

Chapter 1 Introduction

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Back in the 1960s a group of us met weekly in our homes in Kingston upon Hull to engage in extra Bible-study. We selected six Books of Scripture as a short list for our first enterprise, and held a ballot, giving 6 votes to the Book of our first choice, and so downwards. The votes were then added up, and we committed ourselves to accepting the highest total as the Book for study. Revelation was one of the candidates and it was nobody's first choice: we all felt that we would rather not study it, not just yet at least. But conscience made many of us give it second choice, and so, since there was no unanimity about our first choices, the accumulation of the 5-votes caused this Book to romp home an easy winner.

So for three years or so we went through the Book of Revelation, making it our aim to let the Book itself lead us, rather than commentaries about it. The result was beyond all measure rewarding, for the present author at least. Then tales of our conclusions got around, and addresses followed. So very many people said something like, "All that history we were supposed to know, as well as the complicated symbols in Revelation itself, put me off up to now, but at least the Book now means something to me", that repeated requests to put something into writing, as well as on tape as hitherto, had ultimately to be accepted.

Another four years, this time between 1973 and 1977, saw the First Edition of "Apocalypse for Everyman" come out in 18 parts, produced on various typewriters in various places, duplicated on various machines, and containing various typographical peculiarities. Only about 50 or so people were on the subscription list at first, but numbers grew rapidly, and by the time the last stencils were worn out beyond reuse something like 700 copies were in circulation. And still the demand continued, and a new edition was the only way to meet it.

This volume is the result. The Book has been completely rewritten, and considerably enlarged. The conclusions of the First Edition have survived a good deal of criticism, most of it given in a spirit, of great goodwill. They have found increasingly wide acceptance as their biblical basis has been examined. The uncertainties to which confession was made in the First Edition for the most part remain; the reason is the same as it was then: the Book bears its own witness to being very largely concerned with the closing days before the Lord's return, and it is simply not possible to be dogmatic about the details of prophecies yet awaiting fulfillment.

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In the First Edition an attempt was made to let the book, and the Book, speak for themselves without referring to other publications or other opinions more than was strictly unavoidable. However, the comparisons have of course been made, and it would be artificial to purport to ignore the fact. "As a result, comparisons have deliberately been made with the Continuous-Historic point of view, as it is called. The backward look at history which is characteristic of that point of view has been examined in some detail, mainly on the basis of historical notes kindly produced by my historian cousin, James B. Norris. To him goes the first of the grateful acknowledgements of help received. The words in which his historical critiques are expressed are largely his own, but some compression and selection has been made, so the responsibility for what appears is squarely mine.

One reason for the inclusion of this historical aspect is a defensive one. Since it is inherent in this work that there should be uncertainties with regard to future events, it is evidently open to damaging comparison with works on a continuous-historic basis, unless it can be shown that this basis, too, has its uncertainties or worse. If that can be shown — as readers will see it has — then the present exposition would be still in the field for careful consideration on its own merits.

It is unfortunate that some critics have chosen to make comparisons, not between the teaching of this book and Scripture, but between its teachings and those of other religious communities. There was no occasion for this, and it is not a profitable approach. The conclusions reached here owe most of all — far and away most of all — to the Bible itself. They owe something to insights on the Bible's message offered by other writers in our own community. (They owe nothing whatever to opinions expressed by others. And even if they did, the same is true of the Continuous-Historic approach, for in the middle years of the 19th century this was the prevailing approach in non-catholic circles, and it is impossible to ignore the contributions, say, of Joseph Mede and of E. B. Elliott, to the broad lines of exposition adopted in the writings of John Thomas, Robert Roberts, C. C. Walker, Joseph Hadley, and W. H. Barker and W. H. Boulton. There is, of course, original thinking in these works also, particularly those of the first-named, but it would be vain to pretend that the broad historical base of any of these works sprang only from these authors, with only their Bibles in hand. Nor is there anything discreditable in using the researches of others to provide the facts we need. We all do it when we read the Bible in translation, or when we use a Concordance or a Lexicon, and for most of us it is indispensable. But this does mean that anything any of us writes is subject to charitable analysis as to its correctness, without anyone saying or thinking unkind things about the motives of the writer .

In fact the conclusions of the present work are very conservative in matters of doctrine. On such matters as the nature of man and the Persons of our God and His Son, the nature of the tempter, the time of the judgments revealed in Scripture, the identities of the classes who will stand to be judged, and the events which will bring the Millennium to a close I have found, without any conscious effort to prejudge the case in either direction, that our accepted doctrinal basis stands up well to a rather searching examination of itself, and of the objections raised against it. And this gives opportunity to express gratitude to our forbears in the faith who led us so securely on the right doctrinal road..

Where differences between the author and his readers do exist, though, I am content to be shown where I am mistaken. I must hope that this is mutual. But we must all bear in mind that our views about the Apocalypse do not bind the divine Author of the Book. He knows what it means in its every detail, and it could be no pleasure to Him if we were to insist on our own rightness without stopping to think that whereas we do make mistakes, and in the interpretation of prophecy have made many, He makes none. As a man who surely made many mistakes of his own wrote to a community which was equally fallible, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken" . Before the same high Judge we must in all meekness do the same

This book is offered to meet a real need. I am humbly glad that the encouragement to write it has come from many who have felt their need partly, if only partly, met by its earlier First Edition.

Now to the remaining acknowledgements. The writings of those mentioned above have afforded real help even when, inevitably, their conclusions were not accepted. Sheila Harris helped greatly in checking Greek and marking misprints in the First Edition. A special word of thanks is due to the printer of this new edition. My wife Sylvia has done splendid work with indexes in addition to all her other ministrings. Anne Taberner of New Zealand helped with the Scripture index during a not-so-ill-wind convalescence in our home. Supporters of the enterprise in countless practical ways, including distribution work and economic help, would not wish to be named but should be assured that they are not forgotten. But to any who have helped and really have been overlooked —and there are sure to be come — twinned thanks and apologies are offered now.

In acknowledging help from above, in such matters as adequate health, a comfortable place to work and the time — however pressed — to spend on it, and all His other blessings; and in committing such a work as this into His hands that He might use it for good and shield it from any other outcome, the author has the uncomfortable feeling — as he does when other people make similar acknowledgements, throughout the whole spectrum of religious thinking—that he might seem to claiming that God is on his side. This is not his intention; something of his need for mercy and grace is apparent even to the author himself.

But the thanksgiving must be expressed, with the prayer for blessing too, for all that.

North Cave

4 February 1981

Alfred Norris

THE BOOK TELLS ITS OWN STORY

A Play in 10 Acts

It would defeat the purpose of this Commentary to attempt to lay down in advance the Plan of the Apocalypse. It was not the way in which the conclusions were reached by the author, and it would not be fair to the reader, who is to be encouraged to think for himself, to attempt to formulate in advance the conclusions to which he is expected to come. A book of symbol lends itself admirably to being retold on its own terms, as a drama in precis, and when the precis has been read, it is as though the reader had himself gone through the Book of Revelation with an unbiased mind, seeing it as a whole, and yet ready to go back to the beginning for instruction. It is just possible that expository ideas will filter through into the telling of the story, but this will be avoided as far as possible, and admitted if recognized.

1 PROLOGUE: 1.1-8

Scene: The island of Patmos, 40 miles S.W. of Ephesus. John's place of exile on account of the faith.

Characters: John; the angel of the Lord Jesus.

Action: The angel brings John a message concerning things to come, which is to be passed on to John's fellow-believers, with a blessing for those who read and hearken. John sends his own greetings to the Seven Congregations, and his assurance that Jesus would return in triumph to the earth.

2 ACT 1, SCENE 1: 1.9-20

Scene: The same. In John's mind, though, the scene is transformed into a Holy Place of Tabernacle or Temple, with seven golden lampstands in it.

Characters: John, presumably the angel in mute attendance, and a glorious Being called "One like to the Son of man" (1.11).

The appearance of the Latter is that He was (i) clothed with a full-length robe; (ii) girt with a golden girdle; and that He had (iii) eyes of flame; (iv) feet of polished brass; (v) a voice like many waters; (vi) seven stars in His hand; (vii) a two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth; (viii) a face shining like the sun.

Action: John falls senseless to the ground. The glorious Being raises Him and announces Himself as (i) the First and the Last; (ii) the Living One Who was dead; (iii) the Possessor of the keys of death and of Hades. He then instructs John to write the description of what he has just seen, of existing things (the state of things in the Seven Congregations?), and the future things which are about to be disclosed to him (1.19). He is told that the Seven Stars are the 'angels' of the Seven Congregations, while the Seven Lampstands are the Congregations themselves (1.20).

3 ACT 1, SCENE 2 (2.1-3.22)

Scene: The same. Characters: The same.

Action: John writes successive messages to the Seven Congregations, in the geographically clockwise order of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. With each message the Glorious One describes Himself in terms of some of the characteristics listed under Act 1, Scene 1.

4 ACT 2, SCENE 1 (4.1-11) Scene: A heavenly Most Holy Place (in John's vision 'in spirit')

Characters: An exalted Person, called the Creator of all (4.11), sitting on a throne and surrounded by a rainbow; 24 other thrones with 24 elders seated on them, surrounding the principal throne. The elders are clad in white and have stephanoi on their heads. Seven lamps burn before the throne. A glassy sea before the throne is occupied by four Living Creatures with eyes fore and aft, resembling respectively lion, calf, man, and flying eagle.

Action: The four Living Creatures cry round the clock to the praises of the Lord God Almighty, and the 24 Elders fall down in worship before Him Who, as Creator, is worthy of all honour.

5 ACT 2, SCENE 2 (5.1-14) Scene: The same.

Characters: The same, with the addition of "the Lamb as it had been killed" (5.6), and of many angels (5.11), and a chorus of all creation (5.13).

Action: John sees a book in the hands of the Creator, and weeps because a search throughout the universe fails to find anyone qualified to open it. His tears are assuaged, however, when one of the Elders speaks of "the Lion of Judah" as having overcome and being fitted to open the book (5.4). Whereupon he sees the "Lamb as it had been slain" present in the midst (5.6), Who takes the book, and thereupon receives the adoration of the Living Creatures and Elders (5.8), who present to Him the prayers of the saints in the form of incense, and speak of the redeeming by Him of saints of all nations (5.10). Upon this the angelic host and all creation join to sing His praises.

ACT 3 (6.1-17)

Scene: The same. But from the heavenly vantage point John sees events unfold on the earth below, on which, therefore, attention is concentrated.

Characters: The Lamb, the four Living Creatures, four horsemen with their horses on the earth, dead persons under the altar in heaven; people of all kinds on the earth.

Action: The Lamb opens the First Seal, and white horse with . bowman enters the scene on earth; then the Second Seal, resulting in a red horse and its rider appearing; then the Third Seal, resulting in a black horse, mounted by a rider with a balance; then the Fourth Seal, resulting in a pale horse mounted by death and accompanied by Hades.

On the opening of the Fifth Seal, John sees in heaven dead martyrs under the altar, hears their cry for vindication, sees them given each a white robe, and hears the promise that, after a further trial for living saints, their hopes will soon be realised.

The Sixth Seal ushers in a scene of portents in the heavenly bodies, chaps in heaven and among mountains and islands, and terror among people of all classes on the earth at the pending "outpouring of the anger of God and the Lamb on the earth. The scene fades out on this note of imminent disaster to the existing world.

6 ACT 4 (7.1-17)

Scene: The same heavenly temple. Angels holding winds which will soon be allowed to blow in judgement on the earth.

Characters: The angel with the seal of God, a great multitude of people; angels, Elders, and Living Creatures.

Action: John hears 144,000 persons sealed, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel, counting Ephraim in addition to Joseph (Manasseh?), but omitting Dan. Then he sees a countless multitude from initiations, standing before the throne and the Lamb. The Elders and Living Creatures resume their praises, and one of the Elders explains to John that the great multitude consists of those who have withstood the 'great tribulation' (7.14), and profited from the redemption procured through the blood of the Lamb. They are therefore allowed to dwell in God's temple and in the praises round the clock (7.15), and will never hunger nor thirst nor sorrow, for they will always be in the company of the Lamb."

6 ACT 5, SCENE 1 (8.1-9.21) •

Scene: The same, but with the same downward look to the earth as characterized Act 3.

Characters: The Lamb; seven angels carrying Seven Trumpets;

an angel who carries a censer of incense; a flying eagle. f)

Action: The Lamb opens the Seventh Seal, and half an hour's silence issues in the preparation to sound the Seven Trumpets, before which incense is offered together with the prayers of the saints, and the same angel who offered the incense then throws fire from the golden altar of incense on the earth, to the accompaniment of voices, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake (8.1-5).

At the sounding of the First Trumpet, hail, fire, and blood are poured on the earth, one third of which and whose trees, and all its grass, are burned up. The Second Trumpet causes a burning mountain to fall into the sea, a third of which becomes blood, and a third of whose life and shipping was destroyed. The Third Trumpet causes a star to be cast on the rivers and fountains, a third part of which becomes bitter. With the Fourth Trumpet a third part of the heavenly bodies is darkened.

The eagle then flies across heaven promising three Woes on the inhabitants of the earth on account of the remaining three Trumpets.

With the Fifth Trumpet John sees a star fall from heaven to earth, and open the pit of the abyss, from which smoke and locusts emerge, whose task is to torment those who have not been sealed by God (7.1-17). The locusts resemble battle-horses adorned with golden stephanoi, with men's faces, women's hair, lions' teeth; they are as though clad with iron breastplates; they sound like hosts of chariots, and they have tormenting stings. Their leader is called in Hebrew Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon, both signifying Destroyer. The Sixth Trumpet, which is the Second Woe, leads to its angel being told to release the four angels bound at Euphrates (9.14), with power to kill a third part of men, commanding an army numbering, so John heard, 200,000,000. The horses in this company had heads of lions, and fire, smoke and brimstone issued from their mouths; they also had tails terminating in serpents' heads. The remainder of men, who survived this slaughter, did not repent (9.20).

7 ACTS, SCENE 2 (10.1-11) Scene: The earth. Characters: An angel descending, clothed in a cloud, with a

rainbow on his head, a face bright as the sun, and feet as

pillars of fire; John himself.

Action: The angel, carrying a little book, puts his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth, and as he cries Seven Thunders speak, but John is not permitted to record their message (10.4).

The angel swears by the Creator that "there shall be time no longer", and that the Seventh Trumpet will complete the fulfillment of the good tidings revealed in prophets and gospel (10.7). He then tells John to take and eat the little book and, as he says will be, it was sweet to

his taste but bitter in his inward parts. John is then told that he must prophesy again over many nations.

8 ACTS, SCENES (11.1-14) Scene: The earth; temple, outer court, and a great city.

Characters: John, Two Witnesses, The Beast from the Abyss; peoples from all nations, the voice of a heavenly Being.

Action: John is himself asked to measure the temple-proper, but to leave unmeasured its outer court (11.2) which is to be in possession of Gentiles for 42 months. The rest of the action is prophesied rather than witnessed, but in the course of it the •Two Witnesses preach for 1260 days dressed in mourning clothing. They are also described as two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth (11.4). They are granted miraculous powers to defend themselves against their enemies, including a devouring fire from their mouths, the power to cause total drought, and to turn waters into blood, and the ability to produce plagues as often as they wish (11.5-6).

At the end of their witness, however, their protection ceases, and they are killed by the Beast which is to come out of the Abyss (11.7) and wage war against them. Their corpses lie in the street of the great city described spiritually as Sodom and Egypt, where Jesus was crucified, to the general rejoicing of many people of all nations, who make spectacle of the bodies for 3 ½ days (11.9-10).

At the end of this period, however, the Witnesses rise from the ground and, quickened by breath of life from God, stand on their feet to the fear of those around, and are bidden by the great voice ascend to heaven. This they do and are lost to sight in a cloud as their enemies watch. At this very moment an earthquake shakes the city, 7,000 people die, and the remainder submit to God.

9 ACTS, SCENE 4 (11.15-19) Scene: The earth viewed from heaven.

Characters: The 24 Elders, great voices of unseen Persons, the Seventh Angel.

Action: The Seventh Trumpet is blown. The heavenly voices announce the imminent establishment of the kingdom of God to replace that of men. God's power is about to be shown; the wrath of the nations is about to be quelled by the mightier wrath of God; the dead are about to be judged and the faithful of all ages rewarded, and the rebels are about to be destroyed. At the end of the scene the heavenly temple is seen open, with the Ark of God's covenant and portents of coming disaster.

8 ACT 6, SCENE 1 (12.1-17)

Scene: Heaven, yet not the immediate proximity of the throne of God as shown in Act 2. Once again the earth is seen from the heavenly vantage point, so events on earth are also included.

Characters: A woman clothed with the sun, her feet on the moon, a stephanos of 12 stars on her head; she is about (o give birth to a child. The child when born. A red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with diadems on his heads. Michael and his angels. A great voice from a heavenly Being. The spiritual followers of the woman.

Action: The dragon casts down one third of the stars of heaven. He waits the delivery of the Child so that he can devour it, but it is snatched from his grasp to the heavenly region of God on His throne. The woman flees to a prepared place in the wilderness. The dragon is cast out of heaven with his angels after losing a war in heaven against Michael and his angels, to the accompaniment of voices of triumph that salvation has been achieved by his expulsion (12.10). Meanwhile the earth is to be troubled by the wrath of the dragon who has only a short time left (12.12).

Having been cast down, the dragon persecutes the woman by casting a flood of waters from its mouth. She flies away with the wings of an eagle, and the earth swallows up the Hood to help her. Her sojourn in the wilderness lasts for 1260 days (12.13-15,6).

Failing to destroy the woman, the dragon makes war with the remnant of her spiritual offspring, which keep the commandments of God and the witness of Jesus.

9 ACT 6, SCENE 2 (13.1-18) Scene: The earth, by the sea-shore.

Characters: The Dragon; the Beast from the Sea; saints; the Beast from the earth; the nations of the earth, branded with the name and number of the Beast.

Action: The Dragon stands by the seashore awaiting the coming of the Beast from the Sea. When it emerges it is like a leopard, but with characteristics also of bear and lion. It has seven heads, and seven horns bearing diadems. One of its heads is wounded, and miraculously healed, so that the world is lost in wonder, worshipping both Beast and Dragon (13.3-4). The Beast blasphemes against God, and during a period of 42 months wages successful war against the saints (13.5,7). All except those inscribed in the Book of Life worship him, but are warned of retribution if they engage in its persecutions (13.8).

The Beast arising from the earth has lamb-like horns but dragon-like speech, and acts as plenipotentiary for the earlier Beast, demanding worship for it, and working miracles in support of his campaign, making a talking image of the Beast. Those who do not worship the image are to be killed. Those who are not branded with the name or number (666) of the Beast lose their rights to buy or sell.'

10 ACT 7, SCENE 1 (14.1-20)

Scene: Mount Zion; heaven with angelic reapers; the earth in the process of being reaped.

Characters: The Lamb; the 144,000; angels; a sickle-bearer on a cloud; an angel bearing a sickle coming from the heavenly temple; another angel from the altar.

Action: The Lamb stands on Mount Zion with the 144,000 redeemed, who learn a new song which none but they can know.

An angel announces the imminence of the day of judgement (14.6), and another that of the fall of Babylon (14.8). A third warns against receiving the tokens of the Beast (14.9), for whom endless torment is prepared.

A promise is given that those who die for their faith in the period which follows will have peace (awaiting the day of resurrection to blessing). The occupant of a white cloud is bidden

by an angel to reap the earth with his sickle, and does so (14.16). A further reaper gathers in the harvest of the earth's vineyard (14.17-20).

11 ACT 7, SCENE 2 (15.1-8)

Scene: Heaven. The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony opened.

Characters: Seven angels carrying the seven last plagues; the saints who have withstood the Beast, bearing harps. The Living Creatures.

Action: On a sea of glass mingled with fire the saints who have gotten victory over the Beast sing the Song of Moses and of the Lamb. The seven angels bearing the plagues emerge from the temple, being given their vials by one of the Living Creatures. The temple is filled with smoke, and no one is allowed access until the seven plagues are ended.

12 ACT 7, SCENES (16.1-21)

Scene: The heavenly temple, but once more with a downward glance to events produced on the earth.

Characters: The angels bearing the vials; men bearing the brand of the Beast.

Action: A voice bids the angels pour out their Vials. The first is poured on the earth, and produces boils on the worshippers of the Beast (16.2). The third is poured into the sea, which becomes blood, and all its creatures die (16.3). The third is poured into rivers and fountains, whose drinking water becomes blood (16.4-7). The fourth is poured on the sun, which scorches men on the earth who, however, decline to repent (16.9). The fifth is poured on the seat of the Beast, and produces darkness and pain, but results only in impenitence and blasphemy. The sixth is poured on the river Euphrates whose waters dry up, and evil spirits from Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet (the Beast of the Earth, 13.11) gather the nations to war against God at Har Magedon.

The seventh is poured into the air, and unheard of portents, accompanied by the breaking of "the great city" into three parts, and the total dissolution of the entire terrestrial system, herald the final crisis and the victory of God over evil (16.17-21).

13 ACT 8, SCENE 1 (17.1-18) ,• Scene: The wilderness.

Characters: A Harlot mounted on the scarlet Beast with seven heads and ten horns. Ten kingdoms represented by the horns.

Action: John is taken by one of the angels with Vials to see the judgement of the great Harlot sitting on many waters. He goes to the wilderness and finds her seated on the Scarlet Beast, gorgeous but repulsively arrayed, and bearing names of Blasphemy and Babylon. She is drunk with the blood of martyrs. The heads of the Beast on which she sits represent seven mountains. The heads also denote seven 'kings' of which John is told five have passed, the sixth exists, the seventh is yet to come for a brief time, and then be succeeded by the eighth, the phase which will finally be destroyed and consigned to 'perdition' (17.11). The horns will wage war under the Beast against the Lamb (17.13-14), but not before they have utterly destroyed the Harlot (17.16-18).

14 ACTS, SCENE 2 (18.1-24)

Scene: Heaven, but looking down on earth at the scene of the destruction of Babylon.

Characters: Angels, the peoples of the earth, and the people of God.

Action: An angel comes from heaven and announces the fall of Babylon, and distress among all peoples of the world because of it. The people of God are bidden come out, so that they shall not be involved in its terrors (18.4). The smoke of the burning Babylon is seen. An angel throws a millstone into the sea as a symbol of the violence with which Babylon will be overthrown, and pronounces its perpetual desolation.

15 ACTS, SCENES (19.1-10)

Scene: Heaven. The marriage feast of the Lamb.

Characters: A great multitude; saints, depicted as the Bride of the Lamb; an angel; John himself.

Action: The destruction of the harlot (19.2, cf. 17.1), and of Babylon (19.3, cf. 18.18), evidently two names for the same subject, is celebrated in heaven by the heavenly multitude, the four Living Creatures and the 24 Elders (see Act 2). The emergence of the Bride, purified by her tribulations, is announced, with a blessing for those invited to the marriage supper. John seeks to worship the angel but is restrained.

16 ACTS, SCENE 4 (19.11-20.3)

Scene: Characters from heaven emerging to come to earth.

Characters: One called Faithful and True mounted on a white horse, bearing on His head many diadems and clad in a garment dipped in blood. Armies of men dressed in white following Him. The Beast and associated kings and the False Prophet and their followers. Angels; the Dragon.

Action: The armies gain their victory over the Beast and his associated powers, and he and the False Prophet and their committed followers are destroyed in the Lake of Fire. The Dragon is taken and bound in the Abyss for 1000 years.

17 ACT 9, SCENE 1 (20.4-6)

Scene: The judgement seat. ' •

Characters: Judges on thrones, the saints of the two classes named in 6.9-11.

Action: The saints are judged worthy and given their reward, to life and reigning with Christ 1000 years, during which no other resurrection occurs.

18 ACT 9, SCENE 2 (20.7-15)

Scene: The earth. A Judgement Seat.

Characters: The Dragon, the nations (Gog and Magog), the saints in their camp; the Judge on a Great White Throne; the resurrected dead.

Action: The Dragon is released and stirs the nations to rebellion. They besiege the camp of the saints, but are devoured by fire from heaven. The Dragon is cast into the Lake of Fire. All the dead are raised and judged. The unworthy, and the death and Hades which have cursed mankind, are cast into the Lake of Fire. Those written in the Book of Life go to their reward.

19 ACT 10 (21.1 - 22.5)

Scene: The New Jerusalem

Characters: John, God on His throne, angels, the Lamb, the saints.

Action: John sees a new heaven and earth. New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, pictured as a Bride (21.2,9); and also as a richly adorned city of enormous size (21.16), which John sees descending as he stands on an exceedingly high mountain (21.10). The city has no temple, and needs no external light, nor does it experience night and day. A river of life flows from the throne (22.1), with the Tree of Life on both sides (22.2). The saints of God dwell in the city perpetually, and from it all curse is removed.

20 EPILOGUE (22.6-21)

The Lord Jesus announces that He will return quickly (22.7,20). John is moved to offer worship to the angel through whom the revelations have been given (22.8), but is prevented. The visions given are to be kept open "for the time is at hand" (22.10). At that time there will be no further opportunity for repentance (22.11). Those who heed the warnings of the Book will be allowed access to the Tree of Life (22.14), but all others will be excluded (22.15). The promised Heir to the throne of David has given these messages (22.16). The Holy Spirit has confirmed them, and the potential Bride must proclaim them (22.17).

The revelation must not be tampered with, by adding or removing. To do either will be to incur loss of the blessing of life, and affliction by the evils which the Book threatens on the enemies of God.

All join in the plea that the Lord will soon return, and, as in more conventional Letters, John concludes by invoking the grace of God on all the saints.

Apocalypse For Everyman

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK (1.1-3)

1.1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show to His bondservants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel to His bondservant John,

1.2 .. who bore witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus and of all things that he saw.

1.3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things written therein; for the time is at hand.

This is a very detailed chain of transmission: GOD — JESUS CHRIST — HIS ANGEL — HIS BONDSERVANT JOHN — (HE THAT READETH) — THEY THAT HEAR AND KEEP. There is some doubt as to whether those who render "he that readeth aloud" for the penultimate link in that chain are right, for although the verb *anaginosko* is indeed associated with reading aloud in Luke 4.16; Acts 8.28-30; 13.27; 14.21; Colossians 4.16; 1 Thessalonians 5.27; it is the context rather than the word itself which tells us so. The word is the only one rendered 'read' in the New Testament, and the remainder of its 33 occurrences clearly have no suggestion that reading aloud is any part of their meaning. Exactly the same form of the verb occurs in Matthew 24. f 5, Mark 13.14 ("he that readeth, let him understand"), where there can be no question of understanding being restricted to the public lector. So we must regard the rendering "reading aloud" of RSV, Moffatt, AB, NWT, and no doubt other modern translations, as being somewhat fanciful. It is a little difficult to understand why special blessings should be invoked on the actual public lector in any case, and the difference between the singular of "he that readeth" and the plural of "they that keep" can be well understood on the assumption that the Lord Jesus is simply quoting His own earlier saying about the reader before going on to make it plain that every one who hears the message is involved in its import. Perhaps we could render the sense as "Blessed is each one who reads, and blessed are all they who hear, the words of this prophecy."

In any case, "hear" has a much deeper meaning than merely to apprehend sounds. The common word for 'hear', *akoud*, though so rendered in effect on almost all its 433 or so occurrences,

obviously on many occasions means something like "attend to and act upon", as we can see from such expressions as:

Whoever shall not receive you nor hear your words (Matthew (10.14); He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (11.15); Lest they should hear with their ears and understand (13.15); Hear and understand (15.10), —

among many others. But, that minor uncertainty at the end of the chain apart, the remainder of the chain is impressive.

As always in Scripture, though by no means always outside Scripture, God, that is the One whom in the New Testament we come to know as the Father, is placed first in the hierarchy of authority. All knowledge and all purpose flows from Him, and to Him all, including His own best-beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord, are subject. In fact, the revelation "which God gave to Jesus" not only appropriates the title 'God' as belonging primarily to the Father, but also indicates that it has pleased the Father to repair an earlier lack in the knowledge of His Son. When the Lord Jesus had been asked about the future in the days of His flesh He had needed to reply: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 24.36, RV). Now God, in giving Him this complete revelation, has no doubt committed all knowledge to the Son as surely as He has committed all power- to Him (Matthew 28.19). Yet for all this the Son remains the Father's

second-in-command in all things. God gives Him the revelation, and no doubt the charge to transmit it, and the angel who goes at the Son's command goes because "it has pleased the Father that in the Son all fulness should dwell" (Colossians 1.19). Even when it is the duty of every man to bow the knee to the risen and glorified Lord, and even when men actually come to do what it is their duty to do, it remains and will remain that all will be received "to the glory of God, the Father" (Philippians 2.11). No Book surpasses the Revelation, as we shall see, in the honour and titles which it bestows on the Son of God: but no Book makes it plainer that all this honour is derived from, and rendered again to, the God who became Father when He begot Him.

He sent and signified it.

The Book of Revelation is obviously a Book of symbol. From the glorious Being with head like wool, eyes like flaming fire, and feet like burnished brass, as we are about to encounter Him in this chapter, to the grotesque beast with seven heads and ten horns, with traits drawn from leopard, bear and lion, whom we meet later (13.1-2), the dramatis personae are visionary creatives conveying truth in acted metaphor rather than actual living beings.

This is perfectly obvious on the face of it, and needs no support from the word "signified".

Yet this word has been pressed into service in such a cause, as though "signified" had to be understood as meaning "conveyed by sign or symbol". But this is in all probability not the case. The verb (*semaino*) occurs only here and in John 12.33; 18.32; 21.19; Acts 11.28; 25.27. In these Jesus "signifies by what death He should die" in terms of being "lifted up", or by what death Peter will glorify God, in terms of being bound and carried unwillingly away; or a prophet "signifies" (or communicates) by inspiration that a drought was to come on the world; or Festus wonders how he will "signify" (again communicate) the charges laid against Paul who is to be committed to trial before Caesar. None of these has the slightest connection with symbolism such as this Book contains. The corresponding noun, *semeion* occurs 77 times translated 'sign' or 'miracle', or more rarely 'token' or 'wonder': but on none of these occasions is the idea of symbolism any part of its meaning. The Book is one whose message the Lord Jesus communicates plainly through His angel, and it does contain many elaborate symbols. But it is the idea of plain communication, and not that of symbolism, which is conveyed in the word rendered "signified".

By His angel.

There are a number of occasions in this Book where one angel in particular stands in attendance on the Lord or on His servant (1.1; 5.2; 7.2; 8.3-5; 8.13; 10.1,5,8-10; 11.1; 14.6,8,9, 15, 17, 18, 19; 17.7; 18.1; 18.21; 19.17; 20.1, 17; 22.6, 8, 16), and though these cannot be in every case the same angel, it is tempting to speculate that the angel who appeared to John in the first and last chapters might be one and the same with that mighty being who represented God before the children of Israel in the wilderness.

The case for the existence of such an angel is, of course, strong. In fact the Revised Version constantly renders (*mat' ahh y:howah*) as 'V/if angel of the Lord' when the words are not linked, and as "an angel of the Lord" when they are joined by *maqquph* (a kind of Hebrew hyphen), though this point is entirely disregarded in the Greek Old Testament. There are clear occasions, though, when, in spite of the fact that it is an angel which is present, the words spoken are said to have come directly from the LORD, so that God is evidently manifesting

Himself and giving instruction to His people through His special angel. There are numerous examples of this in the Old Testament, such as Exodus 23.20, 23 referred to later in Isaiah 63.9, but even on these occasions it is going beyond the certain evidence to affirm that it is necessarily

the same angel on every occasion. Any angel sent out on a divine mission is clearly for the occasion "the angel of the Lord", just as any royal delegate would be "the messenger of the king".

In the New Testament, in any case, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is so uniquely the supreme Intermediary between God and man that He is Himself "the angel of the covenant Whom we delight in" (Malachi 3.1), that it is not to His honour to speculate extravagantly as to the identity of the angel through whom He carries out His revealing work. All angels are subject to Him, and any of them would gladly have obeyed His command to communicate with John in Patmos.

This angel in particular is given nothing of the majesty and terror attaching to "the angel of His presence" in Isaiah 63.9. The office of the risen Lord Jesus Himself might be thought to render all such lesser mediation needless. Indeed, when John is moved to offer reverence to this angel, he is gently rebuked with the humble words, "See thou do it not: I am a fellow servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this Book. Worship God." (22.9)

1.2: The word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John, who receives the message from the angel, bears witness to this Word and this Testimony. It might at first seem that this simply means, "John passed on the message he received", but it must be more than this. Similar expressions are found in 1.9; 6.9; and 20.4. In the first of these John explains that he is a prisoner in Patmos because of his witness to these things; in the second we are introduced to the saints who have died for their witness to these same things; and in the third those who have so died rise to receive their reward at the hands of their Judge. It follows therefore that John is telling us is that he was a witness to the whole counsel of God, and not only to this present Apocalypse, and that this was the reason why he suffered, and why others later were to die. The witness of John included the transmission of the Apocalypse certainly, but it was also the witness of the life he lived personally, in the fulfillment of the faith he held.

1.1: Things which must shortly come to pass.

This presents all expositors of the Apocalypse with a problem. On any showing the ultimate purpose of the Book to lead us to the second coming of the Lord has not been fulfilled quickly. The expression rendered 'shortly' is *en takhei* 'with speed', and occurs also in Acts 12.7; 22.18; 25.4; Luke 18.8; Romans 16.20; and Revelation 22.6. In the first three of these the idea is certainly 'without delay', but in Luke 18.8 we have the promise based on the Parable of the Unjust Judge that God will speedily avenge His suffering saints, coupled with a clear statement that the time will not in fact be short ("though He tarry long with them", or "and He is longsuffering over them"); while in Romans the promise that "the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly" is one which was also to stand for a long time before it would be finally fulfilled. The passage in Luke is the most helpful for our understanding of the expression in Revelation. God does not delay, and "is not slack

concerning His promise" (2 Peter 3.9); the vision does not tarry, but must be waited for "though it tarry long" (Habakkuk 2.3). The Apocalypse itself provides for a considerable period of time before the travail of the servants of God will be rewarded (6.10), and yet Jesus promises: "Behold, I come quickly" (3.11; 22.7, 12, 20). No doubt we are being told that the Lord will come without avoidable delay; we may also be told that, when He does come He will come at lightning speed, "as the lightning from one end of the heaven shineth to the other part under heaven" (Luke 17.24).

The meaning may also be that the earliest events with which the Book opens are on the doorstep. If (though this is a view to which the present writer is not committed) the Book was written at a date before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, and so this event is one of its themes, then such happenings, which would be imminent when the Book reached its readers, would give an urgent meaning both to the events shortly to occur, and to the coming of the Lord which they prefigured, which would make the first fulfillment of its promises very speedy indeed. And if this view is not substantiated, some of the prophecies given to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 (such as 2.10) could obviously not have been far away. And the understanding of chapter 6 which will be developed in this work shows that there have been experiences throughout the present dispensation which were shortly to begin to come to pass when John received his revelation, whether this was a little before 70, or a little before 100 as is usually supposed.

What part did the angel play ?

We might have almost supposed, from the words that Jesus "sent and signified it by His angel", that the messenger was sent with a complete version of the Apocalypse in his lips, which John could simply take down to dictation. But this is obviously not the case. Throughout the Book John is reporting his own actual experiences as he receives the message. He was "in spirit" and saw a vision of the Lord in glory (1.10). He wrote the messages to the seven churches to dictation, indeed, but it was to the dictation of the Lord Whom he saw in vision (1.11) rather than to that of the angel; and immediately afterwards he reports that he was taken

in the spirit into heaven (4.2), where he saw a vision of glory, and witnessed the opening of the sealed book (6.1). He underwent in his experiences the eating of the book in the hand of the angel (10.10), and experienced in his senses its sweetness and its bitterness. The frequent repetition of "I saw" and "I heard" and "He showed me" reveals John as an active participant in the events which this Book discloses to us; and the angel's own part in this was never clearer than in 22.1, where "He (the angel) showed me a river of water of life". So when we are told that "the Lord, the God of the holy prophets, sent His angel to show to His servants the things which must shortly come to pass" (22.6), it is plain that John in receiving this vision has been nothing like an amanuensis, taking down a message to dictation. He has been led and accompanied by the angel through the events themselves with which the Book is concerned, even though they are presented in visionary form. John was like Ezekiel who, though in bodily reality he remained all the time by the canal of Chebar in Babylonia, was nevertheless transported in the Spirit back to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8.3ff) and onwards in his vision to the very high mountain into the age of the future (40.1-2ff)- So John is conducted on a personal tour of future events by the angel who was sent to him, and it is small wonder that at the end of his thrilling experiences he "fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed him these things" (22.8).

This is another excellent reason for being sure that, when the Lord Jesus "signified it by His angel to His servant John", He did not by that term mean "caused the angel to reveal symbols". It is rather that the Lord announced to John that the revelation was about to begin, and that he must now commence his angel-conducted tour through events to come. In some sense the Book of Revelation is a piece of autobiography. In this Book John uses the verb in the first person about 80 times in relation to his own experiences. He records what he saw under inspiration and divine instruction, certainly, but for all that the Book is a record of his own mysterious experiences in the Spirit. It is no doubt impossible for us to go beyond this, and try to understand how this could happen, and how a real angel could conduct a real man through visionary events. But this is the point at which we have to remind ourselves that "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts" (Isaiah 55.9).

1.3: Blessed he that readeth and they that keep. It is not often that one can catch out AV or RV in bad grammar, but it has happened here! It arises from trying to supply one part of the verb 'to be' where the Greek has none. Some versions

(Moffat, for example) have spotted the error and remedied the translation to "Blessed is he that reads (aloud) and blessed are they who hear". The word 'blessed' is *makarios*, the word repeated in each of the Beatitudes of Matthew 5.1-11, and elsewhere — sometimes in evident allusions to those same Beatitudes, as in the parallels in Luke 6.20-22, and in James 1.12; 1 Peter 3.14; 4.14. The same word is used later in this Book (14.13; 16.15; 19.9; 20.6; 22.7, 14). Its meaning is not so much that God bestows favour on those who do or suffer whatever is described, as that theirs is a happy condition. To read brings with it contentment, comfort, strength, and hope. The blessing here is somewhat like that in Matthew 13.16, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see", in which the Lord contrasts the yearning for light by prophets and righteous men of old, with the actual experience of the fulfillment in Him which His own disciples were able to enjoy. Here also, then, disciples are happy because in reading this Book they are prepared for the trials which will come, and given a sure hope of the glory beyond. So later in the Book, the dead who rest in peace when their own sufferings under persecution are over are happy compared with those who survive to suffer still; the watchful believer's are happy compared with the careless, for the former avoid the shame of walking in spiritual nakedness; and he that has part in the first resurrection is blessed compared with those who do not, for he is now fashioned after the power of an endless life, and the second death has no power over him.

An analysis of all the occurrences of this word, in passing, again indicates how artificial is the attempt to divide between the supposed one person who earns his blessing by reading the message aloud, and the plural hearers who take heed to the message. In Matthew 24.46; Luke 7.23; 12.43; 14.15; Romans 4.8; 14/22; 1 Corinthians 7.40; James 1.12, 25; Revelation 16.15; 20.6; 22.7 the word is used in the singular of "he" or "she" who forms the subject, without any reference to some particular person: it applies to all who are in that position, as it surely does in this verse also.

If, then, happiness is the lot of those who pay attention to the Book, then it is folly to neglect its study. Even though its symbols seem complex and its message hard to apprehend, the Lord would not offer such a blessing and expect it to be ignored. To plead that it is too deep for us to follow is by implication to accuse the Lord of having adopted the wrong method, and this we must not do. We can be sure, though, that the Lord would not give with one hand and take away with the other: that He would not promise blessing to the people who read and

understand, and then make very sure that none except the scholar and the historian could do so. Prima facie, we have good reason to feel that if

Chapter 2 Revelation 1:4-8

CHAPTER II

If we apply ourselves to the Book in the right way it will yield up some at least of its mysteries. Like the rest of Scripture, it is given for our learning, and as we shall shortly find, it is so bound up with the earlier Scriptures (of both Testaments) that at least part of the blessing arises from the broader acquaintance with the Bible as a whole which we must attain.

We beg no questions as to how the interpretation will turn out. It will be enough to say at this stage that the present writer and his friends, when this study first commenced, sought that interpretation by looking at all times to let the Book speak for itself, and the rest of the Scriptures illuminate its meaning. Whatever the deficiencies in the result, we have seen reason to be very happy that such an approach was chosen.

JOHN'S PREFACE TO THE BOOK (14-8)

I A: John to the seven churches which are in Asia.

The Book is made up of 7s: churches (1.4), spirits (1.4), lamp-stands (1.12), lamps of fire (4.5), seals (5.1), horns and eyes (5.6), angels with trumpets (8.2), thunders (10.3), bowls (15.1), heads and kings (17.10) and mountains (17.9), and perhaps others more cryptic. There is no reason to doubt that the completeness usually associated with the number 7 is intended here, too: once the seven days of the week are over the cycle is completed, and one starts again. "God did rest the seventh day from all His labours (Genesis 2.2; Exodus 20.11; Hebrews 4.4). Certainly the choice of seven churches in Asia is artificial, for there were more than seven in all in that Roman province of Asia which lies in the SW of the present Asia Minor (thus Paul had written a letter to Colossae, which lay quite close to Laodicea): and Asia was far from being the only place which could profit from the messages to the churches.

There is a certain practicality about the choice, though. A messenger carrying the Book from the Isle of Patmos via nearby Ephesus could travel in a clockwise cycle over the great Roman trade and military roads and visit all these important places, from which the message could be spread to the surrounding regions: but all the same it cannot have been this only which dictated the number chosen. If we had not had seven churches we should not have had seven lampstands or seven stars, and the parallel with the seven-branched lampstand of the Tabernacle and Temple would have been lost (Exodus 25.31-35; 1 Kings 7.49).

Churches. The familiar English word is from the same root as the Scottish kirk, the Scandinavian kirke, the German Kirche, the Icelandic kirkja, and doubtless others. It seems to be derived from the Greek adjective (*kuriakos*), meaning 'pertaining to the lord', and so 'belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ'. The word does occur twice in the New Testament, once of "the Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11.20, and in the present chapter of "the Lord's Day" (1.10). It is a fitting description of the relationship in which bodies of disciples stand to their Master, and not to be despised because it is not transliterated directly from the actual Greek word for which it does duty. How many words in translations ever are?

Those who derive their word by another route from the Greek use a different family of terms, including the French *eglise*, the Welsh *eglwys*, the Spanish *iglesia* and others, and of course the Latin *ecclesia*. So thoroughly is the word in some of the Romance languages tied up with the dominant church in their lands, that in Spanish the word applies particularly to the Roman Catholic Church, and a different word (*templo*) is used for a Protestant church. Finally, of course, the ancient Greek word is preserved intact in Modern Greek where, as in New Testament times, the community is called *ekklesia*.

Thus the words are used absolutely synonymously, and it is purely historical circumstance which determines which is preferred. There was never a more absurd controversy than that which began by postulating (absolutely wrongly) that the word 'church' is the title preferred by apostate bodies, while the word 'ecclesia' still represents New Testament purity, and then went on to object further to the use of 'church' on the ground that people confuse it with the building in which worship is conducted, rather than the community engaged in the worship. No doubt the latter confusion does sometimes arise, but the plain fact is that either word can be and is used in either sense. Religious and theological writers, moreover, often interchange the words innocently to bring out the lessons they seek.

The noun is derived from the verb *ekkaleo*, literally 'call out', and so it has been understood as though it meant 'the community of those called out'. This is a true description of the position of the believer, who has been "called by God out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2.9), but that this is not the real intent of the noun is indicated by the following facts:

1 The verb *ekkaleo* is never found in the New Testament (though it is found in the Old Testament, on two occasions: in Genesis 19.5 where the wicked men of Sodom 'call out' (to) Lot in his home, and in Deuteronomy 20.20, where Israel is to 'proclaim' peace to a city which they intend to conquer — neither a promising foundation on which to build a meaning for 'ekklesia'!).

2 The verb used for the Christian calling is the simple word *kaleo*, meaning 'call', with its related noun *klesis*, or 'calling'. It is not that compounds of the simple verb are unknown in the New Testament, for in Vine are listed *epi-*, *eis-*, *meta-*, *pros-*, and *sun-kaleo*, at least. Since the simple verb occurs more than 140 times, and the simple noun 11 of 'calling' or 'vocation', it seems amply plain that the New Testament usage simply does not contemplate the significance 'called out' for *ekklesia*.

3 The word *ekklesia* is used of heathen assemblies in Acts 19.32, 39, 41, where the idea is much more that of a 'gathering together' than a calling out.

4 The word is used some 80 times in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the people of Israel, as a result of which Stephen speaks of "the *ekklesia* in the wilderness" in Acts 7.38. Similarly the word is used in Hebrews 2.12 when Psalm 22.22 is quoted from the Greek text, and where the meaning is not primarily the Christian community, any more than it is later in the Epistle in the words "the general assembly and *ekklesia* of the firstborn" (12.23).

5 There were two common words used in the Greek to render the 'congregation' of the Old Testament chosen people. *Ekklesia* was one, and the other was *sunagoge*, nearly always simply transliterated in the New Testament as 'synagogue', except in Acts 13.43 AV (when the 'congregation' — which had just been meeting in the synagogue — had dispersed), and in James 2.2, the only time when the Christian 'assembly' is described in this manner. This word

occurs more than 200 times in the Greek Old Testament, and is clearly the preferred way of describing formal Jewish assemblies in the New Testament.

6 That fact provides a very satisfying reason for the choice of this word in the New Testament to describe the Christian community or communities. It was well known to the Jews, and provided continuity between the congregation of the natural people of God and the new spiritual Israel which had supplanted it; and it was used by them sufficiently rarely to become characteristic and unambiguous for the new people of God.

7 In other words, with the single exception of James 2.2 as regards the Christian assemblies (readily explained in terms of the early date and probable Jewish background of this letter), and the references in Stephen's speech and in Hebrews (readily explained by the fact that they are based on actual quotations from the Old Testament), we can write the following practically universal equations for New Testament usage:

Synagogue (sunagoge) = Jewish assembly or congregation
Ekklesia (ekklesia) = Christian assembly or congregation

Regardless of which word we use, then, the church or the ekklesia means the congregation of God, whether each single one

(the church in Ephesus, and so on), or the entire body of believers through Jesus Christ regardless of where and when.

The latter usage is founded on the first use of the term by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in Matthew 16.18 and 18.17, 17, and though it is relatively uncommon elsewhere it is found in 1 Corinthians 10.32 (in all probability); 15.9; Galatians 1.13; Ephesians 1.22; 3.10. 21; 5.23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32; Philippians 3.6; Colossians 1.18, 24; and 1 Timothy 3.15. Much more frequently, when the whole body of the faithful is in issue, the word is used in the plural, ekklesiai or churches.

All the above was written without consulting any commentary, but it might be well to discover how it harmonizes with the view of linguistic authorities. First of all, then, Vine under "CHURCH" simply writes, "See ASSEMBLY and CONGREGATION", a sufficiently promising start.

Under ASSEMBLY he gives "1. EKKLESIA, from ek, out of, and klesis, a calling (kaleo, to call), was used among the Greeks for a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of state (Acts 19.39). In the Septuagint it is used to designate the assembly of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation. In Acts 7.38 it is used of Israel; in 19.32, 41 of a riotous mob. It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, "I will build My church" (Matthew-16.18), . . . (b) in the singular number to a company consisting of professed believers . . . , and in the plural with reference to churches in a district."

While, therefore, there is no objection whatever to the use of the original word ekklesia to designate the congregation or congregations of the Christian people of God, and while it may be useful in drawing a distinction between the New Testament believer and those who to-day share his faith (on the one hand) and those called churches to-day, with their heritage of

views, sometimes seriously at variance with the Scriptures' teaching, we ought to avoid any Pharisaic pride in the use of the term, as though it were either virtuous to do so, or demanded of us by Scripture.

Grace and peace.

This is as much a personal greeting from John as an individual apostle as corresponding words are from Paul, Peter, Jude, and John at the introductions to their Letters. Of the Letters in the New Testament, Hebrews, James, and 1 and 3 John alone do not employ this or a closely similar formula. The greeting is at once an acknowledgement of utter dependence on God, and an assurance of His blessing on those who trust in Him. The writer prays to God to grant to his fellow-believers the undeserved gift of His presence with them and mercy to them (the grace), and to offer them that harmony with Him, and therefore with one another

(the peace), such as no one not reconciled to God can achieve. It is the Lord's promise, "Peace I leave with you, My peace give I unto you" (John 14.27). It is a peace which has nothing to do with the world's temporary interruption of its perpetual wars, and which is able to survive even the world's hostility to the believer: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace. Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16.33) _ a message of singular relevance to this Book, with its waxing atmosphere of trial and affliction in the lives of the saints to whom it is addressed.

From Him which is, and Which was, and Which is to come.

At this point the description applies to the Father specifically and exclusively, since the Lord Jesus is to be referred to separately in the next phrase. This remains true in 1.8 and 4.8, though we shall find the titles of God repeatedly and increasingly bestowed on the Son also as the Book proceeds. There is no possible doubt that "He Which is", in Greek (ho On), "the Being One" is taken from the Greek translation of Exodus 3.14, rendered in most of our versions as "I am that I am", in Greek ego eimi ho on, and taken from the Hebrew 'ehyeh 'a:sher 'ehyeh. This raises an enormous problem about the interpretation of the passage from Exodus. Should we render it "I AM THAT I AM", as the text of nearly all our versions does, or should we read "I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE", or one of numerous other variants given in marginal notes? It seems to the present writer that the huge consensus of translators is not to be ignored, that the rendering of the Septuagint Greek was probably well-founded, and that the near-quotation in Revelation 1.4 is just about decisive. God is "HE WHO IS".

This is not to deny that the Hebrew verb in Exodus 3.14 means literally "I will be". Nor does it ignore the fact that the same word is so rendered in 3.12, where God says to Moses, "Certainly I WILL BE with thee." But with regard to this last we have to ask what Moses would have understood by the promise. God was "with him" at the burning bush at the time the promise was made, and now He says that He will be with him when he has his perilous interviews with Pharaoh. In other words God will not leave Moses in his time of need: He will continue to support him during the emergency. God will go on being with him. This is an entirely acceptable translation of the Hebrew verb-form used, and it fits in with commonsense. Our own present tense, if construed rigidly, refers to an infinitesimal moment only. An instant before that flicker of time was in the future; in an instant more it will have receded into the past. Our present speaks of that which is ephemeral, and what we need for an understanding of God is a

form of words which speaks of His permanence. A continuous future supplies that need: here we have someone Who will never change; what God is He will remain, and for God to affirm "I am and will be the One Who is and will be always" is to affirm His constancy, His faithfulness, and His permanence.

To describe Himself thus, moreover, was just the right way in which to meet the needs of His enslaved people in the time of their travail in Egypt. They were in bondage in a land of idolatry, where all the heathen gods had names: it was natural enough that they should enquire about the name of Him whom Moses would claim to represent; for their ancient faith must have been greatly dimmed by the ages of neglect, and the apparently interminable years of persecution. What use would it have been to them to have some proper name, however awesome, for their God, true God though He was? What they needed was some affirmation of His real relevance to their needs, and "I AM AND ALWAYS WILL BE" did affirm indeed that He was the only true God, and by implication cast all false gods into the shadows, as the merely transitory creations or men who were themselves creatures.

But (returning to Revelation) if God is and always will be, then He must also always have been, so that the claim could at all times have been made. In this passage we have this fact made explicit. God is indeed from everlasting to everlasting. He is the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come" — past, present, and future.

An old-fashioned interpretation would have found this truth in the Exodus passage. The whole section reads in the Revised Version:

God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me to you: this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial to all generations. (Exodus 3.14-15).

Before it became fashionable to pronounce the name rendered in our common versions as The LORD as Yah-weh (with an aspirated 'h' in the middle), its common transliteration into English was JEHOVAH. This, if the anglicized consonants are changed back, would have read something like Y:howah. corresponding to its most common vocalization in the received Hebrew text. When it was thought that the Masoretic rendering truly represented the way the Name should be written, it was also thought that it represented a condensation of three Hebrew tenses of the verb to be, so that past, present, and future were enshrined within it, thus:

Some older commentaries are still around which interpret the Name in this way, and though it does not lie within this writer's competence to pronounce a final judgement, it does seem to him that the alternatives which are now offered add nothing to the dignity of the Person Whom the word describes, and are a great deal more difficult — and always would have been a great deal more difficult — for ordinary people to understand. To receive the Name as conveying the truth which God pronounced to Moses that "this is My name for ever, and this

is My memorial to all generations", is to form a picture of the changeless majesty of God which can hardly be improved upon.

One of the main attractions of the view that the Name which God gave Himself before Moses means "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE", and that the Tetragrammaton means "HE WHO WILL BE(COME)", is that the Name then seems to enshrine the constant intention of God one day to realize His purpose in full, and (in conjunction with a certain understanding of the word 'e:lohiym, usually rendered 'God') will then be manifested in a host of glorified saints. But this truth is quite unaltered even if we do not suppose that it is contained in the Name itself. It is firmly based on the plain words of Scripture, and it was no doubt from the plain words of Scripture that it was found, before ever it came to be thought that the Name, too, contained it.

Indeed, it is to that future that the verse under discussion now turns, in the expression that follows. This is not a simple future of the verb 'to be', completing a series of "was" and "is" with "will be". It is *ho erkhomenos*, or "the One who is coming," so that the description as a whole reads "from Him the Being One, the One Who was being, and the One Who is coming".

From Him Which is to come.

The verb is of very frequent occurrence in Scripture (over 600 times), and is certainly normally used of the advent or arrival of a person or an event. The identical form of the verb is used of the

first coming of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11.3, and also of His Second Coming in Matthew 16.28 (as prefigured in the Transfiguration). We go beyond the mere idea that God will continue to exist in the future also, therefore, into the clear intention to be manifest again. It is significant that as the Book reaches its climax, when it pictures the Kingdom established on the earth, God is then referred to as "Lord God, the Almighty, Which art and Which was (11.17 RV), as He is also at the time when His final judgements are poured out on the earth (16.5). By that time no longer will God be "the Coming One" — for in the person of His Son He will be the One Who has arrived.

From the seven spirits which are before His throne. These Seven Spirits are found again, in 3.1; 4.5; 5.6. In 4.5 they are identified with the "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God", and in 5.6 with the "seven eyes" of the slain and revived Lamb, which are "sent forth into all the earth". The expression has been taken to mean either (1) the Holy Spirit symbolically described, or (2) the angels, or some of the angels, over whom the Lord Jesus now has authority.

In favour of its identification with the Holy Spirit are:

a The linking together of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — though never with the extreme connotations associated with the Doctrine of the Trinity — an association found more or less distinctly also in Matthew 28.19, 2 Corinthians 13.14, and even Luke 1.34-35 with the Holy Spirit as the agent of the Father's paternity of the Son.

b The second of these, 2 Corinthians 13.14, is particularly relevant, since Paul there prays for help from above for the saints in Corinth, involving "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" in a manner quite parallel with the present passage, in which John invokes grace and peace from the Eternal One, the Seven Spirits, and Jesus Christ.

c If the angels are indeed thought of here as the agents of grace and peace, such an idea would be unique in Scripture, and quite out of harmony with the use of such a prayer at the opening of the majority of Paul's Epistles, where it is the occupants of the heavenly throne, the Father and the Son, from Whom grace and peace are sought. It is very hard to imagine John invoking the angels in such a cause or any other, which is what he would be doing if it is indeed the angels who are signified here.

However, in favour of the angels being in fact the subject of John's prayer we have:

d That angels are indeed called 'spirits' (Hebrews 1.7 = Psalm 104.4; Hebrews 1.14; compare Acts 23.9).

e The symbol of "lamps of fire" harmonizes well with the words, "He maketh His ministers a flame of fire" in Psalm 104.4 But the Holy Spirit, too, is associated with fire in Matthew 3.11 and Acts 2.3. It is in any case hard to see the angels described as though they are actually part of the Lamb of God, as the "seven spirits" are in 5.6, whereas the Son of God was anointed with the Spirit without measure, and evidently operates by its means since His Ascension (see, for example, Acts 16.6, 7).

It has to be concluded that the balance of evidence is strongly in favour of the identification of the Seven Spirits with the Holy Spirit, so that John is following in the pattern of Paul and calling down grace and peace upon his fellow-saints from the Father and the Son, mediated by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Of course the angels of God play their part in ministering to them that shall be the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1.14), and this Book itself bears abundant testimony to the fact. But then it calls them by their proper name, the angels. (See Excursus IX)

1.5: From Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful Witness.

This office the Lord Jesus claimed for Himself more than once in the Gospel of John, with the support of His miracles and the testimony of John the Baptist (John 4.44; 5.31-39; 8.14, 18; 18.37). The 'faithfulness' of the Lord was many times questioned during His earthly pilgrimage ("Thou bearest witness of Thyself: Thy witness is not true", John 5.31; 8.13), but was established once and for all by His resurrection, as the Lord goes on here to say. During His mortal lifetime they condemned Jesus, unjustly, because "He made Himself equal with God" (John 5.18); but now, though the question of equality with God never arises, He is "declared to be the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1.4).

The word 'witness' is *martus* or *martur* when it refers to the person bearing the witness, and *marturia* or *martunon* when it refers to the testimony he bears. The act of bearing testimony is described by the associated verb *marture'o*. Our common use of the word 'martyr' associates it with one who seals his testimony by his death, and in the bitter experience of the early church, and later believers too, the association is grimly appropriate. The word itself, though, conveys no such idea: but the thought of witnessing and dying as a result is plainly therein Acts 22.20 of Stephen, and! in Revelation 2.13 of Antipas, 11.3 of "the Two Witnesses", and 17.6 of many who have died for their faith. The Lord is then, surely, using the term here to

remind us that He, supremely, sealed His testimony with His life, a fact which will be celebrated by John in words which closely follow.

This is parallel with Colossians 1.18, and under the guidance of God's Spirit inter-quotation, in one direction or the other, has evidently taken place. As everywhere else in the New Testament, the fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is crucial to the truth and significance of the gospel. He is the only-begotten Son of God, the purpose of Whose coming was to bring many sons unto glory (John 1.14; 3.16; Hebrews 2.10). But He is also the first-begotten from the dead, showing the way whereby those many sons themselves will become children of the resurrection (Luke 20.36). The resurrection of Jesus so surely establishes the fact that He is Son of God that the New Testament sometimes seems to speak of it as though it was the resurrection which made Him so:

The promise made to the fathers, God hath fulfilled unto our children, in that He raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the Second Psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption (Acts 13.32-34).

But the fact is rather that the Sonship, brought about by the 'Virgin-Birth', was brought to its fulfillment by the resurrection, and was established by this for all receptive minds. It was "by His resurrection from the dead" that Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God (Romans 1.4; Hebrews 1.3-6; Psalm 2.7).

Such a statement seems almost premature when one sees how little regard the kings of the earth were paying to Jesus then, and how little regard they are paying to Him now. But the rulers and people of the earth pay little regard to God His Father, too, without thereby weakening His claim and right to be the One who rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will (Daniel 4.17, 25, 32; 5.21). God is God by right, whether He be honoured as God or not; and Jesus is King by right, whether or not the nations bow the knee to Him. He was King of the Jews by birth (Matthew 2.1), and was so recognized by Nathaniel (John 1.49) and by Peter (Matthew 16.16): these even before He died. He made the same claim for Himself in reply to Pilate (John 18.33-37). The fact that He never reigned at that time leaves quite unaffected the fact that He was the Heir-apparent to a vacant throne, the 'One Whose right it is' of Ezekiel 21.27. And now that "all power hath been given unto Him in heaven and in earth

(Matthew 28.18), it is already the duty of men and nations to render to Him their allegiance. Already God has "given Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Philippians 2.9-11). In heaven no doubt this already occurs. On earth, save for the small company of the saints, it must await the day of His return and victory and, as regards "those under the earth", the day of resurrection and judgement.

The expression, "the Ruler of the kings of the earth", seems almost to be written to emphasize the evil that those same "kings" will do when they conspire to "give their power to the Beast", and to resist Him at the time of His second coming (17.13-14), though He is already by right "King of kings and Lord of lords", — when "the kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers thereof take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2.1-2). The Book from the start sets the tone: the world is in rebellion against God; it will show this by the treatment it metes out to His saints; and it will only be brought to heel when the Lord quells its rebellion on His return.

The remainder of this verse, and the verse which follows it, make up a doxology. As happens so many times in Scripture, the writer turns aside from his development, overcome as it were by the majesty of his subject or the depth of his gratitude for the saving work of God and His Son, to render thanks or to bow in awe. Just so does Paul write in his Letter to the Romans. After a long exposition he has reached the point of concluding that "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all"; and the contemplation of that mercy leads him to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things, to Him be the glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11.32-36): and this is but one example of its kind.

So it is here. And it opens up an interesting enquiry as to the manner in which the inspiration of God leaves scope for the initiative of the writer. This Book is plainly declared to be the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him (1.1), and yet the ink is scarcely dry on those words before John is sharing with us his own personal praises and thanksgivings, which must surely

have come from his own heart without the need for compulsion such as that which led all "Holy men of God" to speak as they were impelled by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1.20-21). The topic warrants a digression from the study, and a consideration of:

Excursus I: The Prophet and His Prophecy

There is a considerable number of autobiographical touches in this Book, the more surprisingly since, more than most parts of Scripture, it pictures the prophet under the irresistible control of God being given visions and caused to write messages, the one of which was shown him with the command, "What thou seest, write!" (2.11,19), and the other of which consisted of messages which were quite obviously, to some extent at least, dictated to him verbatim.

We have already instanced the doxology of 1.5b-7. For the rest, some of the more vivid examples are:

1.17 I fell at His feet as one dead, and He laid His right hand on me.

5.4 I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the Book . . . and one of the elders said to me, Weep not.

7.4 I heard the number of them that were sealed, 144,000 . . . After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number.

7.13 One of the elders answered, saying to me, These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I said to him, My Lord, thou knowest.

10.8 I heard the voice again speaking with me, saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel . . . And I went to the angel, saying that he should give me the little book . . . And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it my belly was made bitter.

22.8 When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things.

22.20 Amen: come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints.

These are in addition to the very numerous passages throughout the Book where John says, "I saw", or "He showed me", or "He took me". He is personally involved in all that the Book treats of, and he describes, sometimes vividly, even poignantly, how he felt about his experiences.

He is not alone in this, of course. Indeed, the parallels with Ezekiel's experiences as he is taken in the visions of God to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8.1-11.25), and later when he witnessed the plan of the future Jerusalem, with its temple and the divisions of the land (40.1 ff) is close. The same is true of some of the experiences of the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7.1, 15; 8.15, 27; 10.1-19; 12.8). The prophets were very far from being mere automata, impersonally

acting as scribes to record dispassionately what was imposed upon them. They were human beings with all the emotions and anxieties and fears of other human beings, and they were allowed to record how they were affected by what they experienced. Other prophets, too, are more or less autobiographical, and none more so than Jeremiah who, for all the fact that he, more than most, stresses that he spoke only when "the word of the LORD came unto" him (as in

I.2, 4, 9, 11; 2.2, 3, 4, 9, 12 and many other places), nevertheless is allowed to disclose the inmost feelings of his heart in face of the tragic sufferings which his ministry brought upon him. But Jeremiah goes further than the other prophets: he not only describes his experiences: he actually gives vent to his feelings, and calls down curses on his misfortunes, and deplores what God is about to do to His people:

4.10 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.

II.18 The LORD gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it; then Thou showedst me their doings. But I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter: and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be no more remembered. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see Thy vengeance on them: for unto Thee have I revealed my cause.

15.1 Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent on usury, neither have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me . . .

20.7 O LORD, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. I am become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocketh me. For as often as I speak I cry out; I cry, Violence and spoil: because the word of the LORD is made a reproach to me, and a derision all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing and I cannot contain . . . Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought

tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born to thee, making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontide, because he slew me not from the womb, and so my mother should have been my grave, and her womb always great. Wherefore came I from the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

Clearly these are the spontaneous and bitter effusions of the prophet's own heart, provoked by his own suffering and not by the compulsion of the Spirit of God. Equal) clearly they are the Spirit's divinely sanctioned expression of how hard it is to be a prophet of the LORD among a rebellious people, and as such a real and precious part of the inspired Scripture. But this and the other examples show to us plainly that the inspiration of God has not usually chosen robots for its agents. These are men of flesh and blood, and from their reactions \ve have much to learn. Jeremiah suffered the unexplained afflictions of Job, and expressed himself in the face of them in language which is like Job's, and which might indeed reflect his acquaintance with that Book (see Job 3.3, 10/1 1, 20).

The prophets record God's revelation indeed: but under His guidance they also record for our instruction that they were men like ourselves. We shall find reason to be glad, as we return to our present study, that John the man filters through the message of John the revelator, and we discover for our learning how he reacted to the revelations granted to him.

He washed us from our sins in His own blood.

This expression occurs again in this Book in modified form in 5.9; 7.14; 12.11. The thought of being washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus, or at least that of being redeemed through His blood, is found elsewhere in the records of the Last Supper (Matthew 26.28 ; 1 Corinthians 10.10; 11.25, 27), and in such passages as John 6.53-56; Acts 20.28; Romans 5.9; Ephesians 1.7; 2.13; Colossians 1.14, 20; Hebrews 9.7, 12; 12.24; 13.12, 20; 1 Peter 1.2, 19; 1 John 1.7; 5.6, 8. The figure is drawn from the sprinklings of blood associated with the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and presents us anew with the problem of how to relate the actual sacrifices offered under the Law with the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. Clearly the topic is too large to be dealt with more than cursorily here, but perhaps the best brief comment is that the Letter to the Hebrews gives the answer complete. It was not possible for the sacrifices under the Law to take away sins (Hebrews 10.4). Even the solemn sacrifice which preceded the entry of the high priest into the Most Holy Place once a year (10.7) only served to emphasize that for others, and for the High Priest also on all other days save this, access into God's presence was not possible (10.8), while the fact that the ordinance had to be repeated year after year showed that it achieved nothing permanent (10.9, 10). In fact, the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament consisted of shadows of the better thing to come (10.1), and if there were no better thing to come the whole elaborate ritual would have been and remained "weak and unprofitable" (7.18).

While it is true that without the shedding of blood there is no

remission of sins (9.22), the blood of animals is merely an anticipation of the shedding of the blood of the Son of God, which is alone sufficient to achieve its object, and is so utterly complete in itself that it will never need to be repeated (9.23-28). The priests who offered the sacrifices were as limited in their powers as the sacrifices they offered, for they were sinners and mortal (5.2; 7.28), and must always be succeeded by other priests who would continue the interminable repetitions. The only way in which what the Law anticipated could be

brought about was by the coming of One made in all points like to His brethren (2.10-17), Who would live a spotless life, and then die a death which would bring His temptations to an end and cause Him to be made perfect (2.10; 5.7-9; 7.26-28). When such an One had been raised from the dead, He would be able to enter closely into God's heavenly presence and take up His residence in this true Most-Holy Place (10.12), and there, with His constant recollection of the hard travail through which He had repelled and then conquered sin (2.18; 4.14-15; 5.7-8). He is able to serve the interests of all who come through Him in prayer into the presence of the Father (10.19-25). All the ritual of the Law has, then, to be summed up in the human nature, the flawless life, and the culminating death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The participation of the faithful Jew in such ritual was his anticipation of the coming offering which alone could give meaning to what he did. The disciple who comes to God since Jesus Christ was offered pays his tribute to the sinless-ness of the Lord and His destruction of the power of sin in His death (9.26), and, having symbolically died in his obedient mind to sin by being "crucified with Christ" (Romans 6.3-7). He can claim all the benefits which the Lord's death and priesthood have secured and can yet secure (Romans 8.31-34).

It is this which is expressed in the words, "washed us from our sins in His own blood"; and in a Book which is deeply concerned with the transition from the Law to salvation in Christ, and with repelling the objections to the Christian way raised by unbelieving Jews (as we shall see both in the Letters to the Churches of chapters 2 and 3 and in some later evidence), this verse amounts to an affirmation of faith in the full efficacy of what Christ has wrought by His death.

1.6: He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father.

This verse carries the same thought further. Israel had been delivered from Egypt, symbolically by the blood of God's Passover-lamb, and then in the wilderness had been sworn in to God as a "kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Exodus 19.18). Now "Christ our Passover hath been sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians

5.7) and, by their deliverance so brought about, the believers from all races have become "a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2.9), replacing in the present dispensation the rejecters of the Lord Jesus Christ as He had warned them (Matthew 21.42-44). Both Peter and John would have been present when the Lord offered this warning to His people, and in both their writings there appear words which plainly echo what they then heard. John lays down from the start the true position of the Lord Jesus Christ and His saints: He is the Redeemer, and they are the chosen people. Thus, however tactily, are the pretensions of the disobedient Jews put in their proper place. Those to whom John is writing are the elect of God; those others who rejected the counsel of God against themselves are for the present rejected in their turn.

To Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever.

Thus John comes to the end of his doxology. Grammatically, the glory and the dominion might here be ascribed either to the Father or to the Son, but there is no doubt, from the constant usage of Scripture, that it is the Father who is intended. Indeed, the words are very like those in the commonly accepted termination of the "Lord's Prayer": "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen" (Matthew 6.13, AV and RVm). It seems likely enough that the spoken version of this Prayer, ending "for ever and ever. Amen", might have been borrowed from the verse before us.

For ever and ever.

The Greek expression here is in the form preferred in AV and RV, though with the omission of the last two words in RVm: eis tons aionas (ton aidnon), "literally "unto the ages (of the ages)." The same expression, in full, occurs also in 1.18; 4.9, 10; 5.13, (14); 7.12; 10.6; 11.15; 14.11 (here without the definite articles); 15.7; 19.3; 20.10; 22.5. It is very much a speciality of this Book, and is only found outside it in Galatians 1.5; Ephesians 3.21 (without the preposition); Philippians 4.20; 1 Timothy 1.17; Hebrews 1.8 (in the singular); 13.21; 1 Peter 4.11; 5.11. It corresponds to two principal expressions in the Old Testament, /: 'dwlam wd 'edh and min ha 'owla ha 'dwlam. The former of these is literally "to the age and onward" and is found with this translation principally in the Psalms (9:5; 10.16; 21.4; 45.6, 17; 48.14; 52.8; 104.5; 111.8; 119.44; 145.1,2,21), and also Exodus 15.18; Isaiah 30.8; Daniel 12.3; Micah 4.5. The latter is literally "from eternity even to eternity", and is found in 1 Chronicles 16.36; 29.10; Nehemiah 9.5; and in its Aramaic variant in Daniel 2.20; 7.18

Now on the face of it, it would be difficult to think of expressions which convey so clearly the idea of endless eternity, whether in the Hebrew or in the Greek. The first Hebrew expression looks as though it means "for ever and then more"; the second "from one eternity to another eternity"; and the Greek "ages, each part of which is itself an age". It is true that neither aion nor 'owlam taken by itself necessarily conveys the idea of eternity, and may correspond simply to some particular age, particularly the age which is to end at the Lord's return (Matthew 13.39, 40, 49) and the age which will follow that (Mark 10.30 ; Luke 20.35). There are other usages also, in which the word becomes practically synonymous with kosmos, as meaning the world dominated by sinful men in which we now live. But nevertheless, the redoubled combination of age with age in the phrases under discussion seems to convey the idea of limitless eternity very emphatically.

Perhaps because of the unwelcome implications of supposing that some of the matters associated with this expression really could be endless, however, it has sometimes been suggested that some finite period of time might be intended, even by these emphatic terms, and it might be a step in the direction of elucidation if we first of all examine the passages themselves.

Here then are the ones in the Apocalypse:

1.5

Glory and dominion to God.

1.18

The risen Jesus is alive.

4.9

The one on the throne lives.

4.10

The same.

5.13

Blessing and honour and glory and dominion to the One on the throne and to the Lamb.

5.14

The elders worship (Him that liveth, A.V. only).

7.12

Glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, and power to our God.

10.6

The angel swore by the Creator, who lives.

11.15

The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign.

14.11

The smoke of their torment goes up (here the articles are missing, as noted above).

15.7

THHE WRATH OF God, Who lives.

19.3

The smoke (of burning the great harlot) goes up.

20.10

The devil, beast, and false prophet are tormented in the lake of fire.

22.5

The saints shall reign.

The ones in the remainder of the New Testament are:

Galatians

1.5

Glory and praise be to our God and Father.

Ephesians

3.21

Glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus (here without the prepositions).

Philippians

4.20

Praise to our God and Father.

1 Timothy

1.17

Honour and glory to God.

Hebrews

1.8

Thy throne, O God (of Jesus, in the singular).

13.21

May God make you perfect through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory.

1 Peter

4.11

May God be glorified through Jesus Christ,

Whose are glory and dominion. 5.11 To God be the dominion.

Turning to the ones in the Old Testament:

Psalm

9.5

God has blotted out the name of the wicked.

10.16

The LORD is King.

21.4

God gave to the King (Messiah) life and length of days.

45.6

Thy throne, O God (cited in Hebrews 1.8, 9, above).

45.17

The people will give Thee thanks.

48.14

This God is our God.

52.8

I trust in the mercy of God.

104.5

God laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be moved ("for ever" in A.V., but the Hebrew is the same).

111.8

The works of God's hands are established.

119.44

I will observe Thy law continually.

145.1

I will extol Thee my God and bless Thy name.

145.2

I will praise Thy name.

145.21

Let all flesh bless His holy name.

Exodus

15.18

The LORD shall reign.

Isaiah

30.8

Write the message in a book that it may be.

Daniel

12.3

They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars.

Micah

4.5

We will walk in the name of our God.

1 Chronicles

s 16.36

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel.

29.10

Blessed be Thou, O LORD, the God of Israel, our Father.

Nehemiah

9.5

Stand up and bless the LORD your God.

Daniel

2.20

Blessed be the name of God.

7.18

The saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdom.

Now it emerges very clearly from this analysis that the overall sense of all the terms is that of endless time. There is no limit to the period during which God should be praised, nor that to which He, His Son, and His saints will live (the two latter from the time of their resurrection and immortalization); or is there any limit to the endurance of the earth. If a few of the expressions are hyperbolic (since no mortal person can praise God in the temple for all eternity) this is the result of poetic expression, and not of any inherent limitation in the meaning of the terms. If there is any reason for limiting the terms at all, it is a subjective one, arising partly from our knowledge that there is a time-period set to one phase of the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, about Whose reign the same words are used; but particularly from a conviction that there can be no such thing as absolutely endless conscious torment. This is no doubt a serious problem, which will have to be faced, but it seems to this writer that it has to

be faced by some other means than weakening the meaning of "for ever and ever". Without pausing for that discussion now, it might at least be pointed out that the solution is hinted at in Isaiah 34.9-16. There, in predicting the desolation of a certain land which is to be so complete that "the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever", we are turned aside from a picture of a land totally uninhabitable by any living thing, when the prophet goes on to add: "The pelican and the porcupine shall possess it; the owl and the raven shall dwell therein. . . Thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and thistles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be for an habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches. And the wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wolves, and the satyr shall cry out to his fellow, yea the night-monster shall settle there. . . There shall the arrowsnake make her nest. . . Seek ye out of the book of the Lord: no one of these shall be missing, none shall want her mate. . . They shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein.

It hardly needs saying that a land which is laid waste by perpetual fire and brimstone would be no fit dwellingplace for any of these creatures for an instant, and how much less "from generation to generation". In one way or another, it must be possible to understand the prophet's words in some way which allows both things to be true: and if these words, then perhaps also the corresponding ones in Revelation which speak of eternal torment? To this we shall hope to return more comprehensively later.

Amen.

This little word is too often neglected, in part because of its insignificance, and in part because of our unthinking familiarity with it. Yet it is full of significance. In its Hebrew original form, 'amen, it is so rendered 27 times, and 'so be it' once, 'truth' twice. In Greek transliteration, amen, it is found a full 150 times in the

The readers will not fail to have noticed that the quotation from Isaiah also contains the expression "for ever and ever", in spite of not being contained in the list on page 17. The Hebrew expression here is *netsach n:tsachiyim*, and is listed in YAC as occurring with this translation only here. The word *netsach* occurs around 33 times, of which 24 are rendered "ever", and the remainder *alwav(s)*, constantly, evermore, perpetual, (un)to the end. This is the only case where the word is used twice together, in singular and plural, meaning something like "for an eternity of evers".

New Testament, of which 50 are so rendered in translation, and the remaining 100 'verily', all of these last in the Gospels, from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. The following comments on it are taken from Vine, (EDNTW):

Its meanings may be seen in such passages as Deuteronomy 7.9, "the faithful (Amen) God; Isaiah 49.7, "Jehovah that is faithful"; 65.16, "The God of truth", margin "The God of Amen". And if God is faithful, His testimonies and precepts are sure (amen): Psalms 19.7; 111.7; as are also His warnings, Hosea 5.9; and promises, Isaiah 33.16; 55.3. 'Amen' is used of men also, e.g. Proverbs 25.13. !

There are cases where the people used it to express their assent to a law, and their willingness to submit to the penalty attached to the breach of it, Deuteronomy 27.15; cf Nehemiah 5.13. It is also used to express acquiescence in another's prayer, 1 Kings 1.36, 'where it is defined as "let God say so too"; or in another's thanksgiving, 1 Chronicles 16.36, whether by an individual, Jeremiah 11.5, or by the congregation, Psalm 106.48.

Thus, 'Amen' said by God = 'it is and shall be so', and by men, 'so let it be'.

Once in the New Testament 'Amen' is a title of Christ (Revelation 3.14), because through Him the purposes of God are established (2 Corinthians 1.20).

The early Christian churches followed the example of Israel in associating themselves audibly with the prayers and thanksgivings offered on their behalf (1 Corinthians 14.16, where the article 'the' points to the common practice). Moreover this practice corresponds to the pattern of things in the heavens (see Revelation 5.14, etc.)

The individual also said 'Amen' to express his 'Let it be so' in response to the divine 'Thus it shall be' (Revelation 22.20). Frequently the speaker — but he means the writer (A.D.N.) — adds 'Amen' to his own prayers and doxologies, as is the case in Ephesians 3.21, for example.

This leaves little to be said. It is sad and to be regretted that a reaction to the frequently meaningless Amens at the end of hymns and some prayers offered in a ritualistic environment should have caused many congregations of believers to remain silent at the end of prayers on their behalves. The one who offers his prayer says his own Amen, but those for whom it is offered maintain an unresponsive silence. Can we urge on such congregations that "Amen" is not the praying person's way of saying, "The prayer is at an end, and you may now resume

your seats"? It is the opportunity for each one present to say: "So be it. May the Lord do His part, and I mine, in what has been prayed for!" Certainly mechanically enthusiastic "Amen" at revival-type meetings can have a deterrent effect, but there are more dignified and thoughtful ways of "saying the Amen at thy giving of thanks" which are a proper and divinely authorized way of associating the congregation with the one offering their petitions. 1.6:

He made us priests.

The Old Testament had its priests who were, since the time of Moses, from the house of Aaron within the tribe of Levi exclusively. All others were false priests, though there had been at least one "priest of the Most High God" about whose antecedents we know nothing (Genesis 14.18-20; Psalm 110.4; Hebrews 5.6ft). This is not the place in which to develop the way in which the mortal priesthood of the descendants of Aaron was supplanted by the unchangeable priesthood after the order of Melchizedek of the Lord Jesus Christ: this the Letter of the Hebrews does supremely well. But this is the place it point out that, from the time when the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, there are but two ways of looking at the office of priest. The one concerns the Lord Himself, who is uniquely the Priest of our confession and brooks no rival, successor, or partner (Hebrews 5-6; 7.11, 15, 17, 21; 10.21); and the other concerns every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ without distinction (1 Peter 2.5, 9; Revelation 1.6; 5.10; 20.6). The idea that believers in our era can be divided into those who are priests and those who are laity is utterly without any foundation in Scripture, and the assumption of the office of sacrificing priests which those ordained to the Roman persuasion, at least, make, is an affront to the teaching of Scripture. Indeed, it is absurd that the celibate priesthood of the Roman church should arrogate to itself the hereditary office of the married priesthood of Aaron, and the assumption of such office is utterly devoid of any foundation in Scripture.

Linguistically, the words concerning priesthood in the New Testament are all linked with the adjective hieros, sacred. Thus, the sacred place is the hieron, the temple (71 times in N.T.). The priest's office is hierateia (Luke 1.9; Hebrews 7.5); the priesthood is hierateuma (1 Peter 2.5, 9); the exercise of such office is expressed in the verb hierateuo; and the one who exercises this office, the priest, is the hierews. The only passages which might in any way be made to suggest that there is a class of priests, as distinct from ordinary believers, within the Christian community, are those which refer to believers who minister about holy things (1 Corinthians 9.13), and to Paul "ministering the grace of God" (Romans 15.16), and in neither case do these verses really suggest the existence of such a distinction.

The Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the only Priest between His people and His Father, a truth which tacitly not only excludes any caste of professing priests on the earth from such a special office

in relation to their fellow-believers, but also eliminates the army of supposed mediators, and especially the Queen of them all, Mary the mother of Jesus, from any such function in heaven. And insofar as the name priest is appropriate to any believer at all, it is appropriate to every believer without exception.

But while this fact should humble any who would seek, or who profess to hold, any special status on their own account (and should also warn any who would seek without official hierarchial status to be regarded as divinely appointed leaders because they themselves feel qualified for the task), it does invite every believer to ask, "In what sense are my brethren and

I priests at all, and how do we exercise that priestly office?" Israel should have asked itself the same question when it received God's promise that it should be a "kingdom of priests and an holy nation". It is true that the promise in both cases provides for ministering and mediatory duties in the age to come when "they shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5.10). But it is also true that in both cases the chosen people have a duty to do in witnessing to their faith and offering it to others, which means that they must not take lightly their need to "let their light so shine before men that these may see their good works, and glorify their Father Who is in heaven" (Philippians 2.15; Matthew 5.16) Thus: in every way, the hope for high office in the age to come cannot be fulfilled unless it is linked with high service in this present time.

1.7: Behold, He cometh with the clouds.

There is a sense in which this is quite literally true, for when the Lord Jesus went up to heaven "a cloud received Him out of sight" of His disciples, and they were told that He would return "in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1.10-11; see also Matthew 24.30; 26.64). But there is no doubt another sense in which the angels who will accompany Him on His return are spoken of as 'clouds' also (Mark 8.38; 2 Thessalonians 1.7). And in yet a further application of the figure, the saints whom at some point the Lord will raise from the dead, and who make up "them that sleep in Jesus" whom "God will bring with Him" (1 Thessalonians 4.14; Colossians 3.4), may be so considered. But there is no occasion in the New Testament where the present word for cloud, *nephelē*, is positively identified with large companies of people, for Hebrews 12.1, though it speaks of men of faith as a "great cloud of witnesses", uses an alternative word *nephos*, which is found nowhere else in the New Testament (though it occurs in LXX some 26 times compared with some 120 for the more common word). The present passage, of course alludes clearly to Daniel 7.13, in which "there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man" to receive a king-

dom; and since Daniel 7.18 says that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom", this gives good ground for associating together the clouds and the saints.

Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all the tribes the earth shall mourn over Him.

This is a direct allusion to Zechariah 12.10, whose expressions "look on Me", "pierced", and "mourn for Him" all find their echo here. But while Zechariah 12 is purely concerned to deal with the natural nation of Israel, the present passage broadens the picture considerably. We shall find this repeatedly throughout the Apocalypse. Matters-which in the Old Testament are concerned with the natural seed of Abraham, are given a wider application in Revelation to other nations on the one hand, and to believers from the whole world on the other. If this fact is kept in memory it may help to restrain over-literal application of parts of this Book to natural Israel only. "They which pierced Him", in the sense of those who conspired to bring about the Lord's death, are indeed natural Israel (though even in this other nations had their complicity, as Peter brings out in Acts 4.24-28); but "every eye" and "all kindreds of the earth" here evidently range over a wider field. It is true that in Hebrew the same word, *erets*, is used both for 'earth' and for 'land', and that context must decide the sometimes difficult question as to which is intended. But the problem is less acute in the New Testament than in the Old, and the plain fact is that, in the New Testament, the Greek word far more often means 'earth' than 'land', the former in the sense either of 'ground' or our planet as a whole, while in the Apocalypse in particular the idea of the whole world seems to predominate. In

fact, of the 80 or so occurrences of the word, there is not one which with any probability means the land of Israel in particular, and there are many which plainly have the wider significance (1.5; 3.10; 5.3; 6.15; 7.1; 12.4; 13.13; 16.14; 17.2; 20.11, and others).

What we are clearly told, therefore, is that when the Lord Jesus returns, not only will natural Israel lament the evil done in crucifying Him (endorsed through the ages by their continuance in unbelief), but that the other nations of the world, who conspired with Israel then (and since that time have also in the main failed to yield themselves to the Lord's allegiance), will repent in dust and ashes when they see Him in His glory. Indeed, the rebellion of the nations against Him of which this Book is to speak so eloquently later (17.12-14 and elsewhere), will give excellent ground for repentance when the Lord discomfits them and demands their submission. Once again, John the prophet reveals himself to us as John the man, when he adds his own prayer to what the Lord has

revealed, and expresses his desire for its fulfillment with his "Even so, Amen!"

1.8: I am the Alpha and the Omega, (the beginning and the ending), saith the Lord God . . . The Almighty.

The remaining titles in this verse, "Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come", have already been considered. Here "the Alpha and the Omega", the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, is plainly drawn from Isaiah 41.4 ("the First and with the last", and 44.6 ("the First and the Last"). God is the Author and Finisher of the work of creation and salvation, and in accomplishing the last the Lord Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12.2). The question we have already raised, as to whether these titles are related to the one or the other, raises itself again here, and requires special treatment.

Excursus II: The Lord Jesus Christ and the Divine Titles

We take such titles in order as they occur in the Book:

"name of the city of My God", associates it plainly with the name of the Messianic Branch of David in Jeremiah 23.6, where "this is the name whereby He shall be called, Y:howah Tsidkenuw, the LORD our righteousness", and with the name of the liberated Jerusalem in 33.16, also "The LORD our righteousness". Though the word which in its pointing in the Masoretic text reads Y:howah certainly refers to the Almighty Father Himself, it is in Jeremiah applied both to Messiah the Branch, and to Jerusalem the city of God. Since the Lord Jesus evidently uses these passages, it is plain that He is laying claim to the use of the title The LORD our righteousness for Himself.

4. 8 THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS, AND WHICH IS COMING. This is similar in form and usage to 1.8, and clearly refers to the Father specifically.

4. 9, 10 HE THAT LIVETH FOR EVER AND EVER. This expression, which is also found in 10.6, clearly refers to the Father again, as the exposition of chapter 4 will show conclusively. See also 15.7. The same expression in Aramaic is found in the lips of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.34, and in those of the angel in 1 2.7, this time in Hebrew. The parallels with Revelation 10.6 are here very close, and must be given further consideration.

11. 17 LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHICH ART AND WHICH WAS. The Father again, though the manner in which He takes "His great power" and reigns is through the return of His Son. Here A. V. adds "and art to come", as in 1.4, 8 but other versions omit this phrase. Since we have here reached the point where God's rule over the earth has been established, it is fitting that "art coming" should now be omitted, for its prophecy has been fulfilled.

15. 3 LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, KING OF THE AGES (or possibly "of the nations", as in AVm, RVm, and NASB; but definitely, it seems, not "of the saints"). Once more the Father.

16.5,6 THOU WHICH ART AND WHICH WAST, THOU HOLY ONE, LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY. The Father again, once more omitting "art coming", because now we are in the midst of the last judgements leading up to God's control of the earth through Jesus Christ.

16. 14 GOD THE ALMIGHTY. The Father again, since the "great day" referred to here links us directly with 6.17, where "He that sits on the throne" (6.16) is the Father, clearly distinguished from the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, by His side.

17. 14 LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS.

1. 4 HE WHICH IS, AND WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS TO COME. Plainly at this stage it is the Father only, as we have shown, to Whom reference is made.

1. 8 THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHICH IS, AND WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS TO COME. Again the Father only, both from its close proximity to (1), and because we have not yet reached the point where such words might be used about Jesus.

1. 11 I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST. If these words are part of the genuine text, they would certainly have to be applied to the Lord Jesus Himself, as we shall see from a further consideration of "the One like to the Son of Man" (1.13). But the words are omitted in R.V., R.S.V., and others, and without a backward glance in Aland and Black's Greek Testament, and should therefore be left out of consideration.

1. 17 I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST. Here we can no longer escape the issue. The Lord Jesus is certainly the One who says He is "the living One and I was dead", and Who now lays claim to part, at the least, of the title of God in 1.8. Names which originally belonged to the Father only are now seen to become applicable to His Son also.

2. 8 THESE THINGS SAITH THE FIRST AND THE LAST. Again, beyond any possibility

of doubt, these words apply to the Son, for again He describes Himself as the One who "was dead, and lived again".

3. 12 MINE OWN NEW NAME. Whereas the name is not specified, its link with "the name of My God, and the definitely here a title of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb. Yet "Lord of lords" certainly refers to the God of Israel in Deuteronomy 10.17 and Psalm 136.3, while Nebuchadnezzar in effect applies both titles to Him in Daniel 2.47. But the most striking comparison is with 1 Timothy 6.15, in which God, "Whom no man hath seen nor can see" is called "the King of kings and Lord of lords". Most plainly here, therefore, a title which hitherto belonged to the Father only is being bestowed on His Son. See also 19.16.

19. 13 THE WORD OF GOD. As in John 1 . 1 4 and 1 John 1.1. When "the Word became flesh" the expression came to denote Jesus as the only-begotten Son, manifesting the glory of the Father, by Whom He had been begotten through the power of the Holy Spirit.

21.6 ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END. The Father again, for it is "He that sitteth on the throne" (21.5) Who is here speaking of the marriage of the Lamb and His Bride.

21. 22 THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY. Plainly the Father again, since He appears side by side with the Lamb.

22. 6 THE LORD, THE GOD OF THE SPIRITS OF THE PROPHETS. Though this is presumably the Father also, it is paralleled by statements that the Lord Jesus, like the One referred to here, "sent His angel" (as in 1.1; 22.16). The passage certainly, therefore, testifies to the identity of purpose and of will that move the Father and the Son, in much the same way as the statements of the Lord that the Father would send the Comforter to the disciples (John 14.16), or that He Himself would do so (16.7) come to the same thing. God's angels are Jesus' angels, since "angels and authorities and powers" have been made subject to Him (1 Peter 3.22).

22. 13 ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE BEGINNING AND THE END. Here at last these titles refer unquestionably to the Lord Jesus, even though they are identical with names hitherto used of the Father (1.11, 17). For the promise, "Behold, I come quickly" (22.12) refers to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, and is repeated in 22.20, and answered with the unanswerable, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!"

In brief, in this remarkably extensive list of titles attributed to the Father and His Son, which is surely unique in Scripture, though the supremacy of the Father and the dependence of the Son are never in doubt, there are sufficient occasions on which the exalted titles of God are also ascribed to His Son to make it plain that the Lord is regarded in this Book as having inherited the right to use the power and office which such titles convey. As Isaiah prophesied, it is now true in fact that "His name" is "called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9.6); and in the words of the Letter to the

Hebrews, "He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than" the angels (Hebrews 1.4). The whole is summed up in Paul's words:

"God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ Lord, to the glory of God, the Father" (Philippians 2.9-10). But the glory is an acquired glory. It is His by attainment because of the spotlessness of His life and the perfection gained by His death. And it is cherished by the Lord Jesus as a means whereby He can yet, as He has always, render to His Father the praise and the honour now placed safely in His hands.

Chapter 3 Revelation 1:9-20

CHAPTER III

JOHN'S FIRST VISION AND THE COMMISSION TO THE CONGREGATIONS (1.9 20)

1.9: I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus.

So Paul's exhortation that we should continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14.22) is realized in practice by John in his sufferings on Patmos. The outward manifestations were those of suffering — exile and perhaps hard labour in the stone-quarries. The sufferings were met in patient endurance, and the endurance was sustained by the confidence of the reality and promise of the kingdom of God, of which John already (1.6) reckoned himself and his brethren to be participants. The patience is *hupomorie*, not the longsuffering which bears with the infirmities or ill-behaviour of others, but the standing firm in adversity which those in tribulation or temptation require. The other word is *makrothumia*, the bearing with our common sins which we should show to others in consideration of God showing the same to us (2 Peter 3.9; Romans 9.22; 1 Peter 3.20). John is here illustrating by his own example the need to hold on in face of persecution and hardship, a part of the "overcoming" which he is shortly to urge on the seven congregations of Asia.

was in the isle which is called Patmos.

"The island is about 6 miles long, with a breadth of up to 4 miles, and it has been suggested that the scenery of its rugged volcanic hills and surrounding seas find their reflection in the imagery of the Apocalypse" (NBD, 1st edition, 1962). It is hard to think of a less likely suggestion: was it the "rugged scenery" of Babylon's endless alluvial wastes which inspired the very similar imagery of the Book of Daniel? Were the non-existent seas of that inland country responsible for his pictures of the great deeps? The imagery of the Apocalypse comes from the rest of Scripture, and first and last from the inspiration of God. Has that otherwise very conservative Commentary overlooked the fact that this is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him"?

The island lies at the latitude of Miletus (on the mainland, Acts 20.15), about 60 miles (100 km) SW of Ephesus, the port which would be the natural landing place for a messenger carrying this

Book to the Seven Congregations.

For the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

John is a willing witness to the word and testimony. He now reveals how he is a sufferer in the same cause. He will shortly revert to the phrase so as to speak of those who will have died in the same loyalty (6.9). And as his revelation draws to its close he will picture to us the ultimate blessing of those who are willing to be faithful unto death (20.4). See 1.2, and for significant and related uses of the word *marturia*, testimony, see also 11.7; 12.11, 17; 19.10, 10.

1.10: was in Spirit.

So also in 4.2; 17.3; 21.10. In each of these John receives a supernatural revelation taking the form of a visionary experience. Here he sees One like the Son of Man (1.13); then he saw visions of a heavenly throne; then one of the harlot of apostasy mounted on the beast of rebellion; and finally one of the descent of the New Jerusalem. The expression and the experience are alike paralleled in the life of Ezekiel (3.12; 8.3; 11.1; 37.1; 43.5). In both cases God uses His own power to reveal to the eyes of men events, in signs and symbols it may well be, which man would be incapable of seeing on his own account. It was in such a way, no doubt, that Paul was "caught up into Paradise (even to the third heaven)", to see things too holy, or too great, or too surpassing the normal wit of man to understand, to be communicated to others (1 Corinthians 12.2-3).

A careful examination of the uses of the word Spirit in relation to God will show that, when God's personal intervention is in issue, it is usually used with the definite article, to pneuma, to hagion pneuma, to pneuma to hagion; but when the power of God bringing revelation, or strength, to His saints is intended, then the word is usually used without the article: pneuma, pneuma hagion. The evidence for this is adduced in an Excursus in my "Acts & Epistles".

On the Lord's day.

Two explanations of this are current. One is that it refers to Jesus' day of return to the earth, which is often enough referred to as "the day of the Lord" in Scripture (Isaiah 2.12, Joel 3.14,18; Zechariah 14.1; 1 Thessalonians 5.2; 2 Peter 3.10; Revelation 16.14, etc.). The other is that it refers to the first day of the week, our Sunday, when the disciples discovered the emptiness of the Lord's tomb, when He appeared to the first witnesses of His resurrection, and when He broke bread with them, and they were accustomed to do in their turn (Luke 24.1-35; Acts 20.7; 1 Corinthians 16.2). A third is possible: that John is telling us that

to witness the things which belong to God's own eternal day, as he saw the vision of God's glory in the heavens.

Though the coincidence of the words is tempting in favour of the first suggestion, its Tightness or wrongness depends on whether or not the vision which John now sees really is one of events taking place at the time of the Lord's return and the establishment of His kingdom. We shall find that this view does not pass that test. On absolutely unmistakeable evidence, the verses and chapters which immediately follow are not concerned with the time of the Lord's second coming. The first possibility is therefore not adequate.

The second is equivalent to saying, "I was in Spirit on a Sunday". In the first edition of APOCALYPSE FOR EVERYMAN I rejected this view summarily with the words,

The second (view), though it is supported by the information that Sunday began to be so called (as "The Lord's Day") at least as early as the second century, seems to this writer about as unlikely as any explanation could be. What possible purpose could be served by John informing us that it happened to be a Sunday when this particular vision was granted to him? Would the interpretation be any different if it were a Tuesday, or if we were not told which day of the week it was?

This roused a critic whose most helpful views on other matters will play a considerable part later in this exposition to write:

My first serious criticism: "The Lord's day". Your approach is Aristotelian. You can see no point in the Revelation being given on the first day of the week. I can see every point, but truths like these are spiritually discerned. The commentators put the matter better than I.

1. SWETE: The exile of Patmos, shut out from the weekly Breaking of Bread in the Christian assembly at Ephesus, finds the Lord's presence in his solitude. [He adds that Hort's view (yours too) seems to introduce a thought foreign to the context; it is not Christ at His coming Who is revealed, but Christ present with the church on earth.]

2. KIDDLE: He (John) wishes to establish a bond of sympathy with his readers ... in mentioning the time of his vision, the Lord's Day. John is once again quietly emphasizing a common participation in the Christian life.

3. AUSTIN FARRER: The alternative translation (yours) is false to the Greek and false to the context.

In addition to the evidence of Ignatius that the first day of the < week was called the Lord's Day at least from the end of the first century (compare the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Passover, , there is the evidence of the Didache (date uncertain but somewhere between 60 and 110), "On the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks".

I do not find these most interesting quotations at all convincing. That John would deeply miss the communion of the saints in the Breaking of Bread is not to be doubted. That the words concern "Christ at His coming" I have repudiated rather than supported. That John wishes to establish a bond of sympathy with his readers is far more evident in 1.4-9 than it is in 1. 10. It is far from plain in what respect the Greek impairs the interpretation I offered then, and offer again now. And it is in no way clear what differences in the translation of the Greek have to do with the matter. The relevant Greek phrase is: egenomen en pneumati en te kuriake he mem. Both AC and SC support the view of my critic above that Sunday is referred to, yet neither suggests that there is anything decisive about the Greek, and for my part I had not supposed that there was. The latter points out (what has been recognized above in the Excursus on the word 'church' (page 6), that the word "the Lord's" or "of the Lord" only occurs elsewhere in the New Testament of "the Lord's Supper", in 1 Corinthians 11.20 (which is consistent with, but does not require, that the day on which the Lord's Supper was eaten is referred to here), but that is all. However, the comment does provoke the question: could John be saying, "Because of being under the influence of the Spirit I was transported into the Lord's day"? If he were, then the Lord's day would be a part of his vision, and not the day of the week on which the vision was received. But even if John is not affirming this, at least the words allow of "the Lord's Day" to which he refers being a day which he experienced as a result of his vision, and since everything which follows in the chapters which follow suggests that John is actually witnessing in vision the things which belong to the risen Lord, now exalted in the heavens, that it is the Lord's heavenly day which he experiences is at least possible. It might be adjudged appropriate that such a vision should have been given him on the day of the week corresponding to the Lord's resurrection, in which case he would have experienced his transport on a Sunday. So both these views may be true in fact. Yet it still

seems to me that John is stressing, not the day of the week on which he was blessed with the revelation, but the day of the Lord into which it introduced him.

So we return to the view which was expressed in the First Edition in the words:

"We shall here adopt the view that John means, "I was in Spirit, and was taken out of human time into the time which belongs to God, where things present, sometimes things past, and most often things future, are to be displayed to him as God sees them, and as

He wishes them to be seen."

1.11: The seven congregations.

Reference has already been made to the convenient geographical distribution of these churches, such that a messenger from Patmos would, landing at Ephesus, proceed on a clockwise route through Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, before returning to Ephesus and to Patmos. Having regard to the considerable (though far from flawless) zeal of the first congregation addressed, Ephesus, and the total decay of the last of them (Laodicea), it has been suggested that these communities are typical of seven ages of our era, culminating in the time of the Lord Jesus' return. But there is absolutely nothing in the Book itself, beyond the general statement that it is designed to teach Jesus' servants about things to come, which would support this suggestion. Nor is there any such orderly regression from purity to apostasy as would make the suggestion probable. Consider the brief summary which follows:

Ecclesia Revelation

1 Ephesus 2.1-7

Good qualities

Works, toil, patience, discerning of false apostles, persistence, hatred of Nicolaitans.

Bad qualities

Forsaking of its first love.

2 Smyrna 2.6-11

Tribulation, acceptance of poverty, endurance of Jewish persecution.

NONE.

3 Pergamon 2.12-17

Stedfastness in persecution.

Toleration of the teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans.

4 Thyatira 2.18-29

Works, love, faith, ministry.

Toleration of the teaching of Jezebel.

5 Sardis 3.1-6

A few only undefil-ed.

A living death for the rest.

6 Philadelphia 3.7-13

Faithfulness in weakness.

NONE. "

7 Laodicea 3.14-22

NONE.

Lukewarmness and complacency.

It is arguable that Laodicea was the worst of the seven, though Sardis runs it very close. It is not arguable that Smyrna (the second) and Philadelphia (the sixth) are the only ones against

which no charges are levelled. This is not a history, if it is history at all, of progressive decline, and it could only be by arbitrary selection of the history of Christianity from that time to this that it could be divided into seven ages which at all correspond to the fluctuations of faithfulness, apostasy, complacency and sloth which we find displayed here.

Of course these messages do promise things to come to pass (1.1), though largely in conditional terms. If they are faithful they will be blessed (2.7); if they are unfaithful they will be punished (2.5). But the wording of the letters which are given in chapters 2 and 3 gives no ground at all for supposing that they are intended to be regarded as a panorama of history yet to be unfolded.

heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet.

It has been suggested that this means that John was symbolically looking at the "things which are behind" (Philippians 3.13) until he heard the trumpet sound, and then turned round to behold the things of the future. But as to that it seems plain that the 'behind' and 'before' of Philippians refer to position and not to time. The message all the same suggests the sobering thought: man left to himself does not know which way he should be looking, and needs the guidance of God before he knows what is good for him. "We know not (even) how to pray as we ought" (Romans 8.26). So John in Patmos is looking around for what shall be revealed, and is taught that he is looking in entirely the wrong direction. He must turn away from the way a man would look, and look the other way, listening to the great voice which he hears, and turning to the direction from which the voice comes.

1.12: turned to see the voice which spoke with me.

The natural mind of man puts the Lord behind him. When he turns again and repents of his human ways he sees the Lord before him; and if then the Lord beckons him to follow, he is behind His Lord, and goes the way in which he has been directed. It cannot be without some significance that the word used for 'behind' here, and in a good number of other places, is *oridzo*, which is elsewhere used of disciples "coming after" Jesus (Matthew 4.19; 10.38; 16.24; John 12.19; Acts 5.37). Jesus is behind us until we consciously put Him in front. This John did for all of us when he looked the other way from that he had been looking, and saw the vision of the glorified Lord. But the actual experience is, as so many, many times in this Book, one which re-enacts those of the prophets of the Old Testament, for in Ezekiel we have:

Go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from His place (Ezekiel 3.11-12).

The "voice as of a trumpet" (1.10) is an expression which heralds a vital pronouncement from God. It is often associated with the last day, with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and with the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 24.31; 1 Corinthians 15.52; 1 Thessalonians 4.16), but in this Book it is concerned with calling attention to the immediate announcement of God's plans for His saints and for the world (4.1; 8.2; 8.6, 13; 9.14; and in verbal form, instead of

the noun, in 1 Corinthians 15.52; Revelation 8.6-13; 9.1, 13; 10.7; 11.15). The trumpet is sounded to command John's attention — and our own.

1.11: What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven congregations.

So John is not merely to send to each of the congregations here mentioned its own particular message, as outlined in the two chapters which follow, but the entire Book. Each congregation would receive its own special few verses (and perhaps be allowed a sight of the counsel to the others too, as we have?), but all of them would receive the Revelation as a whole. The same applies to ourselves: we have received the entire "revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him", but in addition, though there is no message avowedly addressed to our own congregations individually, we have been told what the Lord said to our fellows of the first century, these messages themselves being among the things written aforetime for our learning.

1.12: Having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands.

The comparison of this with the seven-branched candlestick in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25.37), and its replicas in Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 4.20; 1 Kings 7.49) is evident. But what is less obvious, but quite fundamental, is the difference between the two. In the Tabernacle and the Temple the seven branches were visibly and organically joined to the one stem. Israel was one visible community, centred on the Tabernacle, while it wandered in the wilderness under Moses, and until the destruction of Shi-loh when they were come into the promised land. The same was true in Jerusalem after David had removed the Ark there, and when Solomon established the temple on mount Moriah. But in this Book we have ceased to be concerned with the Law, or yet to be concerned with literal Jerusalem as a centre of worship, or with a visible centre at all. "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain (Gerizim) nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father . . . God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4.21-23). When the temple in Jerusalem ceased to be the acceptable centre of gravity, the new Congregations which should spring up would outwardly be unlinked one with another; but they would nevertheless be combined in a common purpose and teaching by the fact that the same Son of man would walk in the midst of them (1.13). There is a superficial autonomy about the true churches of the Christian era, which only allegiance to the Son of God can convert into a true organic unity.

1.13-16: One like to a Son of man.

The same title is used in Daniel 7.13 of the One who should take over the kingdom of men and make it into the kingdom of God. "Son of man" is used repeatedly in addressing the prophet Ezekiel (2.1, around 100 times in all). The Lord Jesus so speaks of Himself on numerous occasions, some 60 times or so spread through all the Gospels: though no writer takes the initiative of so describing Him. The glorious vision was human in shape, as distinct from many other of the beings described in the Apocalypse, but nonetheless symbolic in all its characteristics. But it was distinct from all else in the Book in that it reminded John of One whom John had known and loved before: it was "like a Son of man". Just as the hearts of two disciples had burned in them when they walked with the risen Christ (Luke 24.32), so would John's heart burn within him now. "In Spirit" he was, but what he saw in Spirit was real to him: his beloved Lord and Saviour stood before the man "in a trance but having his eyes open" (Numbers 24.4).

The Lord Jesus Christ Who, "knowing that He came from God and went to God" (John 13.3), nevertheless "took upon Him the form of a slave" (Philippians 2.7), chose to emphasize before His brethren that He was also one with them. It is thus as Son of man that He now reveals Himself to John, so that even in His glory He may be seen and approached in His real though perfected humanity. The Father committed all judgement unto Jesus "because He is Son of man", partaking of a nature in all points like that of His brethren (John 5.27; Hebrews 2.14, 17). The name of humility is a name of honour too: the Lord is like any other son of man in His nature, that He may be the merciful and faithful High Priest for all who come to Him.

But we might seem to have begged a question. Is this indeed the Lord Jesus personally, though in symbolic guise, who stands

before John? Or is it, as has been thought, a composite symbol including within itself all the "many sons" whom the Lord will bring unto glory? Is this Christ uniquely, or Christ and His glorified saints of the future? The following points seem to be quite decisive in favour of the former:

1 1.13 The Being walks among the seven lampstands

which are the seven congregations (1.20), and ; exercises authority and judgement over them (2-1);

2 1.16 He has in His hand seven stars (1.16), the angels of the congregations (1.20), to whom He instructs John to write in terms of their present needs and behaviour, and their future prospects;

3 1.18 He is the One raised from the dead (1.18), having keys over death and the grave, which are yet to be put to use (2.7, 8);

4 2.1 All the Letters which follow are written by One who can say, "I know thy works" (2.2, 19; 3.1, 8, 15), and who, evidently writing with the authoritative approach which becomes the risen Lord alone (2.5, 10, 16), describes His powers in terms of the image now before us, with its stars and lampstands, (2.1), its claim to be the Living One who was dead (2.8); to possess the sharp two-edged sword (2.12, 16); to have eyes like a flame and feet like polished brass (2.18); to have the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (3.1); to have the key with which He alone can open and shut (3.7); and to be the true Witness (3.14) and the beginning of the creation of God. ..'•• They could in their very nature only have been written by Jesus the Lord, and since He appropriates in them the composite picture set out in the image of 1.12-20, there is absolutely no doubt that that image is one of the glorified Son of God with the powers and attributes which He already possessed when He gave His revelations to John.

5 19.11 We meet the same Person again when He conquers the Beast of human dominion towards the end of the Book. Here also He has the eyes of flame (19.12) and the sharp sword in His mouth , (19.15), and here He is called King of kings and Lord of lords, and The Word of God (19.13, 16).

And if it is urged that at that glorious time the Lord will actually be revealed in a multitude, the answer is that, if so, they are separately provided for as "the armies which are in heaven" (19.14), which are plainly distinct from the central Figure Himself.

Against this powerful evidence what can be set?

6 1.10 That John was in "the Lord's day". This has already been answered.

7 1.15 The fact that the One referred to has "a voice as of many waters" (1.15), which is associated in other passages with the "voice of a multitude (Ezekiel 1.24). But the multitude always present with the Almighty God consists of His angels (Psalm 103.20; 104.4; 148.2: Luke 2.14; Matthew 26.33). Since Jesus' ascension these angels have been put in the power of the Lord (Matthew 13.4; 2 Thessalonians 1.7; Hebrews 12.22), as we have already shown on 1.1 (pages 3-4). The Lord has His multitude answering to this description, entirely independently of the postulated presence of the saints.

1.14 His "hair white like wool" has also been taken to mean a multitude. Even were we sure it did, the explanation given under (7) would cover this case also. But the expression is taken from the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7.9, and is there so far from denoting a multitude that this is separately defined in the following verse, where "thousand thousands ministered to Him, and then thousand times ten thousand stood before Him". The purity of the hair's whiteness, and the ageless wisdom associated with this quintessence of hoary heads (which now by the gift of the Father reposes also on the Son of God), are a much more probable significance of the symbolism of the white hair than the numbers of followers.

It is, therefore, a symbolic representation of the Lord Jesus in power that we meet here. But the entire picture depends on the visions of prophets of the Old Testament, as the following list, no doubt far from complete, will show:

1

1.13

CLOTHED WITH A GARMENT TO THE FOOT. Daniel 7.9; 10.5.

2

1.13

GIRT ROUND THE BREAST WITH A GOLDEN GIRDLE (see also 15.6). Daniel 10.5.

3

1.14

HEAD AND HAIR WHITE LIKE WOOL AND SNOW. Daniel 7.9.

4

1.14

EYES AS A FLAME OF FIRE. Daniel 10.6.

5

1.15

FEET LIKE BURNISHED BRASS. Ezekiel 1.7; Daniel 10.6.

6

1.15

VOICE AS OF MANY WATERS. Ezekiel 1.14; Daniel 10.6.

7

1.16

THE SHARP TWO-EDGED WORD. Isaiah 49.2; 11.4.

8

1.16

COUNTENANCE AS THE SUN. Daniel 10.6. Compare Matthew 17.2.

Thus the risen Lord Jesus has the qualities of total purity (the garment to the foot), of unassailable righteousness (the golden girdle, for "righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins", Isaiah 11.5), of infinite wisdom (hair like wool), of penetrating and irresistible judgement (eyes as a flame), of a steadfast walk towards victory over sin (feet as brass:

compare Numbers 21.9; John 3.14), of command over the angelic hosts of God (voice like many waters), and of inheritance of the surpassing glory of God (countenance as the sun. See also 10.1, and compare with the foretaste of glory in the Transfiguration, Matthew 17.1).

It is not suggested that the detail of this interpretation is either infallible or exhaustive. The overall picture of the Lord Jesus blessed with the powers given Him by God in consequence of His victory over sin, though, is not open to doubt. The details, though of interest, can but ornament this firm result.

Excursus III: The Government of the Congregations of God

Israel was subject to hierarchical government. Its priests were the ministers appointed by God, and to them alone was granted the authority to conduct sacrifice, and to pronounce on such matters as cleanness and uncleanness. Its first rulers were directly appointed by God too, Moses and Joshua being selected for the work of leading out of Egypt, and into Canaan, the hitherto enslaved people. While it is not said that all the Judges were appointed by Him, and while some usurpers are specifically named, those who delivered the people in time of adversity were certainly "raised up" by Him (Judges 3.9, 15; 6.8). The last of the Judges, Samuel, was certainly chosen by God (1 Samuel 2.28; 3.4,20). Their kings, too, sat on "the throne of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29.23), and were under duty to administer the kingdom in accordance with laws laid down by God beforehand (Deuteronomy 17.14-20), and the "manner of the Kingdom" laid down by Samuel (1 Samuel 8.9; 10.25).

As to worship, when once Jerusalem had been taken by David's men, and the Temple set up there, this became the only authorized centre for sacrifice and formal worship, and was revealed to be "the place which God has chosen to set His name there" (Deuteronomy 12.14, 18, 21, 26 ; 1 Kings 8.44, 48 ; Psalm 78.67-68-132.13).

In other words, Israel's administration and their worship were alike centralized in men and in a place of God's choosing. Their system was in no way democratic, nor was it devolved into tribal states going their own ways. These things might have occurred in fact, as they did when the tribes of the north revolted against the house of David, but in the ideal state they would not have happened at all, and their occurrence was a mark and a consequence of the declension of the people from the true faith.

This is the united "seven-branched candlestick" situation of which we have written already. It could never persist in that form when the gospel became spread among all nations, and the faithful could not have hoped for it after the destruction of Jerusalem. As the Lord had prophesied to the Samaritan woman, the hour was coming when the worshippers in spirit and in truth would have as little opportunity of looking to a destroyed Jerusalem as the Samaritans then had to their decimated shrine in Gerizim (John 4.20-24).

The old organization was not compatible with the new order, and it was not possible to restore it even if it were. What government of the church, then, would take its place?

The earliest congregations were not left to their own devices. In the first place, divine instructions were conveyed by direct revelation during the lives of the apostles, as revealed in the instruction not to preach until the Holy Spirit was poured out on them (Acts 1.4), and the fulfillment of this waiting at Pentecost (2.4); in the command to Philip to preach to the Ethiopian (8.28), and to Peter to make the gospel known to Gentiles (10.19-20); in the

appointment of Barnabas and Saul (later Paul and Barnabas) to preach in Gentile lands (13.2). The same guidance would sometimes redirect the initiative of the preacher by barring him from fields of his own choice (16.6-7), and opening up to him others (16.9-10). In the second place, inspired apostles and elders would adjudicate on acts and policies, as when the apostles appointed Stephen and the other six grecian Jews to settle the issue of injustice to widows (Acts 6.1-6); or when they deemed it necessary to satisfy themselves that Peter had acted rightly in preaching to Cornelius (11.1 -18), or that the fugitives from Judea had acted faithfully in preaching to Gentiles in Antioch (11.22). The apostles and elders in Jerusalem made an authoritative pronouncement on the conditions under which Gentiles might be admitted to the church (15.22-29), claiming the support of the Holy Spirit for their decision, and implicitly claiming the right under this guidance to make commandments binding on the church, when they denied that they had given "any such commandment" as the Judaizers had claimed (15.24).

Moreover, though Paul denied that his authority had been gained by any decree of the remaining apostles, and claimed that it had come direct from God (Galatians 1.1, 15-16), yet he claimed for himself the full right to determine what should be done and to pronounce what should be held as sound doctrine, in the churches which he and his colleagues had founded. By such authority Paul imposed the decision of the council in Jerusalem on the churches of Asia (Acts 16.4), as by the same authority he and Barnabas had ordained elders in such churches earlier (14.23). By the same authority he delegated the duty to appoint elders to men whom he set in positions of regional authority such as Titus (Titus 1.5). On matters of teaching and practice he laid down the law in the strict sense of that expression, pronouncing a curse on those who perverted his teaching (Galatians 1.8, 9), and requiring believers to acknowledge that his definitive writings were "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14.37). He even appears to claim to be able to inflict severe judgement and punishment on those who wilfully teach otherwise than according to his own word (2 Corinthians 13.1-2).

If the situation of the First Century had persisted, there would be no doubt where the true authority in the Christian community lay, and, as there truly were in those days, there would be the signs and wonders to prove it, the "signs of an apostle" as Paul calls them (2 Corinthians 12.12). It is sometimes claimed that the local churches themselves had a kind of local guidance to lead them in the right way, in the person of the "Christian prophets" who resided in their midst. But this is patently not the case, for otherwise there could not have occurred that near-apostacy of the Galatian churches which occasioned Paul's writing his letter to them, and the writing of such a letter would not have been necessary. There would have been no abuse of Spirit — gifts in Corinth, nor any need to write to Paul for advice as to how they should conduct their affairs (such as is referred to in 1 Corinthians 7.1). Whatever else the prophets were, who resided in the cities having churches, they were not able to act as infallible guides leading their respective ecclesias into all truth. For that the guidance of the inspired apostle was needed: and even so it was not always heeded.

What then was the organization of the Christian church and churches in post-apostolic days? In fact, it seems, it often degenerated into the chaotic; and non-inspired writers in the period of "the apostolic fathers" are to be found urging the churches to "do nothing without the bishop", and to regard those holding this office as divinely appointed rulers of the churches they directed. Thus:

Clement of Rome in his First Letter to the Corinthians, written about 95, expressed the view that bishops are the successors of the apostles (the apostolic succession). The most complete picture of the position and work of any early bishop is given in the Letters of Ignatius (died about 110), bishop of Antioch. He (the bishop) was the chief pastor, priest, administrator, and ruler of the Christian community (Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition, volume II in loc).

The position taken up by these quite early writers was developed into the authoritative structure of the Roman church, in which even today, in spite of the rumblings of a democratic attitude, the authority of the church, even its infallibility, are vested in increasing degree in its priests, its bishops, its archbishops, its cardinals, its councils, and its popes. If the authority is less strongly asserted in the other episcopal churches, the residues of it are there in principle, and the "ordination" of the successive ranks of the clergy does, in the eyes of high churchmen at least, give them some kind of divine title to pronounce and to govern. Similarly far-reaching claims to authority are no doubt made also in the Eastern Orthodox churches.

All these developments would be claimed by their supporters to be proper adaptations of the government of the church to post-apostolic times, even adumbrated in apostolic teaching and practice, in which bishops, elders, and deacons all played their part. They certainly arose out of the attempts of men, articulately or inarticulately, to fill the vacuum left by the apostles' demise. But Scripture scarcely affords even the slenderest foundation for this development. Its "bishops" are 'overseers' or 'supervisors', and are plainly the same as the elders spoken of in other places. For this it is only necessary to compare Acts 20.17, in which Paul summons the elders, rendered from the Greek *presbuteros*, with 20.27, where he calls the identical persons bishops or overseers, *episkopos*. The term 'elder' appears to have been borrowed from Jewish practice in the synagogues (Matthew 15.2 ; Acts 4.5; 6.12); while the term 'bishop' is of very limited usage, being found only in Acts 20.28; Philippians 1.1; 1 Timothy 3.2; Titus 1.7; and 1 Peter 2.25, in the last case of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Related words include the verb 'to oversee', found relevantly only in 1 Peter 5.2, and the noun 'overseer', relevantly only in Acts 1.20 (of Judas), and in a Christian context 1 Timothy 3.1. In all these there is no trace of the idea of an 'ordained' leader of a group of churches; and since the office of a 'deacon', *diakonos*, even less conveys the idea of a quasi-inspired official of the church, we have to conclude that the New Testament provides absolutely no basis for such an authoritative system of government of the church of God.

But if not this, then what?

It has been argued that the New Testament deals only with individual churches, and that each of these is therefore subject as a unit to the Lord direct, Who alone provides their bond of unity. Thus it is that Jesus walks among the seven lampstands and Himself pronounces on them. No doubt this is true, but it provides little if any guidance as to how those lightstands are to govern their relationships with each other. Are they to go on their own way regardless of the others, claiming that since the Lord Jesus alone walks in their midst they have no accountability to each other and are, under Him, masters in their own individual houses? Or are they to attempt to cement the theoretical unity of faith and practice which their Lord has bequeathed to them, by establishing the machinery which will ensure that it is achieved in practice?

There are those who say simply, "No instruments of united action are possible or permissible. The New Testament operates simply on the principle of 'ecclesial autonomy'. And there are those who say the opposite: systems of united action and doctrinal integrity are inescapable.

We must have some system of co-operation and mutual action which will ensure our unity of faith and practice, and will demonstrate to ourselves and to others that we are a body of believers upholding the same corpus of faith.

It is entirely commendable to seek to ensure that the faith shall not be compromised by merely human councils. To that extent each congregation must act as its own conscience dictates. But it is unbelievably ridiculous to suppose that, if each congregation acts according to its own rights, regardless of the others, overall unity will be attained.

What this means is that here, as in so many other departments of life, the Scriptures give no precise guidance as to how the affairs of congregations of believers are to be regulated. Since we no longer have apostles to appoint our elders for us, the individual communities must certainly appoint their own, and though the manner of their doing so is not laid down in Scripture, the qualifications which should be looked for in such leaders are very clearly given (1 Timothy 3.1-13; 4.6-16; 5.1.7; Titus 2.1-15). Though they are appointed by the will of their congregations, once the appointment has been made they are to be treated with respect (Hebrews 13.7, 17, 24). Yet if anyone finds himself in a position of authority or responsibility, he is to recognize that in discharging this he is a servant among equals (1 Peter 5.1-5). And the overriding need to live in unity and harmony forbids anyone to covet office for its own sake, and any congregation to divide itself into parties, either for the sake of securing particular appointments or for pursuing party policies when the appointments have been made. If it is decided that appointments must be made by what are called democratic procedures, then the aim should be to agree about such appointments with a consensus of all concerned. Propaganda, under-cover negotiations, and pressure-methods, are utterly contrary to the spirit of Christ.

When it comes to interrelations between communities, a choice has to be made between deliberate formation of organs of cooperation, and simply allowing relations to develop arbitrarily by active and public-spirited individuals and groups coming together to provide the services they see to be needed. If the former is judged to run the danger of 'councils' usurping the authority of Scripture (a perfectly real danger), then the latter runs the equal!)' real peril of playing into the hands of ambitious and unscrupulous persons playing on fears of the former, and "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20.30) in a way which would be less possible if some machinery existed to control their aspirations. Man) a heresy and man) a schism has resulted from such ambitions being allowed to run loose, cloaking themselves under claims of high morality or concern for doctrinal purity.

Some measure of public control of affairs within and among congregations will at least preserve these from de facto domination by popular or ambitious individuals who have persuaded themselves that they are God's gift to the community. It is right that the body of believers should benefit from the unfettered freedom of all under Christ to serve it with their best dedicated abilities, and repressive and quasi-military discipline which would stifle such initiatives must be avoided. But such repression can arise as much from individual as from conciliar tyranny, as John had to acknowledge with sorrow (3 John 9-10). Individual ecclesias, arbitrary controlling groups, and elected councils are all subject to invasion by "grievous wolves not sparing the flock" (Acts 20.29), and there is no remedy in human terms other than constant and prayerful vigilance. Any such government is, too, subject to sloth and indecisiveness, and there is no safeguard against this save the determination of all to walk worthily of the high calling wherewith they are called. If popes and councils can stabilize and perpetuate teachings and practices utterly contrary to the doctrine and pattern of Christ, the

absence of the latter can leave, in Paul's delightful mixed metaphor, disorganized believers as "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men in craftiness, after the wiles of error" (Ephesians 4.14).

Perhaps the surest way of averting the perils and contributing to the edification of a community is to apply diligently and worship-fully the prescriptions laid down by Paul:

I say through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according to God has dealt to each man a measure of faith. For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us. . . let us give ourselves to our ministry, or teaching, or exhorting, giving with simplicity, ruling with diligence, showing mercy with cheerfulness . . . in honour preferring one another. (Romans 12.3-10, the latter part abbreviated and paraphrased).

1.16,20: He had in His right hand seven stars. The seven stars are the angels of the seven congregations.

It is plain that the Lord Jesus claims complete authority over all His congregations, and it is impossible to limit that sovereignty to the seven here addressed. It was true of congregations throughout the world at that time who escape notice here, and it is true of all such churches ever since. The Lord walked in the midst of the

lampstands then, and He walks in the midst of them now: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 19.20) — and since those words were spoken in the context of disciples making decisions for the good of the community over which they were appointed leaders, they are of particular relevance to the topic of the foregoing Excursus III.

What is less clear is what the stars, or the 'angels' they depict, may signify. The fact that John is to address the Lord's messages to these 'angels', though (2.1), seems to place beyond doubt that they are human beings. The Lord Jesus would hardly send an immortal angel to tell John to write letters to other angels of the same kind, nor would such angels require the exhortations and admonitions which the Letters contain: "To the angel write, I know thy works"! The angels, whoever they were, were resident in the ecclesias addressed.

The word, *angelos*, is of course applied most often to the supernatural and immortal servants of God, but there are adequate examples of other applications. John the Baptist was the "messenger of Jesus, whose work was predicted by a prophet whose name in Hebrew also means "My angel or "My messenger". John in his turn sent "messengers" to Jesus (Mark 1.2 ; Luke 7.24), who Himself sent "messengers" to prepare lodgings for Him on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 9.52). It was probably a "messenger" from Peter who the disciples mistakenly supposed to be standing at the gate when Peter knocked after his deliverance from prison (Acts 12.15). The "angels" which the saints of the Lord will judge in the age to come (1 Corinthians 6.3) may be rulers of this world, but are certainly not the mighty emissaries from heaven of Almighty God. From these varied uses of the term the idea of messenger or emissary, even representative, emerges, and so we can see the Lord saying to John, in effect, "Write to the representative of the congregation at Ephesus and say: To you as acting on behalf of (his community I have the following message . . ." And if this provokes the thought

that those charged with the leadership of the Lord's flock have special accountability before Him for the behaviour of their charges, that is a salutary reflection. Leaders cannot dissociate themselves from the conduct of those they lead.

It may be impossible fully to enter into the emotions of the One who spoke these words, but it is well to be awake to them. The words to us may represent merely a doctrinal fact, but for the Lord (the) sum up the experience and the fruits of His bitter travail, the fulfillment of the hope, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither will Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 10.10; Acts 2.25-33). His Father has always been the Living One, (/won), and now the Son is, AoZow, the One possessed of life for evermore with His Father. It is not so much "I was dead", either, as though it merely denoted the state of unconsciousness; rather is it "I died" (RSV) or "I became dead" (KVM). The Lord had gone through the process of willingly laying down His life, as a result of which it was possible for Him to be given life for evermore. This is a condensed version of Peter's words, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2.24). Now we have Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13.8). He has become in reality what He always was in promise, "Him whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5.2-4).

The significance of "for ever more" has already been discussed on pages 24-26.

I have the keys of death and of Hades

This is the fulfillment of the promise to Peter: "Upon this Rock I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16.18). It is the assurance of the ultimate triumph of the message of the gospel, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name" (John 20.31). It sums up in the Lord's own words the message of Paul, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them which are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thessalonians 4.14). In a Book which because of its overriding theme cannot give detailed attention to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the colours are nailed to the mast from the outset. It is the risen Lord who reveals the message, Who stands by to aid His servants in the sufferings which this Book promises them, and Who will ultimately triumph when He returns. It is He Who will bring from their graves to blessed life after His own pattern those who are faithful to the end.

The "hell" of AV is rightly transliterated as Hades in KV. The same word is employed in the other references cited. In Biblical usage it is equivalent to the Sheowl of the Hebrew, which is so rendered in I.XX. It is quite distinct in meaning from the other word rendered hell in AV, which is Gehenna, a transliteration of a Hebrew expression meaning "Valley of Hinnom", and referring to the endless destruction of all that is cast into it. Only in one place is Hades even apparently associated with the punishment of the dead. This is in Luke 16.23, in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, for which see my THE GOSPEL OF MARK, Digression 26, page 88.

1.19: Write, therefore, the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter.

John's message is thus not wholly confined to the future. The things he has so far seen belong to the past and the present, as it then was to John. The evidence already given that this vision

of chapter 1 concerns the actual glory of the risen Lord is convincingly confirmed here: the Lord had died and risen, and now was able to reveal the future to His servant. These are the things past which John has seen. They are also the things which are, and which are to be disclosed for the immediate guidance of the churches to which John will now write. The things which are to be hereafter are not yet before us. The Book will disclose those in its own time.

1.20: The seven lampstands are the seven congregations.

The separate existence of the congregations, without the need for organic connection with a visible upright stem, has already been touched on. But the use of "lampstand" to designate these congregations is full of significance. A lampstand holds a lamp, and it is the only sensible place to put a lamp. So says the Lord in Matthew 5.15; Mark. 4.41; Luke 8.16; 11.33. Then it gives light to the whole house. Outside this Book of Revelation the only occurrence of the word besides these in the Gospels is in reference to the Tabernacle in Hebrews 9.2. Inside this Book it is found six times in the first two chapters, and only again in 11.4, where the "Two Witnesses" are lampstands in bearing their witness to the gospel before the end comes. So throughout it is the thought of making known the glad tidings they have received which is expressed in the term. The saints have received their light from the Light of the World (John 8.12; 12.46), and are now to be lights in the world in their turn (Matthew 5.14, 16; Philippians 2.15). They have been "called out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2.9), and for them "the darkness has passed away: the True Light already shineth" (1 John 2.8). It is for them to bear witness of the light they have received. The seven congregations will be judged according to their response to that calling: and so will all others, then and now.

Chapter 4 Revelation 2:1 – 3:22

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CONGREGATIONS OF ASIA (2.1-3.22)

The Author of the Letters.

The Author is, as we have already seen, identical with the One like to a Son of man (1.13), but it might be appropriate to clinch this identity by setting out the description there given, and underlining those parts of it repeated, actually or substantially, in chapters 2 and 3:

I turned to see the voice which spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the midst of the lampstands one like unto a Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt at the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and His eyes were as aflame of fire; and His feet were like unto burnished brass . . . and His voice as the sound of many waters. He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun. (He said): I am the first and the last, and the living one and I was dead and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of hades. (1.12-18).

If that were not enough, the Revealer also takes to Himself the control of the Seven Spirits of God (1.4), and the title of the "faithful and true Witness" (1.5), and "the Beginning of the creation of God" (1.5; Colossians 1.15, 18). Identification could not be more complete, and we know beyond a doubt that John and we are in the presence of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ.

The cities to which the Letters are addressed

Ephesus. The commercial capital of Asia, standing between two ranges of mountains near the south of a lovely ravine. Roads radiated in every direction over Asia Minor from the city, giving it a fine position as a trading centre. It was renowned for its temple to "Diana of the Ephesians", reputed to be the grandest in the world. Its history is largely an account of conflict between Greek traders . . . and the devotees of idolatrous worship and magical art.

Smyrna. This was almost as well-equipped as Ephesus as a centre for trade. It had a renowned temple to the Emperor, built in honour of its loyalty to Rome. The city was well-planned and beautiful, well guarded by fortresses, and commercially very active.

Pergamon. This was regarded as the preeminent city on account of its age and its royal associations. Its situation was high and imposing, but it was a little off the main travel routes. It was the recognized centre of imperial worship.

Thyatira. This was situated in a peaceful and fruitful valley on the road between Pergamon and Sardis. It possessed a Greek temple, and a shrine directed by a pagan prophetess. It was renowned for its dyes (hence the reference in Acts 16.14), and had famous guilds which fostered idolatry and sensual vice.

Sardis. This had a fortress position on a rock ledge overlooking a mountain valley. It has a reputation for impregnability, but had in fact twice been conquered while its population was asleep.

Philadelphia. This was surrounded by mountains which rose to the east to form the Central Asian Plateau. It was the gateway of the eastern trade route, and hence a thriving city.

Laodicea. The city was built on low hills in the shadow of high mountains. Many roads radiated from the highway to the east. Banking and the woollen trade were important here, and the city was famous for its school of medicine.

(The relation between the history and geography of these seven Cities, and their character as revealed in the letters addressed to them, it developed in great detail in W. M. Ramsey, "The Letters to the Seven Churches" (Hodder & Stoughton, 1904).

Ramsay (LSCA, 1904) claims that John, though writing to a common pattern in the Seven Letters, "imparts to them many touches specially suitable to the individual Churches, and showing his intimate knowledge of them all" (p.39), and though this may well be true, it is right to point out that here, more than in most other parts of the Scriptures, the individuality of the human penman is submerged, in the strictly revelatory parts, beneath that of Him Who writes, "I know thy works"! The two kinds of knowledge are not incompatible, and even here it lay within the power of the Lord to exploit the experiences of His prophet in preparing His message, but the latter must be kept strictly within its proper bounds. It lies in any case outside the purpose of this exposition to dwell on such local factors. We need only say that Ramsay's book well repays study in its own right.

2.1: To the angel of the congregation in Ephesus.

The city figures prominently in Acts as a centre for Paul's preaching (18.19, 21,24; 19.17, 26, 35; 20.16, 17). It received one of the Letters of Paul's Roman Imprisonment; and is the only one of the Seven Congregations to be mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament except for brief mention of Thyatira in Acts 16.14, and of a congregation at Laodicea in Colossians 2.1; 4.13-16.

2.2:7 know thy works.

This is a refrain common to all the Letters in AV, and to all except Smyrna and Pergamon in RV. Since the works of these two also are in fact examined in their Letters, it is hard to believe that AV and the Textus Receptus which underlies it are incorrect, whatever the weight of ancient authorities may be. It is a keynote of all the letters that there is no hiding from the Lord what is going on. "All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4.13). Those "eyes as a flame of fire" (Revelation 1.14) miss nothing.

/ know thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not and didst find them false; and thou has patience and didst bear for My name's sake, and hast not grown weary (-2.3)

This is a splendid testimonial. The congregation at Ephesus laboured in the service of the gospel, incessantly, to the point of weariness; it endured without seeking respite; it discerned

and rejected apostate teachers; and despite every discouragement continued to maintain the teachings of the gospel without giving up.

2.4: / have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works; or eke I will come to thee, and remove thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent.

It is a little difficult to understand how a congregation so steadfast could then be charged, as it is, with having "left its first love", and with being in need of recovering it. Yet the fault is so grievous that it is in danger of bringing that lamp-stand in Ephesus to extinction unless it is put right. Moffatt renders the complaint to mean that they had "given up loving one another as they did at first", as though their zeal was real but hard, and in pursuing it they had hardened themselves to the needs of their own needy and weak. This is a phenomenon by no means unknown to us also, where those who are zealous for the purity of the gospel, as they understand it, can

prove singularly indifferent to the needs of their less fortunate brethren, concentrating only on building up a corpus of zealots who can further their fanatical ends: and this is certainly destructive of the gospel's message, and a good ground for terminating their work and influence. So it could well be that the religion of the Ephesians had become formal and barren, lacking in the fruit of gentleness and meekness which belong no less to the work of the Spirit. This seems almost to be emphasized rather than mitigated in the final commendation, that this industrious church has set itself against a grievous heresy, for it rejects and discards the Nicolaitan doctrine.

2.6: This thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Formally, the doctrine of Ephesus is pure, and this purity is highly commendable. Here is no counsel of toleration of evil. It is only a question of making sure that resistance to evil does not throw away the preservation of love. Ephesus appears to have chosen the hard road of tyrannical rectitude.

Although, therefore, Ephesus had become defective in brotherly love in its zeal for doctrinal purity — if this is a correct analysis of its position — it remains a fact that the doctrinal purity was urgently required. A hateful heresy was at large, and Ephesus at present provided a bastion against it. What was this heresy? We have several examples of the Lord's approach to this or related errors in these letters addressed to Ephesus, Pergamon, and Thyatira:-2.6: The works of the Nicolaitans.

2.14: The teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. 2.20: Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel which seduceth my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

The error of Balaam in the Letter to Pergamon is expressed in similar terms to that of Jezebel in the Letter to Thyatira, and the words "in like manner" of the Nicolaitans in the former suggests that this and the Balaam-heresy are related. This parallel is taken a little further when we note that Nicolaos, in the Greek, and Bil'am, in the Hebrew, appear to bear related meanings as "lord or conqueror of the people". The errors cannot be quite identical, since if

they were there would be no need to refer to two of them in the Letter to Pergamon, and no need to distinguish them in any of the

Letters, but the differences may lie more in the leaders who promoted the wrong teaching and practice, than in the teaching and practice themselves. There might, for example, have been one Nikolaos who imported the apostasy from Greek sources, and some evil man (in Pergamon) or woman (in Thyatira) of Jewish affiliations who perversely introduced the errors in the form in which they were condemned in the Old Testament, and who were locally active in these two congregations. It is even possible, if the rendering in R^Vm has any substance, that the woman here called Jezebel might have been the wife of the leader of the congregation in Thyatira, and allowed by her husband to conduct her evil works in much the same way as a weak Ahab allowed Jezebel to introduce Baal-worship in its worst form into Israel (1 Kings 16.31; 19.1,2).

The activities of these Old Testament characters make all too plain the nature of the sins to which the congregations of Asia were attracted. Balaam sought to bring about the downfall of Israel by causing the women of Midian to seduce them into idolatrous fornication (Numbers 25.1, 9; 31.8, 16). It is remarkable that Peter, whose Letters were addressed to saints in this very area (1 Peter 1.1; 2 Peter 3.1), should warn against the same false teaching (2 Peter 2.15, "having followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor"), as did also Jude (Jude 11). Having failed to prophesy evil against Israel, Balaam sought to achieve the same ends by guile, and the sins to which he led them are precisely those condemned in these Letters. And whereas we have no such precise information as to how Jezebel wrought evil in Israel, all her background would suggest that just such lustful pursuits would be part of her idolatrous stock-in-trade.

That these were real dangers to the early congregations of Christ is made very plain in 1 Corinthians 10.8, where Paul pleads: "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed". The saints of Asia were being tempted to return to the abominations, if not the open acceptance, of idolatry. This adds great point to the decision of the council in Jerusalem of Acts 15. There, while exempting Gentile believers from observing the Law of Moses, the apostles and elders did lay down that they should abstain from fornication, meats offered to idols, things strangled, and blood (Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25), the first two of which are before us here. Gentile believers were surely being told that, whereas they did not need to become Jews, they must resist from being pagans, and must refrain altogether from the abominations of pagan idolatrous practices.

Anything which might foster the error that liberation from the Law gave licence to lawlessness must be repudiated. It follows that the Council was not concerned with limited, but real, concessions involving keeping part of the Law of Moses (in the matters of blood and strangulation), but much more probably with the blood poured out in heathen libations, and strangulation as an idolatrous rite. If both of these were "pollutions of idols" (Acts 15.20), they could well be implied in the summaries of Revelation 2.14, 20, as well as in the treatment of the same corruptions in 1 Corinthians 8.1-13; 10.7-8; 10.14-31).

A sinister note is now sounded. Balaam taught Balak (2.14) how to bring Israel to near-destruction by seducing them with the women of Moab (Numbers 25.1) into the idolatrous worship of Baal-Peor (25.3). His prophecies against them had come to naught: what more natural than that they should now say to themselves that, no matter what they did, they were secure from harm? Peter suggests that such false teaching had invaded the churches of Asia at

the hands of those who, like Balaam, "with feigned words made merchandise of them". Now John writes at the Lord's command to warn the congregations of the seven lampstands there that they are in danger of succumbing to the same peril.

This is by no means an outmoded warning. The complete surrender of Bible-based morality in the years since the Second World War, which seems daily to gather impetus, is a canker in the body of every western 'democracy', and seems actively and suicidally to be encouraged in high places, in government, in universities, even in churches, and of course in entertainment. The 'reds-under-the-bed' view that such moral decline might actually be fostered by alien powers only too ready to undermine the stable social fabric of their potential enemies, may not be provable, but neither is it improbable. Balaam and that woman Jezebel are active still, and the warning against their seductions is one of the timeless messages of this Book.

2.20: Which calleth herself a prophetess.

There were prophetesses in the earliest days of the church. Peter had quoted Joel to this effect at Pentecost (Acts 2.17-18; Joel 2.28), and female prophets appear subsequently in Acts 21.9; 1 Corinthians 11.4-5. In this Book we are near enough to those times for it to have been plausible for a genuine prophetess to have existed, and "that woman Jezebel", if she is a single individual, might well have presumed on this to claim

divine inspiration for her lascivious teachings. The way in which her judgement is spoken of certainly appears to treat her as literal, even if not as a single individual, for calls for her to change her ways have gone unheeded. Her punishment is designed to remind us of the terrible fate which overtook the archetypal Jezebel at the hands of Jehu (2 Kings 9.30-37).

2.21: I gave her time that she should repent, and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold I do cast her into a bed.

She will exchange the bed of her fornications for the hard ground on which she will be devoured. Whether the Lord is here promising some temporal punishment for the fornicators of Thyatira, or whether He is pointing forward to the future day of judgement may not be certain, but the warning to the other churches offered by her fate would be hard to understand were something of the kind not to occur. But, of course, the opportunity of repentance was still there, and Thyatira was fundamentally a faithful church (2.19), actually growing in faithfulness with the years, so perhaps the matter was never put to the test, if the reform asked for took place in time.

2.22: And them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. 2.23: and I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts.

It does appear, though, that real physical punishments were sometimes inflicted by the Lord, in those days when the apostles wielded the power of the Spirit, and the Lord confirmed the word with signs following (Mark 16.20). We know of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11), and of the blindness brought by Paul on Elymas the sorcerer (13.11). We know, too, of the terrible death of Herod directly at God's hand. When Paul says that "some are weak and sickly among you, and some sleep" (1 Corinthians 11.30), he appears to be referring to physical consequences of their unworthy behaviour. When he threatens to come to them with destructive power if they do not amend their ways (2 Corinthians 10.8, 11;

13.10), he appears to refer to real sanctions which he can impose on the rebels; and when James refers to those who are sick, and are advised to call for the elders and confess (James 5.13-16), his words are very difficult to understand unless they refer to punitive sickness. Since in the present context the Lord is saying that what He will do to the sinners in Thyatira will be a warning to all the other congregations, it would seem that some signal act of public judgement is called for.

2.23: / will give to each one of you according to his works. But any temporal punishment would be intended as a warn-

ing of more severe retribution at the day of judgement itself. God searches all hearts by His quick and powerful word (Hebrews 4.12-13), and gives opportunity for repentance now; but the statement that Jesus will "render to every man according to his works" (Matthew 16.27; Romans 2.6; 14.12; 2 Corinthians 5.10 and elsewhere) is almost a formula in Scripture for the awarding of blessings and punishments by the Lord on his return, though it is based on similar expressions in the Old Testament addressed to Israel (Psalm 62.12; Proverbs 24.12; Jeremiah 17.10).

He that overcometh. (2.7,11,17,26; 3.5,12,21).

This is one of the most obvious links between this Book and the other writings of John. In the Gospel the Lord claims, "I have overcome the world" (16.33). In the First Letter, the saint follows in the Lord's footsteps and does likewise (2.13, 14; 4.4; 5.4,4,5). After the latter pattern, "He that overcometh" is in this Book the exhortation of every Letter, and for later times also in 12.11; 17.14; and 21.17. The Lord's victory over the world when He died on the Cross is the basis for all the other victories; the saint overcomes in his turn not in his own strength, but in faith, and by "the blood of the Lamb".

The Tree of Life. (2.7; 22.2,2,14).

The Tree of Life was there in the original Garden of Eden; but because the man and his wife preferred to rival God in His omnipotence, they were denied the right to continue in His presence, and the paradise of God was lost to them (Genesis 3.22-24). The ultimate return to the bliss of a new Eden found its fullest exposition in the Old Testament in the writings of Ezekiel, who saw the future, restored fortunes of Israel accompanied by access to "very many trees on the one side and on the other" of a stream proceeding from the House of God (47.1, 7). In the prophet's vision the characteristic of those trees was that "their leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit of it fall: for it shall bring forth new fruit every month because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for healing" (47.2). This same picture is caught up in the Apocalypse, where "a pure river of water of life" proceeds "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22.1; compare John 4.11-15; 7.38). Here the trees on both sides of the river of water of life are called "the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (22.2). It is reserved for those who have washed their robes (in the blood of the Lamb) (22.14RV; 7.14), and have been faithful to the sayings of this Book (22.19). Here the figure represents the power and will of God to grant life without end, free from all the disabilities which beset our present fallen race. Then Eden shall be restored: "there shall be no curse anymore (22.3; Genesis 3.17).

The tree is xulon, a term not commonly used in the New Testament for a living tree, for which the word is dendron. LXX uses xulon far more commonly than dendron, and thus we might suppose that Revelation is simply quoting the Greek without any particular implication. But when we see how consistently the New Testament uses dendron for fruiting trees (Matthew 7.17-19; 3.10; 12.33; Luke 3.9; 6.43-44; 21.19), while Revelation itself also uses this word for living trees (7.1, 3; 8.7; 9.4), the situation begins to look differently. When we then note that xulon is used in the New Testament for sticks, stocks, timber, or a dead tree (Matthew 26.47, 55; Mark 14.43, 48; Luke 22.52; 23.31; Acts 16.24; 1 Corinthians 3.12; Revelation 18.12), none of which has any relevance to a tree of life, or even a tree still living; while it is also employed five times of the cross of Christ (Acts 5.20; 10.39; 13.29; Galatians 3.13; 1 Peter 2.24), then a clear and beautiful purpose is perceived in the choice of the term here. When life is granted to the servants of the Lord, it will be because that Lord died that it might be possible. Their life comes because their Lord died on the Tree, and it is "from the dust" that "there blossoms red life that shall endless be". What began as the symbol of shameful death becomes the token of eternal triumph: the dead wood springs into leaf and flower and fruit because "it is Christ that died: yea, rather, that is risen again" (Romans 8.34).

One minor matter is quite certain. Xulon, though it means 'wood' rather than 'tree' in the New Testament, does not mean 'forest'. The "tree of life on both sides of the river" (22.2) cannot be properly translated to mean "the forest of life on both sides". Our imagination may not be able to understand how the same tree can be on both banks of a river, but that problem is not to be solved by imposing on the word a collective sense it does not bear. Perhaps the tree overhangs both banks, or perhaps a physical picture is not possible. It does not matter: the important thing is that it is accessible to all the residents of the city.

Paradise. (2.7)

Though this term is uncommon in the New Testament (Luke 23.4; 2 Corinthians 12.4; and here), it is used in LXX

some 28 times, of which 13 refer to Eden in Genesis 2 & 3. The Hebrew word, *pardes*, apparently of Persian origin, is used of forest or orchard in Nehemiah 2.8; Ecclesiastes 2.5; and Song 4.13. There is thus a clear Edenic background to the use of this term here, and when coupled with the Tree of Life it plainly promises Eden restored. This was the promise to the malefactor on the Cross: that he would be there when the Lord came to restore Eden to the earth. Paul's visionary excursion into the "third heaven" is to be understood similarly. Paul had his own vision of the future glory which is now revealed to John.

True and false Jews: "which say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (1.9; 3.9). "False apostles". (2.2)

Ephesus in Acts is a centre of operation of disbelieving Jews (19.9), claiming miraculous powers (19.13-17), and siding with the worshippers of Artemis against Paul (19.33). Paul's principal foes were from among his own people, from the time of his conversion and on (Acts 9.23; 29; 13.6-12; 13.50, etc.). He himself actually describes them as "false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves unto the apostles of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 11.12-15), words which must surely have been in the mind of the Lord as He dictated these words to John. Though Paul did indeed suffer ill-treatment at the hands of Gentiles, much of this was at Jewish instigation (Acts 9.23; 12.3; 13.45, 50; 14.2; 17.5; 18.12; 20.3; 2 Corinthians 11.24;

1 Thessalonians 2.14), and, once Christian congregations were founded, the principal agents of apostasy among the new believers were again the Jews (Galatians 2.12; Acts 15.1-2, 5).

It seems, therefore, that here also Jews were the main opponents and perverters of the faith "once and for all delivered to the saints", courting all the perils associated with preaching "another gospel" (Galatians 1.8-9). Any compromise with such a false gospel, which would nullify the saving grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ must be resisted then, and it must be resisted now. Of course, in our present experience it is not from Jewry that the move to deny the grace of our Lord Jesus comes to us. Even in those days Greek philosophy, with its disdain of a suffering Saviour and its search after wisdom, was destructive of the true gospel, and the humanism of our own day is no less guilty, when linked with the word 'Christian', of having a form of godliness and denying the power thereof. The churches of Asia, and those other congregations of believers to which Paul had preached, had to contend with Jews and Greeks, but fundamentally the same problems arise in every age.

Though the Lord condemns in unmeasured terms those who destroy His gospel, and though it is the duty of the follower of the Lord to "discern the spirits whether they be of God" (1 Corinthians 12.10; 1 John 4.1), yet it is not our prerogative to engage in recriminations against those whose teaching we must reject. The disciple of the Lord does not assert his own righteousness by flinging about indiscriminate accusations against those with whom he cannot agree. It may be tempting to use language like that of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23 against the Pharisees, or that of Paul in Acts 13.10 against Elymas, or that of the Lord in Revelation against false teachers, but it is not our office to do so. Specially when we are at pains to disavow possession of the Spirit-inspired insight which the Lord and His apostles possessed, we must limit our condemnation of the teaching of others to saying and proving that it is wrong, and offering a more excellent way. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but must be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness correcting those that oppose themselves, if peradventure God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Timothy 2.24-25).

2.10: The devil is about to cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried.

This, and the allusion to Satan's seat in 2.12, reveals the essentially political nature of the devil here referred to. He is the same devil who "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour", whom Peter exhorts some of these same believers, and others, to resist (1 Peter 5.8-9). There are many meanings to be attached to both words 'devil' and 'Satan'. Judas was a devil; Peter was satan; the wives of bishops and other servants of the Lord must take care that they are not (John 6.70; Matthew 16.23; 1 Timothy 3.11; 2 Timothy 3.3; Titus 2.3). The world is a satan, to whose mercies unfaithful Christians might be cast as they were excommunicated by Paul, until they should learn better ways (1 Corinthians 5.5; 1 Timothy 1.20); suffering can be a satan to keep the disciple humble in face of temptation to be proud (2 Corinthians 12.7). In its most fundamental sense the Lord Jesus destroyed the devil by His death when He came "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 2.14; 9.26), and the equation of those two passages shows that no supernatural power is intended by the word. We shall meet this problem again when we come to the power called "the devil and satan" in 12.9, 12; 20.2, 10, but for the present are back to the local level, in

dealing with the devil and the satan of the letters to Smyrna and Pergamon. As in 1 Peter 5, the devil here referred to is plainly the persecuting power of Rome, imprisoning disciples for their faith, and operating against them from his imperial headquarters in Pergamon.

Ye shall have tribulation ten days.

The time has not yet come for a consideration of the vexed problem of the time-periods of the Apocalypse, but this ten-day tribulation of Smyrna does seem to lie outside the scope of the main problem. The diligent compilers of RV references suggest a possible clue in Genesis 24.55, where Rebecca's kin ask for a ten-day moratorium before she departs to become Isaac's wife; or Daniel 1.12-15, in which Daniel and his friends ask for a 10-day test of their Spartan diet, chosen instead of the king's idols' meat; and perhaps they have done the best that can be done: "You will have trial like that of Daniel; you will seek assurance like the friends of Rebecca — but what you need is to hold fast, and then the crown of life will be yours. Anything more specific than that we shall search for in vain."

Thus I wrote in the First Edition of APOCALYPSE FOR EVERYMAN. It should, however be noted in all fairness that SC says that "the final and pre-eminent persecution which was carried out by paganism (under Diocletian) against Christianity lasted ten complete years . . . Lactantius states it, with absolute precision, to have continued from 23 February 303 to 13 June 313. Its exact duration therefore was 10 years, 3 months, and 19 days." One is only left wondering what precisely this persecution, not due for more than 200 years, could have meant for the congregation in Smyrna before the end of the first century: especially since intervening events of considerable import are passed over in silence. Thus, Polycarp was martyred there around 155, and a principal place among those who approved and furthered it was taken by the Jews of the city (Ramsay, LSC pp. 272ff.).

28.10: The crown of life.

This is the Stephanas, commonly associated with the garland awarded to the victors in public games, woven from succulent leaves, or made in golden replicas of these (1 Corinthians

9.25). It is commonly, too, contrasted with the more enduring and glorious, diadema. But the same word is used to describe the mock-royal crown of thorns worn by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 27.29); while the crowns of Revelation 4.4, 10; 6.2; 9.7; 12.1; 14.14 are crowns of authority, whether or not they are also crowns of achievement: certainly they denote more than having come first in an athletic contest. The corresponding verb, *stepnanof*, is certainly used of the games in I Timothy 2.5, but when it is applied to the triumph of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews 2.7, 9, it conveys much more than this. The Lord Who began His course a little lower than the angels has, because of suffering death, been crowned with a glory and honour exceeding theirs, all things having in principle been put under His feet. Indeed the alternative word for crown, *diadSma*, only occurs three times in the New Testament, all in Revelation (12.3; 13.1; 19.12), twice of evil powers and once of the Lord Jesus. Once again LXX is our best guide, for there *stephanos* occurs about 30 times, and *diadema* only about 5, all save one in Esther. It needs only a glance to convince us that kingly authority rather than athletic triumph is likely to be the

connotation of the word.

"The O.T.-occurrences of *stephanos* are: 2 Samuel 12.30; 1 Chronicles 20.2; Job 19.9; 31.36; Psalm 21.3; 65.11; Proverbs 1.9; 4.9, 9; 12.4; 14.24; 16.31; 17.6; Song 3.11; Isaiah 22.17, 21 Greek only; 28.1, 3, 5; 62.3; Jeremiah 13.18; Lamentations 2.15 Greek only; 5.16; Ezekiel 16.22; 21.26; 23.42; 28.12 Greek only; Zechariah 6.11, 14. Those underlined certainly refer to royal authority, and others may well do so. A number imply dignity and honour without necessarily conveying an idea of power. There is none which with any probability can be regarded as referring to victory in games. The same applies to the use of the cognate verb in Psalm 5.12; 8.6; 103.4; Song 3.11. Apart from all this, the exhortation to be "faithful to death" is not remotely connected with athletics. Stedfastness and constancy will be rewarded with honours which a faithful person may expect from the Lord at His return. So Paul in 2 Timothy 4.8, faithful unto death indeed, anticipates the "crown of righteousness"; and so also James (1-12) and 1 Peter (5.4), in the last of which the "*stephanos* of glory" is actually contrasted with the fading garland of the athlete. There is an interesting example of the limitations of metaphor in Revelation 3.11, where Philadelphian saints are warned to be watchful lest anyone should steal their crown: persecution and temptation can certainly rob saints of their crown, but no one can 'steal' it so as to profit himself, and no competitor in the race for life will lose a crown because he has been unable to steal someone else's! Notwithstanding the exhortation to remember that "they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize" (1 Corinthians 9.24), this is not intended to make us compete with each other so that one can snatch what the other fails to attain. It is intended to encourage unremitting effort, so that each will run the race with the same eagerness as if there only were one reward: "So run, that ye may attain!" 2.11: The second death.

Postponing, until we meet the same term again in 20.6,14; 21.8, the question as to who will stand to be judged when the Lord returns, we learn at least from this passage that the one who does receive the crown of life will do so at the day of judgement. This may involve him in dying for his faith, but in that event he has no need to "fear them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul", for having lived a faithful life he will be spared the "destruction of both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10.28). For those granted access to the Tree of Life there is no longer any need to fear destruction in the Lake of Fire (20.14, 15; 21.8; compare Matthew 25.34, 41, 46).

2:12-13: To the angel of the congregation in Pergamon, write. . . Thou holdest fast My name, and didst not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

There is no reasonable alternative to treating this as a simple piece of local, congregational history. Even in the days of persecution to death, with all the weight of official sanction ("where Satan dwelleth"), the congregation had stood fast when Antipas lost his life for his faith. A church which persecution had failed to subdue was now menaced by corrosion under the subtler attacks of the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans (2.14-15). Should it yield to this, it would no longer be the Roman authorities which would seek its destruction, but the Lord Jesus Himself, with the sword of His mouth (2.16).

Attempts to derive a lesson from the meaning of the martyr's name (whether understood as "against a father" or "against all") are fanciful, and any such lesson must be known beforehand if it is to be found in the etymology. It is true that the Lord came "to set a man against his" (unbelieving) "father" (Matthew 10.35), and also that He said that His followers would be "hated of all men" for His name's sake (10.22), but we know these things because the Lord said so, and "not because this verse might be understood to convey cryptically some

such meaning. We should never have learned the message from this verse alone. Apart from this, the believer does not hate his unbelieving father: If there is hatred it arises

from the side of the unbeliever. It is true that the Lord said that "if any man . . . hateth not his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14.26), but the words concern the readiness of disciples to endure the loss of the affection of even the closest members of their families, if that is the price of their acceptance of the gospel, and certainly do not place the initiative of 'hating' in the hands of the disciple. The world hated the Lord, and may hate His disciples, but whereas they are taught not to "love the world, or the things that are in the world" (1 John 2.15), they are in no way taught to hate its people, which would be utterly contrary to the spirit of discipleship. 2.17: The hidden manna.

When the supply of manna finally failed, all there was left was the golden pot of it, preserved in the Most Holy Place (Exodus 16.33; Hebrews 9.4). If the pot was actually inside the Ark (which is quite explicit in RSV of Hebrews 9.4), then even this relic of the former miraculous provision had been lost by the time Solomon built the temple (1 Kings 8.9). Yet the Lord Jesus now provides from Himself the Bread from heaven, in unfailing amounts, for those who overcome their natural appetites, and labour for the meat that endures to eternal life (John 6.27-59). His saints have free access to the true reality underlying the place where the last fragments of the old manna were preserved, there to obtain the full satisfaction promised to those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5.6), with "mercy, and grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4.16). When the overcoming is complexed, then for them there will be the life which endures for evermore, in the presence of the true Body of Christ, when they will "hunger no more, neither thirst any more" (Revelation 7.16).

A white stone.

Apart from the topical associations of the gift of such a stone with acquittal, victory, or public honour in the Graeco-Roman world, all of which are relevant to the blessing which the Lord will bestow on the saint at His coming, the suggestion that the stone might correspond to the drawing of an affirmative lot from the Urim and Thummim in the high priest's breastplate is attractive too (Exodus 28.30; Deuteronomy 33.8; Nehemiah 7.65), especially since the last allusion concerns Nehemiah's refusal to let men of doubtful antecedents take on the priestly office, and so provides a perfect background for the time when such a Priest shall indeed stand up, and will indeed judge as to the fitness of His people for His priesthood. The word used here for 'stone' is a

rare one, being the Greek *psphos*. occurring twice in this passage, and only once elsewhere. But that other occurrence is highly significant, for the word is there translated 'voice' in AV, 'vote' in RV, when Paul assents to the execution of Stephen (Acts 26.10), once more suggesting a parallel with the Urim and Thummim. The Old Testament use of the word is on this occasion of no assistance.

The new name.

This is no doubt the same as in 3.12. See pages 33-35. Victory over sin brings with it the righteousness of faith which is owed to The LORD our Righteousness. That no man knows it save the recipient also relates it to the Lord Jesus' own new name, of which the same is said in 19.12. Yet in this last case the name is actually given to us in full, as "King of kings and

Lord of lords" (19.16). The idea is thus not that the name is unknowable as a set of letters, but that the nature which accompanies it is incomprehensible save to those who enjoy the redemption it implies. Neither deathlessness nor impregnable righteousness is more than a term, until the liberty conveyed by them is become a reality in the person of "him that receiveth" it. The same is true of "the new song" which none save the redeemed from the earth can learn (14.3). It is only possible to sing such a song with understanding when the victory which it signifies is being savoured.

2.26: Authority over the nations.

It is already clear as early as this in the Book that the saints will "live and reign on the earth" with Christ, as in 20.4 more explicitly. This is also the teaching of Daniel 7.27. It seems probable that the much discussed words of Psalm 149.6, 7, in which it is said of the saints, "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments on the peoples", are to be understood in the same way.

2.27: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels

of the potter are broken to shivers, as I also have received of My

Father.

By whatever means the rebellious nations will actually be overcome when Jesus returns, the administration of the lands in which the survivors will dwell will be exercised by the Lord through His saints, to whom, no doubt, will be given the charge both of instruction and of discipline. "This honour have all His saints" (Psalm 149.9) is much more readily understood of such a task than of the purely negative one, by whomsoever it will be discharged, of destroying those who wage war against God. This destruction, however necessary it will be, is the regrettable result of human unwillingness to yield to the will of God, and it can hardly be a pleasure in itself to punish the disobedience. That the nations will be ruled "with a rod of iron" reveals that it will no longer be in their power to resist the will of God and inflict persecution on His servants. There will be no gainsaying the benign rule of the Lord, and any attempt to do so must needs be suppressed.

The words "rule with a rod of iron" are taken directly from Psalm 2.9, together with the reference to the "potter's vessel". In the Psalm the words are certainly used of the Lord Jesus Himself: here they connect His saints with the work He will do on His return. Those who "live and reign with Him a thousand years" (20.4), the saints, will, it seems, have the responsibility under their Lord of seeing to the dismantling of rebellious human institutions and their replacement by the righteous ordinances of God.

The link with Psalm 2 is important in another way too. It is Messianic there, and it is in Messianic association in Revelation 2.27. We might expect that it would be used consistently with this when it appears again in the Book. There are two further occurrences, and the latter of these, in 19.15, allows of no doubt at all: it is the conquering Lord Jesus Who will "smite the nations with a rod of iron," and it would be confusion if, in 12.5, the "Manchild who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron", were not to be the same. It is impossible to believe that the Lord Jesus would send His angel to reveal an internally inconsistent message, and we must,

therefore, be prepared to find that the interpretation of 12.5 also centres on the Lord Jesus, rather than on any mere man, however exalted.

Excursus IV: The Word "Saint" in the Old Testament

In the New Testament the word *hagios*, when used as a noun, is always rendered 'saint', and always refers to men and women associated with the Lord Jesus Christ, save in Matthew 27.52 perhaps, where faithful men of earlier times may be intended. Whether it is so used in the Old Testament has been questioned, particularly in the light of the passage under discussion, Psalm 149.9, where understandable emotional objections to disciples being involved in bloodshed at the return of the Lord have led to the suggestion that the word could be used of angels, who also are God's 'holy ones'. Whatever the emotional problems, however, the question of the meaning of the word 'saint' is one of fact, and the facts are not hard to assess.

The English word 'saint' is found about 40 times in the Old Testament, of which 19 are translated from the Hebrew word *chasiydah* (including Psalm 149.9), and 18 from the word *gadh-*

oivsh, or related Hebrew and Aramaic words. It is the meaning of the former of these which is in issue. It is translated 'saint' in the following places: I Samuel 2.9; 2 Chronicles 6.41; Psalm 30.4; 31.23; 37.28; 50.5; 52.9; 79.2; 85.8; 97.10; 116.15; 132.9, 16; 145.10; 148.14; 149.1, 5, 9; and Proverbs 2.8.

In all the cases emphasized above the word is certainly used of human beings, undergoing the trials and dangers of this life, and looking for the blessings of God in the time to come. In all the other cases it could bear the same meaning, but this is not so compellingly evident. We are obliged to conclude, therefore, that it is sons of Adam either in their probationary state, or as subsequently glorified, who are intended by this word, including its use in Psalm 149.9. Attempts to avoid this conclusion, however understandable, are not based on sound exposition. Since the present writer is one who needed to be convinced of this by hard evidence, he puts forth this view with the greater assurance.

3.1: Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

Death in the New Testament does not always mean the cessation of natural life. It is also applied to the spiritual state of the ones who are not born again as disciples of the Lord Jesus, or not living actively the life which should follow on their rebirth. The man called to discipleship who put off the day of decision ("Suffer me first to bury my father!") was dead (Luke 9.30); so was the Prodigal Son until he came to his senses and returned home (Luke 15.24, 32); only when they hearkened to the teaching of Jesus did men "pass from death into life" (John 5.24-25). Jews and Gentiles alike were "dead in trespasses and sins" unless they allowed the Lord Jesus to "quicken" them (that is, bring them to life) (Ephesians 2.1-7). A giddy widow who wastes her ecclesiastically subsidized time in gossip is "dead while she lives" (1 Timothy 5.6). All merely human life is death in God's sight; in a very real sense Adam did die the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, and was expelled from the intimacy of God's society in Eden. Certainly his mortal life was prolonged for many years, but life without God is meaningless, and he was from that time on reduced to a painful and mediated approach to God through sacrifice.

The only true life for us is that which Jesus came to offer us: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have abundance" (John 10.10). This life belongs to the disciple for so long as, and in so far as, he lives his life in fellowship with God. The declaration, "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3.15) gives an example of how it might be forfeited. Although on several occasions the life which the believer lives now is called "eternal life" (John 5.24; 6.47, 54; 17.3; 1 John 5.11, 13, 20), that life in this dispensa-

don is not to be equated with immortality. It is only provisionally in the possession of the believer, lived in fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1.3), and it will only assume the permanence of immortality when the saint, if he were already dead, has been raised, and in any event has been judged, and changed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus' own glorious body, by Him Who has the keys of death and of the grave (Philippians 3.21; Revelation 1.18).

3.4: Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

This is a dead congregation; yet it is not wholly dead. A residue remains which is not unfaithful to its calling, and schismatics on the look-out for a call that these faithful members should divide the congregation and withdraw themselves into self-righteous purity will look in vain. The command to "be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain" (3.2) must have been heeded in the first instance, if it were heeded at all, by these same faithful few. They were not told to leave; nor were they told to form themselves into a party within the congregation, a church within a church, a self-appointed elite which would seek to gather to itself all those who are "strong", and despise the weak and leave them to their fate. The duty of the surviving faithful in Sardis was to "lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed" (Hebrews 12.12-13). One of the tests which will determine whether men and women are really strong in the Lord will be the patient compassion with which they follow the Lord's own example, and do not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Matthew 12.10). Sardis was in desperate straits, but this was no call to leave it to its fate. Start — so the exhortation ran — with anything good which is left, and try to build up again from that. 3.3: / will come as a thief.

The Lord has given this warning before to His disciples (Matthew 24.45; Luke 12.39). Both Peter and Paul say the same (1 Thessalonians 5.2, 4; 2 Peter 3.10). The Lord is to say the same again (Revelation 16.5) in immediate anticipation of the "great day of God Almighty". Unless the present case is an exception, all these cases have reference to the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. Yet the congregation in Sardis has not, in fact, survived to see that day. Like the rest of the Seven Congregations it has long since passed away. We have to conclude that the Lord's warning has the same relevance to

the saints and congregations who survive to the time of the Second Advent, as it would have had to Sardis had the Lord returned during the lifetime of that congregation. It could hardly be otherwise: unless Jesus was prepared to disclose the timetable for His coming, and date that return within a very narrow band of years, then it was inevitable that every generation should be left with the possibility that it might witness that return. So, to all who are in a Sardian frame of mind when the Lord really does come again, the message is the same. Like the other six congregations, Sardis has its message for to-day in proportion to the existence now of conditions like those it represented then.

The metaphor of the thief-like coming is not intended to pronounce as to whether the advent of the Lord will, or will not, be silent and unnoticed. The thief is a kleptes, one who breaks the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," klepto. Such a person may either "break through and steal" (Matthew 6.19), or "steal away while we sleep" (Matthew 28.13). The important message is that thieves do not make an appointment with the owner of the goods they covet, but arrive unheralded. The manner of the Lord's return cannot be discovered from this word: only the unexpectedness of it. "Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee".

3.5: The Book of Life.

This is the first reference to the Book of Life in the Apocalypse. Others are to follow in 13.8; 17.8; 20.12, 15; 21.27; 22.19. Two words are used: in the passages underlined the word is *biblion*, and in the remainder *biblos*, but there is no obvious distinction made between them. The concept is already present in Philippians 4.3, "whose names are in the Book of Life" (*biblos*). It is heartening to know that all who in God's sight are in a state of grace have their names already written in the Book. It constitutes a kind of heavenly birth-register of those who have been born again of water and Spirit, and patience in well-doing will maintain the names where they have been entered. Only relapse or unfaithfulness will cause the Lord, as He says here, to "blot out one's name from the Book". Salvation is that which the Lord desires for His saints, and they commence "accepted in the beloved". The apostles were told, even in the days of the Lord's earthly ministry, to "rejoice that their names were written in heaven" (Luke 10.20). As with Israel in the wilderness, in words surely referred to here, so with the Christian in his pilgrimage: "Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book" (Exodus 32.32-33). God, as it were, writes up the names in advance "in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (13.8; 17.8), calling those whom He foreknows (Romans 8.29-30), not of works, lest any man should boast. The works of faith are indeed needed, though, to show that the call has not been in vain, and keep the name on the roll as that of a member of God's family in continued good standing, but the call is of God and of grace.

/ will confess his name before my Father and before His angels.

The Lord here recalls what He had already said in John's hearing while yet in His weakness. Those who confess Him before men will be confessed before His Father and His angels (Matthew 10.32; Luke 12.8). It is those who remain steadfast in their loyalty to Him of whom the Lord will in effect say in the day of account: "Yes, I know this person. He (or she) is My friend, and, in season and out of season, has never been ashamed to say so before others."

The passages cited above do not exhaust the references to a Book in the Apocalypse. John's message is to be written in a book and circulated (1.11). He sees a Book in the hand of the occupant of the heavenly throne in 5.1-9, sealed with seven seals. When the sixth of those seals is broken, the "heaven is removed as a scroll" (6.14). When the judgement sits at the Lord's return, "books" are opened in addition to the Book of Life (20.12, 12); and the Apocalypse itself, as it draws to a close, is repeatedly referred to as "this book" (22.7, 9, 10, 18, 19). On all these occasions the word used is *biblion*. In addition to these there is the "little book" which John is required to eat, in 10.2, 8, 9, 10, where the word used is *bibliaridion*, a word otherwise unknown in either Testament.

It has been argued strongly that the seven-sealed book of chapter 6 is identical with the Book of Life. In Peter Watkins: "Exploring the Apocalypse and the Future" (King's Langley, John Watkins, 1980), pages 127-139, this view is supported on these grounds:

1 Only "the Lamb" is worthy to open it (5.5).

2 All the seals have to be removed before the Book can be opened, after which the judgement can sit and the saints receive their reward

(20.12).

3 The Lamb who opens the Book is also the Lamb ,slain who possesses the Book of life (13.8; 21.27), and it is His death which constitutes Him worthy to perform the opening (5.9).

4 Three songs of praise are associated with the events surrounding the opening of this sealed book. The first is in 5.9, before the Book is opened; the second is in 5.11 "and the occasion could well be when the Book — whatever it contains — is opened"; the third is in 5.13 by all creation, "and the occasion must surely be when God's purpose with all created things is completely fulfilled". That the second of these songs is sung when the Book of Life is opened is supported by linking 5.11 with 20.11 -12 and Daniel 7.10. From this it is concluded that all three refer to the same occasion, the day of judgement, and

3.7: He that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, He that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth.

The description "holy and true" is again applied to the Lord in 6.10, where the faithfulness of the Lord in keeping His promises is being pleaded by sufferers awaiting their release. This is the import of the message here. The Lord is addressing a congregation (Philadelphia) which is enduring suffering, and giving it and all like it the needed assurance that the suffering will not be in vain. The Lord's "key" will open the door to the liberation of the sufferers. The key is plainly the same as that referred to in 1.18, "I have the keys of death and of hades", but there are also clear allusions to Isaiah 22.22. The message in that prophecy is in the first instance addressed to Eliakim ben Hilkiah in the days of Hezekiah of Judah: "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: and he shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open". The Lord is the true Heir to the line of David, of Whom Eliakim was a type. But the Lord's key is mighty over the powers of death themselves. The "gates of hades" shall not prevail against those who are members of the Lord's true church (Matthew 16.18-19), and in His words to Philadelphia the Lord must have been recalling those to Peter, the rock of whose confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", was to provide the sure foundation for the promise. Peter was allowed to use the keys which opened the way of life of Jews and Gentiles (Acts 2 and 10), and by the Lord's grace those doors have been kept open so that no man can shut them. The Lord Himself will open the graves of His servants at His return, and release the captives to be made alive for evermore.

3.10:7 will keep thee from the hour of trial whkh is to come upon the

whole world, to try them that dwell on the earth.

We are again faced with the problem encountered in 3.3. The hour of trial here spoken of sounds very like the "time of trouble such as never was" of Daniel 12.1, and the period of

"distress of nations with perplexity, men fainting for fear, and for expectation of things which are coming on the world" (Luke 21.25). But this time has not even now arrived, and Philadelphia's lightstand has long been quenched. Once again, therefore, unless we are to suppose that the Lord encouraged an expectation of His very speedy return such as did not occur, we are obliged to suppose that it is brethren like those in Philadelphia, rather than these Philadelphians themselves, who are intended to profit from the promise. The Lord is undertaking that those who are faithful to Him will, despite their own little strength, be empowered to withstand the troubles to which the world as such will be subjected when the time of His return draws near, and even, as we may see, be withdrawn from the scene before the worst of them strike.

3.14: The faithful and true Witness.

See also on 1.5. During His mortal pilgrimage the Lord had been reproached by His enemies with the words, "Thou bearest witness of Thyself; Thy witness is not true" (John 8.13). In all, the verb is used 33 times in John of John the Baptist's witness to Jesus, of Jesus' to Himself, of the objections of the rulers, of the writer's own testimony, of the witness which the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, should confirm to the disciples after the ascension. The credentials of the Lord have now been established for ever by His resurrection, whereas those who rejected His testimony have been discredited and, for the present, rejected. "Ye are My witnesses", God had said to them (Isaiah 43.10, 12; 44.8), but they had been and remained unwilling witnesses, testifying all too often by their self-inflicted punishment rather than by their willing words. Here, though, the Lord is claiming for Himself the fulfillment of another Messianic prophecy: "I will not lie to David. His Seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as the faithful witness in the sky" (Psalm 89.35-36). "I have given Him for a witness to the peoples" (Isaiah 55.4). The words are used of God Himself in Jeremiah 42.5, there also against an unfaithful people, and could be added to the list of titles of the Father now bestowed on the Son since His exaltation to the right hand of God.

The Beginning of the Creation of God.

These words are alive with memories of other parts of Scripture, from "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1.1); through "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1.1); and on to "the Firstborn of all creation, for in Him were all things created; the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1.15-18). The Greek term, *he arkhe*, is feminine, and so denotes an office rather than a name of the Lord. It may refer either to time or to position, being used of the beginning of the creation, or of the miracles of the Lord, for example, and of principalities, rule, principles. The former is much the more common, and since both the Father and the Son are described in this Book as "the Beginning and the Ending" (1.8; 21.6; 22.3), this is likely to be the primary meaning here. Jesus is, of course, the Firstborn of the new creation, as Colossians 1.18 says, but He is also the primary motive behind all that the Father did in creation. "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8.58). Abraham was an historical link, though a very important one, in the outworking of God's purpose, but the Lord Jesus was its intended focus, His ultimate redemptive work guiding all that God did throughout all time. "I am", in contrast with "Abraham was" marks Him out as the unseen factor providing the reason why "everything was made that hath been made" (John 1.3).

3.15: Thou art neither cold nor hot. I would than wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth.

It is one of the saddest mysteries of our sinful nature that it is possible for anyone to fall under this condemnation. Rejection outright of the gospel is understandable: that is honest coldness. But once the gospel has been perceived to be what it truly is, "the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1.16), then disciples ought all to be boiling hot in their enthusiasm to embrace and fulfill their high calling. All disciples fall short of that, no doubt, yet what is here being exposed is a negligent acceptance of the name of discipleship, in spite of which the riches of this world, its allurements and its diversions, the friendships of its people, and over and above that simple sloth, reduce what should have been the steaming fragrance of the cauldron on the simmer to the soggy disgust of tepid porridge. And this, the Lord says with a grim explicitness which makes no concessions to euphemism, makes Him sick: "I will spue thee out of My mouth".

3.16: "Thousayest, I am rich and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

The Lord's constant exhortations about treasure in heaven as compared with our vulnerable hoards on earth; about what happened to the good seed among the thorns; about having too much to do to be bothered to go to the wedding feast; about the fate of the rich fool (Matthew 6.19-21; 13.22; Luke 14.16-20; 12.16-21), batter in vain against the near-impregnable complacency which thinks itself "rich and increased with goods and lacking nothing", as far as this life is concerned, and is too spiritually slothful to offer a thought to the riches of God's grace and the food of life to be found in the true Bread from heaven, and in the fellowship of the saints for those who forsake not the assembling of themselves together in memorial, proclamation, and study.

They had fine clothing in Laodicea; yet had they considered the lilies of the field, they would have been better clad (Matthew 6.28-29). Great riches were theirs, but their riches were corrupted and their garments moth-eaten (James 5.2). They had need of nothing, and so were like those fleshly Pharisees who had no need of a physician (Luke 5.31).

3.18: / counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire that thou mightest become rich; and white garments that thou mightest clothe thyself. . . and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mightest see.

They had discarded the white garments of their redemption, and were thus naked in the sight of their God, lacking the covering for their sins provided in Christ, for "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4.13). They were contented with their locally compounded eyesalve from "the one famous medical centre in Phrygia" (Ramsay, LSC), but what their eyes really needed was the salve made by the loving ministrations of the Lord, whereby blind men from earlier days had been made to see (John 9.6). Their complacent acceptance of their favourable lot stands in utter contrast with the Lord's assessment of them as among the most miserable of men.

3.20: Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

So simply does the Lord reveal His patience and meekness; so terribly does He expose our own power over Him. He stands outside the door of the cold Laodicean heart and asks to be admitted within. There is no outer latch on the door to admit the Light of the World, and the disciple, having shown Him the door, can keep Him out if he will. Only: one day the Lord

will know that there is no purpose in staying, and then He will go away, and if then the door is opened to beg Him enter, He will not be there.

We are to "seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55.6). The Lord will break down no doors: only He can save us, but He will not force His salvation upon us. On the other hand, to open up to Him is to accept the consequences. He is no bringer of a message, to hand it over and leave us to our leisure. He comes in expecting to stay. He will be neither postman nor rent-collector. The door must be flung wide to receive Him, and He must be invited into our living quarters. No dusty, disused drawing room must be unlocked to receive Him with distant gentility, while He sits on the edge of quaint, uncomfortable chairs and makes polite and meaningless conversation until it is time to go. He must be asked to stay and eat, and sup with us. There must be no surprise or regret when the Guest turns into the Host, and we sup with Him.

3.21: He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne.

All this He has bidden us expect. "If any man love Me, My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14.23). Our private domestic castle must become a chamber in His house. If this is how we receive him, then one day we shall be as much at home with Him as He in His victory is now at home with His Father, set down at the right hand of God. Those who, as this Book reaches its culmination, are moved to say, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!" must surely answer the appeal He makes to every Laodicean and say, "Even so, Come in, Lord Jesus!"

2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13,22: He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

This is a refrain in every letter. It is also found in 13.9, and in the same or almost the same form in Matthew 11.15; 13.9, 43; Mark 4.9, 23; 7.16; Luke 8.8; 14.35. It is a complete demonstration that this Book and these Letters are not intended merely for their original recipients. It stands in contrast with those rebukes addressed to those who, having ears, hear not or are become dull of hearing (Matthew 13.15; Mark 8.18; Acts 7.51, 57; 28.28; Romans 11.8). It is the constant call of God to His people:

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither. As for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Leave off, ye simple ones, and live; and walk in the way of understanding. (Proverbs 9.1-6).

Chapter 5 Revelation 4:1- 5:14

CHAPTER V

THE VISION IN THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE (4.1-5.14)

These two chapters quite clearly make up a single vision, and we shall inevitably fall into serious expositional error unless we recognize this. So let us begin by telling the story as if it were only this, leaving interpretation until we have done so:

4.1

John sees a door opened in heaven, and hears again the voice like a trumpet, inviting him to ascend (1.10), when the things of the future would be disclosed to him: "I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter".

4.2

As a result he is again "in Spirit", and beholds a throne in heaven.

4.3

On this is a radiant Person (cf. 21.11). The throne is surrounded by a rainbow (10.1), with the appearance of an emerald (cf. 21.19, where a different but related word is used).

The word *thronos* occurs 61 times in NT, in 54 of which it is translated 'throne', and in the remainder 'seat' in AV. All the occurrences are given here for further reference, those translated 'seat' being marked : Matthew 5.34; 19.28, 28; 23.22; 25.31; Luke 1.32; 1.52 ; 22.30; Acts 2.30; 7.49; Colossians 1.16; Hebrews 1.8; 4.16; 8.1; 12.2; Revelation 1.4; 2.13 ; 3.21, 21; 4.2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 9, 10, 10; 5, 1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6.16; 7.9, 10, 11, 11, 15, 15, 17; 8.3; 11.16 ; 12.5; 13.2 ; 14.3, 5; 16.10 , 17; 19.4, 5; 20.4, 11; 21.5; 22.1, 3. Apart from a tendency to use the word 'seat' when evil or merely human powers are involved there seems no reason for the variation, particularly in this chapter.

4.4 Around this throne are twenty four others on which are seated elders clad in white and crowned with gold.

The word *presbuteros* occurs 67 times in NT, 62 as "elder". In the Gospels it refers to the elders of the Jewish communities, but in Acts it is used also for the leaders of the congregations of Christians, a meaning it retains in those Epistles in which it appears (I

Timothy 5.1,2 , 17, 19; Titus 1.5; Hebrews 11.2 (of Old Testament men of faith); James 5.14; 1 Peter 5.1, 5; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). In Revelation it is used exclusively for these present symbolic heavenly beings (4.4, 10; 5.5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7.11, 13; 11.16; 14.3; 19.4). Though the word means literally 'one who, or that which, is older' when used substantively, only rarely in NT is the idea of age the dominant one. In the synagogues and Christian congregations they were men deemed to be of sufficient maturity to be entrusted with responsibility as leaders. The case marked refers to elder women.

4.5 Lightning, voices and thunders come from the central throne, and seven fiery lamps burn in front of it, "the Seven Spirits of God" (1.4), while before the throne is a sea of glass. "In the midst of the throne and round about the throne" are four living creatures, full of eyes before and behind.

Note that these are "living creatures" and not "beasts" as in AV. They are to be distinguished sharply from the wild horrors which appear later in the Book, and which are appropriately called theria, wild beasts. The characteristic of the present creatures is life, not beastliness.

whose death has redeemed to God people of all nations. Many angels join their praises, and all creatures everywhere offer their blessings on "Him that sitteth on the throne, and on the

5.10

One called the Lamb. Only then do we learn:

6.1 The Lamb opened one of the seven seals.

This analysis causes certain points to stand out very clearly:

1 Only now we are approaching the point when the Book will begin to disclose the future, for though we were told in 1.1 that the Book was intended "to show unto Jesus' servants things which are shortly to come to pass", three chapters pass by before John is reminded of the promise, and is told in vision to enter a heavenly scene, when "I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter (4.1). This is much the same as to say, "Now that the preliminaries have been dealt with, we are in a position to set about the main task, and discuss the future". This confirms still further the position taken about chapters 1-3, that they are concerned with the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ which He had after His resurrection and ascension, and that they deal with actual contemporary events and situations, and are not designed to deal with the future. The only prophecies in those chapters are those which concern the particular congregations there addressed, or those which speak in general terms of punishment for those who deny or neglect their Lord, and of blessings at His return for "him that overcometh".

Since the Lamb of 5.6 unquestionably depicts the Lord Jesus, and since it is He Who takes the Book out of the hand of the Occupant of the throne, then that Occupant represents God,

the Creator, Himself. This is in any case made absolutely plain in 4.11: "Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created".

3 Since, notwithstanding the glory of the scene as we see it in chapter 4, no-one is present at that stage able to open the Book, and since John is moved to tears because of this, then chapter 4 is plainly not a vision of the glories of the future kingdom. It is rather a picture of the situation before the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is glory there, indeed, but the whole of the world's future awaited the triumph of the Lord on the cross. Up to 5.3, then, we have the glory of God as it was before the Lord Jesus ascended. From 5.4 we see the new situation which arose when Jesus ascended to God's right hand. Indeed the terms of the doxology afforded to Jesus in 5.13, by "every created thing in heaven, and on the earth, and under the

4.7

The living creatures resemble a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle, and they each of them have six wings. They sing praises the clock round to the Lord God, the Almighty, the Occupant of the throne.

4.10

In this they are joined by the 24 elders, who worship the enthroned One, by Whom and by Whose will all things were created.

5.1

In the right hand of this Person is a sealed book.

5.2

A "strong angel" makes a proclamation that one shall be sought who is worthy to open the book.

5.3

No such person is found, in heaven, on earth, or under the earth.

5.4

Hereupon John burst into tears that the book cannot be opened.

5.5

He is comforted by one of the elders, who tells him that "the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" has overcome and can now open the Book.

5.6

John then sees in the midst of throne, living creatures, and elders "a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God" (1.4).

5.7

The Lamb takes the book.

5.8

All the heavenly beings fall down, with each his harp and bowl containing incense which is "the prayers of the saints".

5.9

Then they sing a new song of praise to the Lamb

earth, and on the sea", correspond closely to those of Philippians 2.10 where, because the Lord has conquered sin, God has highly exalted Him, and required that every knee should

bow to Him, "of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth". It is clear that the Lord who revealed the one to John inspired the other in Paul, and expected that they would be compared together to provide the solution of the picture.

Here, then, we have a clearly established position. John sees in symbol the glory of God in heaven. He is given to understand that the fulfillment of God's purpose for the future depends utterly on the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, so that He may gain the power to bring about the future blessings. He sees that this has come about when the slain Lamb ascends to be with His Father, with "all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28.19). The interpretation is given to us by the Book itself, the surest of all grounds of exegesis. Any minor difficulties it might involve can be dealt with in the sequential analysis as they arise..

4.1: Come up hither, and I will show thee.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Revealer, as He had promised (1.1). But, as so often in this Book, He reveals by what He shows rather than by what He says. It is "What thou seest, write in a book" (1.11). The message is therein picture: the interpretation is left to the disciple to search out. This is the whole problem of the Book of Revelation, to which every student has to address himself. We see the symbols, and can read the story as a story: but what do the symbols and the story signify?

4.2: / was in Spirit.

Both the language and the experience resemble those of Ezekiel 3.12, where that prophet was caught up to see a vision of the glory of God. The prophet had already seen such a vision in isolation, as it were (1.4ff), but now sees the same appearance again to prepare him to prophesy to his fellow captives in Babylonia, later to show him the abominations committed by the remnant in Jerusalem (8.22ff; 11.1, 24), and last of all to see the glory of God, which had forsaken Jerusalem when the city was captured, return in promise as the city is reestablished in the future (43.5). The miraculous experience, and some aspects of the material revealed, are common to all those who have been allowed to see in sign what the glory of God is like, such as Moses (Exodus 24.5-11), Isaiah (6.1ff), and Daniel (7.9-10).

4.2: / saw a throne set in heaven.

In Isaiah 6.1 the prophet sees the Lord (a:dhonay in our texts, but LORD,y:howah, if it is correctly stated that the Jewish scribes altered the word from mistaken motives of reverence, as also in 6.8, 11 and 130 or so other places). In that vision, too, the six wings are there on the seraphim, as they are in this prophecy on the four living creatures, while the cry heard by Isaiah, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (6.3) provides the precedent for Revelation's "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was, and which is, and which is to come" (4.8). In Isaiah, too, there is an altar — for the vision takes place in God's temple (6.3) — as there is in the present vision also (6.9).

In the Ezekiel visions there are four living creatures too (1.5 = Revelation 4.6), each of which has four faces of man, lion, ox, and eagle (1.10 = R4.7), compared with one face on each creature here. The fire around the throne is also here in the shape of a bow (1.28 = R4.3). Revelation has its "glassy sea" (4.6), projecting before the throne, and on which perhaps the throne is set, which may correspond to the "likeness of a firmament, the colour of the terrible

crystal" of Ezekiel 1.22-3, which, though located over the living creatures, formed the floor on which the throne was set (1.26).

In the vision of Moses and the elders this feature is matched by the "paved work of sapphire stone" (Exodus 24.10), though we lack other details save that it was "the God of Israel" Who sat or stood above it.

In Daniel too there are thrones (7.9), and "thousand thousands minister unto Him (who sits there), while "ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him," corresponding precisely to the "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" of this vision (7.10 = R5.11).

Now there is nothing in any of these Old Testament visions to associate them exclusively, or in most cases even particularly, with the time when the Kingdom of God will be set up in glory at the return of the Lord. It is true that Daniel sees a vision in which judgement is poured out on the kingdom of men, but the very name "Ancient of Days" (7.9) shows that an abiding presence is on the scene, whereas in the other visions what we should have supposed, on a simple view of the circumstances, is fully justified by a closer look. Moses and the family of Aaron saw "the God of Israel" in His might, designed to strengthen them for the work they had to do. Isaiah saw the Lord in the year that king Uzziah died, to provide the instruction and the incentive for him to minister to his own people. The glory seen by Ezekiel is so obviously the abiding glory of God that it is hard to see how anyone can have thought otherwise: it is revealed to him in Babylonia; it is present in the temple, as yet intact, in Jerusalem; it leaves that temple when Jerusalem is doomed, and it will return there when

it is finally restored.

It is true that, referring to Isaiah 6.10, John tells us that Isaiah then saw "His glory", meaning in the context the glory of Jesus Christ (John 12.41), but this is right and proper, for though Isaiah saw God's glory in the temple of his own day, the statement that "the whole earth is full of His glory" (6.3) was then only true in principle and in prospect. Not until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ would that glory indeed cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Numbers 14.21; Psalm 72.19; Habakkuk 2.14). The glory belongs to God, but it will be revealed in its fullness in the person of, and at the return of, His Son.

In Revelation 4-5, then, John sees first the eternal glory of God before the means by which the future will be revealed are disclosed to him, with the rainbow of God's eternal covenant assuring him that God's faithfulness will preserve the earth from total destruction, that it might be finally filled with His glory (4.3; Genesis 9.8-17). But it was His glory contemporary with John's own times that he saw, as all the facts to follow will plainly show.

4.4: Round about the throne were 24 thrones: and on the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting, arrayed in white garments, and on their heads crowns of gold.

A rather different point of view is taken by Peter Watkins (EAF , pages 129ff), who observes that there are three songs of praise in Revelation 4-5, as follows: (1) that which is sung when the Lamb appears on the scene, but before the Book is opened (5.9); (2) that sung by the myriads of angels (5.12), which "could well be" when the Book is opened; and (3) that which is sung by every creature (5.13-14), of which he writes, "the occasion would surely be when God's purpose with all created things is completely fulfilled." He therefore finds in this vision

three points in time: (1) contemporarily, with Jesus glorified but not returned; (2) adventually, with the thrones of judgement set and the Book of Life opened (see my page 76, footnote); and (3) post-millennially, when the last enemy is destroyed and all surviving creatures render praise and glory to God.

Attractive though the suggestion is, it cannot be sustained. The last two utterances are not in fact called songs, though that is a minor correction. The message of the chapters runs smoothly on; first heaven without the Lamb, then the Lamb's ascension and taking of the Book, then His sitting down with His Father and the opening of the Book, and then the disclosure of the future. To find the future disclosed in advance dislocates the sequence. All the same, we do have a sequence of thought, if not of typical times: first the "living creatures" give glory to God alone; then they accord His share in that glory to the triumphant Lamb; and then the Lamb, possessed of all authority, is shown to be in possession of the right to the allegiance of all creation, as we have shown, in similar terms to those employed in Philippians 2.9-11.

There were 24 hours in the day-and-night cycle, for the Jews as well as for ourselves (John 11.9). There were 24 thousand of Israel who did service before their king each month (1 Chronicles 27.1). There were 24 orders of priests descended from Aaron "to come into the house of the Lord according to the ordinance given to them" (1 Chronicles 24.1-19). There were 12 tribes and twelve apostles of the Lamb (21.12, 14; Matthew 19.28). These facts present a very satisfying reason for having 24 elders present here, in this temple scene. All the orders of priests are, as it were, mustered to render mass praise to their Maker, giving Him "no rest day and night" (4.8) until He make Jerusalem a praise (Isaiah 62.1, 7), and while He sits on the throne which He has established in the heavens (Psalm 103.19). There is no need to say precisely whom or what the elders 'represent'; they stand as a manifestation of the unceasing praise and honour eternally due to God above. Whenever we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10), we pay our small tribute in harmony with the praises of heaven.

White garments and crowns of gold.

One of the reasons given for regarding this as a scene of future glory is found in this adornment, for we have already discussed the crowns, or *stephanoi*, in connection with the coming blessing of God's saints, and we learn later that "the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (19.8). Moreover, we learn that "he that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment" (3.5). It has to be agreed that the symbolism of this verse would accord perfectly well with such a view. But we have already shown that the *stephanos* can also denote authority and dignity regardless of how these have been attained (Esther 8.15; Song 3.11; Ezekiel 16.12). In Revelation itself a *stephanos* is worn by forces of destruction in 9.7, and by the heavenly reaper of the world's harvest in 14.14. As to the white garments, the Levites were so arrayed, and doubtless the priests among them, at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 5.12); Aaron was arrayed in linen garments when he went into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16.4ff.). And in Revelation itself the angels armed with the world's "last plagues" are, like the saints of 19.8, clothed in fine and bright linen (15.6). So, though the symbols are beautifully appropriate to the justified saints, they are not exclusive to them. It is not so much that white garments mean the righteousness of saints, as that they mean righteousness and purity as such, which God and His angels have even now, and with which the Bride of Christ will one day be clothed. There is nothing in these

symbols, therefore, to overthrow the conclusion we have already drawn that this is not a scene of the kingdom to come.

4.5: Out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders.

These would be most inappropriate to a picture of future blessing. They are to be linked with heavy and grievous punishments on the world (8.5; 11.19; 16.18), as they had been linked before with the terrors of God's presence before sinful Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19.16; Hebrews 12.18-21), to which place of terror the saints are taught that they have not come, but to a heavenly Jerusalem which will remain with the things which cannot be shaken when at last God has destroyed the present order of things.

Seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The symbol is that of Zechariah 4.2; the seven Spirits have already been discussed (pages 16-17), and found to correspond to the Holy Spirit of God. In 5.6 this same Spirit is said to be "sent forth into all the earth" in pursuance of God's purpose. Just as we saw the seven Congregations represented by seven separate lampstands instead of the seven-branched candlestick of the Tabernacle, so now we see the seven lamps detached, rather than being linked to a central stem as they are in Zechariah. And whereas in the Old Testament prototype the mission to "run to and fro through the whole earth" (4.10) could possibly refer to either the land of Israel or the whole world as we know it (since 'erets in Hebrew can mean either, here in Zechariah, in its concern with the world-wide gospel, there can be little doubt that the universal concept is the one intended).

4.6: A sea of glass.

The Old Testament links of this have already been examined (page 87). The possibility of seeing through such a transparent base, whereby Ezekiel could discern what lay above, emphasizes even more clearly that nothing can be hidden from Him Who sits above: "all things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4.13). When we recall that the living creatures are full of eyes before and behind, and that the Lamb has seven eyes (5.6), we are made vividly aware that nothing can be hidden from the eyes of our God or of His Son.

4.6-8: Four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. The first creature was like a lion, the second creature like a calf, the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

That there were four of these promotes the reasonable suggestion that they are related to the four camps of Israel in the Wilderness (Numbers 2.3, 10, 18,25). That the faces are the same

as those in Ezekiel 1.5-10 suggests a further comparison. For in Ezekiel the man-face pointed south, the lion east, the eagle north, and the ox west (1.10 combined with 1.4, which shows that the prophet was facing north), so that comparing this with the camp of Numbers would make the lion the emblem of Judah and his group, the ox that of Ephraim, the eagle that of Dan, and the man that of Reuben. The fact that the four living creatures are separate, while the composite likeness of Ezekiel is a unit, once again indicates the general decentralization of the New Testament picture compared with the Old. That in its turn suggests that the Israel of the saints with which this Book deals is the spiritual Israel of the New Covenant rather

than the natural Israel of the Old (though the old Israel has already appeared in this Book as an enemy of the gospel, and might yet do so again).

We know that the bodily likeness of Ezekiel's cherubim (for they are called by this name in Ezekiel 9.3; 10.1-20; 11.22) was that of human beings (1.5) in spite of their four faces, and the same may well be true of the living creatures of Revelation, since the different form of words used for the third of them ("the third creature had a face as of a man") suggests that we are really being told, "they all had the bodily likeness of a man, but the third of them had a human face also. Even the enquiry as to whether this might be so was discouraged so long as the idea of "beast" (AV) remained in one's mind, but as soon as this is recognized as likely, the six wings of 4.8 combine with the picture of the seraphim in Isaiah 6.2 to strengthen the impression of a likeness to the human form. God had said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Genesis 1.26), and the same affinity is bespoken here. There is angelic presence implied throughout this picture, no less in the living creatures than in the elders.

All kinds of other identifications and parallels have been proposed. The four Gospels, with Matthew's supposed concentration on the kingship of the Lord Jesus (the Lion), John's on His divine relationship (the Eagle), Mark's on His service (the Ox), and Luke's on His manhood (the Man), have attracted many an expositor. But there is sufficient variety in the identifications proposed to make them problematical, and in any case the question always arises, what would be the point of comparing the nature of God's heavenly glory, or any other manifestation of His glory, with views about the specialist purpose of the Gospels which are anything but rigidly demonstrated? We were better served, it may be

Precisely this identification is illustrated in carvings of the outer doorposts of the Norwegian seamen's church in Rotterdam, Holland, testifying to the widespread popularity of this type of identification.

thought, by reflecting that the attributes of God sum up and exceed that of all His creatures together: the strength of the lion, the swift flight of the Eagle, the patient service of the ox, and the intelligence of a man, each in itself but a pale reflection of some quality of God.

4.8-11: They have no rest day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty . . .

Such praises are indeed sung in the heavens. As the hosts here symbolized extol God's creative acts (4.11), so they did in the beginning, when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38.7). Heaven praises Him now, as earth should, and His angels bless His name (Psalms 69.34; 103.20; 148.2).

4.11: Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created.

These words settle finally the question as to the identity of the Occupant of the throne at this point. It is the eternal God, the One whom believers are taught in the New Testament to call the Father. He is the source and origin of all, the universal Creator, the One to Whom even His Son said, "Not My will, but Thine, be done" (Matthew 26.39), and to Whom we are bidden pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10). That these praises are shortly to be shared with Another only emphasizes the point that

at this moment they belong to the Father alone. And He is alone on His throne at this moment in the Book of Revelation, as the words to come establish beyond a doubt.

5.1:7 saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within, and on the back close-sealed with seven sales. 5.2: And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice: Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

The book in the Father's hand is the focus of interest. All John's hopes of learning about things to come (4.1) are centred on it. If it could be opened, as events proved that it could indeed, then the events to come could unroll and the glorious climax be achieved. But if it could not, then John's heavenly visit was doomed to frustration. Clearly it was no part of the One seated on the throne to open it. That the future lies in God's hands is in one sense a truism, for "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Daniel 4.17). But in another sense this is less true. What God would do in the future depended critically on what He had achieved by sending His Son. "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we

must be saved" (Acts 4.12). In the drama of the Book of Revelation this is now to be put to the test.

5.3: No one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book or to look thereon.

Let the challenge be issued to the world: he that is able to open this book, let him come forward! The search was universal, but no one could be found. It was not a task which any angel could perform: heaven had been searched in vain. No living man was able to achieve it: the whole earth was scoured and among living men and women no one could be found. No-one remaining in the graves could do it: they looked under the earth, in the tombs of Hades, in vain. John had (so his mind in his vision evidently ran) made his journey to God's temple in heaven in vain.

5.4: / wept much, because no-one was worthy to open the book or to look thereon.

5.5: One of the elders saith unto me. Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe o Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and the seven seals thereof.

John in waking knew fully the answer he was now to be given. But John in his vision is experiencing what men who learn about the meaning of the gospel must experience. He starts with a mind able to learn, but not knowing until he is told, and goes through the motions of learning as a child would. The child in his sadness says, "But there is no-one else. Angels, living people, dead people, all are impotent! Who can be left?" It is almost as though the prophet's words are being brought before us: "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me" (Isaiah 63.5). This speaks, it is true, of the future victory over the nations, but that in itself is only possible because of the past victory over sin. It is the theme of the opening chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews which is being unfolded here. Jesus, "when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1.3-4). It is Jesus Who, "having been made a little lower than the angels, because of the suffering of death" has been "crowned with glory and honour,

that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man," "the Captain of our salvation made perfect by sufferings" (Hebrews 1.9-10). The future now lies firmly in the hands of Him who, having died once and for all for sins (Hebrews 7.27), is now the Priest perfected for evermore.

The Lion and the Lamb (5.5-14).

Our imagination can easily lead us astray. The Lamb is an appropriate and Scriptural symbol for Messiah in His suffering and atoning work (Isaiah 53.7; John 1.29, 36; Acts 8.32; 1 Peter 1.19). The devouring might of the lion, on the other hand (Genesis 49.9; Numbers 24.9; Daniel 7.4; Proverbs 19.12; 1 Peter 5.8; Revelation 10.3; 13.2), is also a Scriptural figure of speech, and in some of these passages is used in a messianic context. When, therefore, we find both Lion and Lamb referred to in Revelation 5, and both unquestionably with Messianic import, what is more natural than to think of the two phases of the Lord Jesus' experience, and say:

"HE CAME AS A LAMB, for the suffering of death. HE WILL RETURN AS A LION, to conquer the nations and establish the kingdom of God"?

5.6: / saw in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.

That the Lord has suffered, and will return in power, are both true. His enemies will never again be able to crucify the Lord Jesus, and He is already in possession of "all power in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28.19), with which at His second advent He will break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms. But if it were such a transformation from Lamb to Lion that John was beholding, would not the dialogue have gone more like the parodied version below:

"One of the elders saith to me, weep not: behold, the Lamb of God hath prevailed to open the book and the seven seals thereof.

"And I saw in the midst of the throne, living creatures, and elders, a Lion, the Lion of Judah in glorious might"?

Remember once again, we are confronted with a man "in Spirit", undergoing instruction as to what has been achieved, and any man in such a position, told that the Lion of Judah had triumphed, would expect to see a Lion, or at least a rampant conqueror fitting the description. Jesus appears on the heavenly scene as the crucified One, revealing by what hard path He has gained the victory and the power. Israel had constantly expected a conquering Messiah, and had rejected a crucified King. This doctrine was to them a stumbling block (1 Corinthians 1.23). What all needed to learn, and need yet to learn, is that the Lord's power could only come to Him when He had conquered that which could have disqualified Him for the exercise of power, and put away sin by his sacrifice.

Having been introduced as the Lamb, for the first time in the Book, it is a Lamb that the Lord remains. The word occurs 27 times in this Book, and all save one (13.11, where an evil beast has horns "like a lamb") refer to the Lord Jesus. He is the Lamb here as He enters the heavenly scene (5.6, 8, 12, 13). He is the Lamb still as He opens the seals (6.1); it is the

"wrath of the Lamb" that the nations are taught to fear (6.16; 17.14). It is before the Lamb that the redeemed are pictured standing (7.9) and, of course, through the blood of the Lamb that they are purified (7.14). But, most telling of all, it is "the marriage of the Lamb" in which the saints participate as wedding guests and Bride (19.7, 9; 21.9). It is, too, the "book of life of the Lamb" which is opened to reveal their blessing (13.8), and it is "the throne of God and of the Lamb" which provides the temple of the new Jerusalem (21.22,23). Jesus Christ for His saints is, and remains, the Lamb: "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13.8).

There is a fundamental fault in the idea that the Lord, having lived His mortal life as a Lamb, should by His resurrection be transformed into a Lion. This would imply that His experiences in the days of His weakness were discarded and lost when He was glorified. It would be incongruous that the spotless life which the Lord lived, disclosing the "mind of Christ" which disciples are expected to emulate (Philippians 2.5-10), should no longer be the same by the time He became their High Priest. If the Lord was made in all points like His brethren, and was made perfect by His sufferings (Hebrews 2.10; 5.9; 7.26), then His perfection must include the things He learned by His suffering (Hebrews 5.8-9). What a different High Priest our Lord Jesus would be, if it were not possible to write of Him that "we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4.15-16), or again that "it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2.17-18. V

The Lord, will, of course, need to exert His irresistible power against the nations which rebel against Him on His return, but even here the initiative in fighting comes from them. The Lamb presents Himself to the nations which have given their power to "the Beast" in 17.13, and it is they who make war against Him, not the other way round, bringing upon themselves His vengeance and His victory. "The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers thereof take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed", and it is because of this that the Lord will "break them in pieces

with a rod of iron like a potter's vessel" (Psalm 2.2, 9). But to His faithful saints the Lord remains kind, merciful, showing mercy to their offences and giving grace to help in time of need. He died for them as the Lamb, and it will be as the Lamb that He makes them his Bride.

The world hates meekness, specially when it is thrust before it for emulation. Cain has always hated Abel, and the world chose typically when it chose Barabbas, the Cain of its generation, and rejected the Lord Jesus, its Abel, "killed the Prince of life, and desired a murderer to be granted unto it" (Genesis 4.1; Matthew 27.20; Luke 23.18; John 18.40; Acts 3.14). The disciples hear the Lord still saying, "Come unto Me: I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls" (Matthew 11.28-30).

Then why the Lion of Judah?

The title is used, and was certainly not intended to be ignored. It is surely the descent from Judah which provides the answer, and Genesis 49.9-10 the source. Judah is the tribe of the Lord's natural descent, and in all probability, as we have seen, the leader of the group of tribes which had the lion on its banner, being located on the east of the Tabernacle in the wilderness encampment (Numbers 2.3; Ezekiel 1.4, 10). That the lion was the symbol of

Judah is further supported by the heraldic castings around the throne of Solomon in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 9.18, 19). Is not John being told, therefore, that he may dry his tears because the appointed Heir to the throne, bearing the standard of Judah, but whose proper name is the Lamb of God, has overcome by the suffering of death, and is now fit to open the book of the future, and eventually to reign in power?

The Root of David.

We are more accustomed to think of the Lord as the Branch growing out of the root of David than as the Root itself (Isaiah 11.1, where the Hebrew word is *netser*; and Zechariah 3.8; 6.12; Jeremiah 23.5; 33.15, where it is *tsemach*), because the Lord is Son of David, descended from his stock. Yet "Root" He is in this passage; He is "Root and Offspring of David", combining both positions, in 22.16; and in Isaiah 11.10, quoted in Romans 15.10, He is the "root of Jesse". The word in LXX is the same as in the Apocalypse, and there can be no doubt that Revelation is referring to the passage in Isaiah.

We are back to the question the Lord asked of the Jews: "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matthew 22.42), and to the total inadequacy of the answer. "The Son of David." The Lord Jesus' origins go further back than David, for through Mary His mother He is Son of God, related in the first generation, as it

were, to the Creator Himself, stemming directly from the same Root from which Jesse and David by creation were formed; Scion of Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5.2). The One Who is now seated at the right hand of God is the One Who had said, "Before Abraham, was, I am" (John 8.58), now taking up in reality the promised "glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17.5). Though He owes His natural birth to a daughter of David, the Lord now claims His position as the One to Whose coming David Himself was merely a steppingstone; as David acknowledged in his prophecy, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool" (Psalm 110.1; Mark 12.36).

Having seven horns and seven eyes.

The seven eyes are present in the Old Testament in the stone set before Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3.9). The picture there has some parallels with Revelation, for Joshua (whose name is the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus, meaning 'Y:howah is Saviour') is falsely accused before the heavenly court by the Satan, or prosecutor (3.1). He is vindicated, freed from his filthy garments, clothed with fair robes, and crowned (Zechariah 3.3-5), and though he doubtless depicts the coming redemption of Israel from her very real sins, and the terms employed cannot without very great care be applied to our sinless Saviour, yet it is the fact that this Saviour did "bear our sins and carry our sorrows" (Isaiah 53.4-6), and it was through a shameful death that He came to be crowned with glory and honour (Psalm 8.5; Hebrews 2.5-10). The Lord is now possessed of these seven symbolic eyes, which are called "the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth", and therefore equivalent to His own claim, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and in earth", and also conveying that there is nothing which is hid from His eyes. By these spirits, or this Spirit, He can say to all lightstands, then and now, "I know thy works!" (3.1).

The seven horns we meet here for the first time in this Book. The other horned creatures of Revelation are evil and anti-Christian (12.3; 13.1, 11; 17.3, 7, 12, 16),. their powers being

joined in alliance against this Son of God and His Father. Here, though, the perfection of authority and power which horns denote is settled on its rightful Owner. The temporary alliances of the world will have their day of power, but ultimately the Lord will be victorious. The victory is built into His triumph over death. (For horns as symbols of power see Psalm 18.2; 89.17, 24; 92.10; 112.9; 132.17; Luke 1.69).

He came, and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne.

This was what John has been summoned to see. Revelation reveals its plan of disclosure. First the Lord must be displayed as the crucified but triumphant Saviour, and then the disclosure itself, which commences in 6.1, can be effected. All this earlier matter, vital and significant though it is, is preparing the ground. It is as important for the saint to know why and how the events will come to pass and be controlled, as it is for the events themselves to be laid out. The introduction has been long, but as pent with excitement for the reader as it was for the seer himself. The Apocalypse does not tell us about the future as a soothsayer might, but as a saint should want it, placing it all in the hands of the Saviour, and bidding us look on it as part of the outworking of the plan of salvation through Him. "It is expedient for you that I go away," Jesus had said (John 16.7), for the way He travelled leads to the Father's throne, and to the mediation which the Lord exercises thence. What He discloses from now on will always be intimately concerned with this heavenly temple-scene in which the Apocalypse is set, and with the wellbeing of the saints for whose sake it is given. Jesus has overcome, and is sat down with the Father on His throne (3.21), and from this Most Holy Place gives His revelation to John, using the Book which He has now taken from the Father's hand.

The reaction of the living creatures and the twenty four elders to the arrival of the Lamb is dramatic, and gives yet a further indication that the 'Old Testament' heavenly scene of 4.1-5.4 has now been transformed into the 'New Testament' scene of 5.5-14. What was formerly the glory of God, not yet called the Father, awaiting the coming and the triumph of His son, has now become what John had said in his Gospel it would be, the glory of Jesus too (John 12.41). The heavenly powers had hitherto been worshipping God alone, "He that sits on the throne" (4.10): they now fall down in adoration at the feet of the Lamb. The new era which was actually inaugurated at the Ascension (John 14, 1-3; Acts 2.33; Hebrews 9.24), is now testified in symbol as a vital part of the process of redemption and revelation: not only is there now, as always, one God, but there is also now "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2.5).

5.8: When He had taken the book the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; 5.9: and they sing a new song.

The heavenly powers which had rejoiced at Jesus' birth now rejoice in His victory. And the "new song" they sing to Jesus should by its very form be compared with the older song which they sang, and doubtless continue to sing, to His Father:

4.11: Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power, for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were and were created.

5.9: (To the Lamb), Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase to God with Thy bloodmen out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and I modest them to be a kingdom and priests; and they reign on the earth.

God is worthy as Creator; the Lamb is worthy as Redeemer. His victory over sin and death is the ground for sharing with Him the honours hitherto belonging to His Father only.

The same song is doubtless that referred to in 14.3, where it is said that no-one could learn it but the 144,000 (of which more will follow when we deal with chapter 7), itself a symbol for those whom Jesus has redeemed. In 15.3, it is called "the song of Moses and of the Lamb", which appropriately links the part played by Moses in mediating the redemption of Israel from Egypt with the extension of this by the Lord Jesus in delivering people of "all nations" (15.4) from their sins.

The Song of Moses in Exodus 15.1 concerns deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. That of Deuteronomy 31.19-30 anticipates the entry into the Promised Land, and is elaborated in 31.30-32.43 as an expression of the eternal purpose of God in choosing Israel so as to preserve and promote His purpose. The song is spoken to the people by Moses, "he and Hoshea the son of Nun" (32.44). But linguistically, and remarkably,

MOSES HOSHEA = MOSES JOSUAH = MOSES 4 JESUS = MOSES THE LAMB

- which is just what Revelation 15.3 calls the new song. This is the song of deliverance from bondage into the new inheritance, of which that achieved under Moses and Joshua was but a type, and it is of this that they sing who celebrate the work achieved for them by the sacrifice and resurrection of their Saviour, entering into the new rest of God from which sinful Israel remained excluded by their unbelief, even when they had gained entrance into Canaan (Hebrews 3.7-19; 4.14).

Harp and incense, and the prayers of the saints.

Apart from an ironical reference in 1 Corinthians 14.7, the only

substantive uses of the noun and verb for harp, kithara and kitharizo in NT are in Revelation (5.8; 14.2, 2; 18.22). The same word is used in LXX to translate rather over half the 44 occurrences of the Hebrew word *kinnowr*. The instrument is peculiarly concerned with the thanksgiving and praise, a very fitting meaning here as the Lamb emerges from His ordeal into the heavenly glory.

Harp of triumph are one thing, though. Incense and prayers of the saints are quite another, and introduce a new and grave element into the situation. This is the first occurrence of the word *thumiama*, incense, in the Apocalypse, the others being in 8.3, 4; 18.13. Indeed, in NT the word is rare enough, being used only of the experience of Zacharias when his son, John the Baptist, was promised (Luke 1.9-11), and once of the Tabernacle's altar of incense, or "golden censer" (*thumiaterion*). Hebrews 9.4). It is, always (save in the irrelevant 18.13) associated with prayers, and what more appropriate moment could there be to introduce this thought than that in which the Mediator has now been seen in God's presence, "ever living to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him" (Hebrews 7.25; Romans 8.27, 34)? The thought is carried a little further in 8.3, 4, where, before severe judgements are poured out on the earth, incense is added by the angel to the prayers of the saints, as though

to emphasize that "we know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered" (Romans 8.26). In times of deep crisis the believer needs to know that God pays respect to his need as well as to his knowledge, and will answer him, in accordance with his faith, "exceedingly abundantly, above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3.19-20).

"LORD, I have called on Thee: make haste to me; give ear to my voice when I call to Thee. Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141.1-2).

5.9: Men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, made to be to our God a kingdom and priests, and they reign on the earth.

A major point of interpretation arises here: in AV the singers are made to say, "Thou hast redeemed us to God . . . and hast made us ... kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth", and if this were sustained it would mean that the living creatures and elders are, after all, the saints, and that the heavenly scene is, in spite of all that has been written here, one including the future kingdom. This would apply to chapter 4, where there is no Lamb, as well as to chapter 5, and the whole picture of the structure of these two — and following — chapters might be thrown into confusion. Fortunately, the problem does not arise, because the

AV rendering is almost certainly wrong. The matter is of such importance, though, that it ought not to be dismissed without a rather thorough investigation. Here is an uncensored selection of English-language versions:

A V — Thou hast redeemed US ... hast made US ... WE shall reign . . .

RV — Thou didst purchase MEN . . . madest THEM . . . THEY reign . . .

RSV — Thou didst ransom MLIN . . . hast made iritivi . . . THEY shall reign ...

N ASB — Thou didst purchase MEN . . . has made THEM . . . THEY will reign . . .

NEB — Thou didst purchase MEN . . . has made of THEM . . . THEY shall reign . . .

JB — You bought MEN . . . made THEM a line of kings and priests . . .

NIV — You purchased MEN . . . have made THEM . . . THEY will reign.

The same view is supported by Berkeley, Phillips, Weymouth, Twentieth Century NT, and the standard translations in several modern languages other than English. The AV rendering is supported by the Catholic Douay and Knox translations (but not by the Catholic New American Bible), and it is obviously dependence on the Latin Vulgate ("redemisti NOS . . . fecisti NOS regnum . . . regnAMIBUS super terram") which has conditioned the more traditional Catholic translations. Aland & Black prefer the majority view (though with only "C" probability), and Alford's Greek Testament concludes that "us" is likely to be a later insertion arising from a prevalent early interpretation of the elders as Apostles and Prophets, rather than to be omitted to support the view that these beings were angels.

The consensus is strong in itself. This, together with the great internal consistency of the interpretation offered above, seems decisive. This will appear even more clearly when we consider the fact that the redeemed, when they do appear beyond doubt in the vision do so as people, 144,000 or a great multitude, and the elders are still present in their own right, with the living creatures too (7.11), which is just about decisive. The elders and the living creatures are not the saints in the kingdom to come.

5.11:7 saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was 10,000 x 10,000 and 1000s of 1000s. Once again, the multitude of the heavenly hosts (Luke 2.13) is praising and singing, but now praising the Lamb in His victory as

well as God in His eternal glory. The numbers are those of Daniel 7.10, and correspond also to the "innumerable hosts of angels" of Hebrews 12.22. An idle thought notes that the total number exceeds 100 millions, if it were to be construed literally which, when we consider the present population of the earth as perhaps 4000 millions is no tax on the imagination. A Psalm speaks of "the chariots of God" as being "twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands", no doubt meaning that the heavenly forces are beyond computation. Compared with the figures given here, though, the mere 80,000 angels which the Lord Jesus said were available to Him for the asking (Matthew 26.53) would have represented a negligible drain on the divine resources. Luke's "multitude of the heavenly host" gives a certain literality to the present verse, and it is small wonder that Jacob was impressed with the size of the two hosts of angels at Mahanaim (Genesis 32.1). It is remarkable that Jacob, in his awareness of this great number of angels in the background, should have struggled with a single angel (32.24) when he had forded the brook Jabbok by night, while the Lord should know of and reject the twelve legions of angels, having crossed over the brook Kidron to wrestle with God in prayer with the one angel by His side to comfort Him (Luke 22.43; John 18.1).

Once more, the context of the resurrection and ascension is stressed by the presence of this multitude of angels, the Lord being exalted at His Father's right hand, "angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him" (1 Peter 3.22).

5.12: Saying with a great voice: Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might, and honour and glory and blessing. 5.13: and every created thing which is in the heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying: Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory and the dominion for ever and ever.

The swelling chorus is reaching its climax. This marvellous Book is not to be thought of for a moment only as a Book of problems and difficulties and controversies. There is sublime and divine artistry in this glorious symphony of praise. God is worthy of praise as Creator and Planner. So say the living creatures and the elders (4.9-11). Jesus is worthy of praise as Sufferer and Redeemer. So say the same small choir again (5.8-11). God has rightly given all honour to the triumphant Lamb, chorus the massed heavenly choir of angels which had been silently waiting the time of victory, since they first rejoiced at His birth. What remains? Only that every created thing, wherever it is to be found, above, here on the ground, in the seas and from the graves,

should join in the panorama of expectation of the final universal bringing of the world to the feet of God. So living creatures, elders, millions of angels, and created things like the sand of

the sea and the stars of heaven assemble their voices in deafening exultation as they salute together the Lord of Creation and His Son for their joint triumph:

"To Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing and the honour, and the glory and the dominion, for ever and ever.

5.14: The four living creatures said, AMEN, and the elders fell down and worshipped.

That one word was needed. The time of rejoicing is only here in anticipation in this chapter. The multitudes on the earth have a long time to wait before they will actually sing this song, and angelic rejoicing must be muted for a long while yet. But God has set to His seal that the work shall be accomplished, and those sitting and standing closest to that divine pair joined together in loving unity of purpose on the throne can only worship before the certainty they have seen and say, but for all of us, So may it be:

AMEN!

Note: THE LAMB

There are three words translated "lamb" in NT. One, the relatively rare *aren*, is found in Luke 10.3, in the genitive case, only ("I sent you forth as lambs among wolves"). A second, *arnion*, is the most common only because it appears numerous times in the Book of Revelation (5.6, 8, 12, 13; 6.1, 16; 7.9, 10, 14, 17; 12.11; 13.8,11; 14.1,4,4, 10; 15.3; 17.14, 14; 19.7,9;21.9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22.1, 3), for elsewhere it is found only once, and that, too, in the writings of John (John 21.15, "Feed My lambs"). The third, *amnos*, occurs four times only, of which two are in John (1.29, 36, "Behold the Lamb of God", the words of John the Baptist), and the other two in Acts 8.32; 1 Peter 1.19, both of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. In LXX *arnion* is rare (Psalm 114.4, 6; Jeremiah 11.19; 27.45), while *amnos* is found about 100 times in connection with lambs for sacrifice. Vine (EDNTW in loc), observes, "The contrast between *arnion* and *amnos* does not lie in the diminutive character of the former as compared with the latter . . . The contrast lies in the manner in which Christ is represented in the two respects. The use of *amnos* points directly to the fact, the nature and character of His sacrifice; *arnion* . . . presents Him, on the ground of His sacrifice, but in His acquired majesty, dignity, honour, authority, and power." It is hard to see the slightest justification for, and even very much meaning in, this pronouncement. *Arnion* is used in a diminutive sense (though compared with *probaton*, sheep) in John 21,16, 17; and may it not be that the Apocalypse uses this word to denote the utter dependence of the Lord Jesus Christ on His God and Father, so that when He enters into the divine glory it is because He has emptied Himself, become helpless and obedient

even unto death, and has waited upon God for deliverance with no more human expectations that those entertained by a sheep for the slaughter. In that event the other Gospels and John the Baptist refer to Jesus as a sacrificial Lamb, while the Lord Himself, in the Apocalypse, puts Himself on the same level of dependence and

needs as He put the young sheep which He first committed to

Peter's care.

Excursus V: Prayer and Praise to the Lord Jesus Christ

There are three main attitudes which might be taken up about the position of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to the godhead. The one sees Him as eternal God in His Second person, Who took flesh of His own volition to become man in all man's weakness, and subsequently, having died as an atoning sacrifice, resumed the full powers of His eternal divine nature, now both the Eternal God the Son, and the immortal glorified Man. In essence this is the position adopted in what we call The Doctrine of the Trinity. The opposite extreme to this sees Jesus as man like the rest of us, and essentially nothing more, though His harmony with His Maker was such that He had bestowed upon Him the honorary title of Son of God, not because He was differently born or begotten from other men, but as a tribute to His extreme godliness. This is in essence the teaching of the Unitarians as we know them today.

Between the two is the position of the writer of this exposition, that the Lord Jesus Christ was begotten by God by way of the Holy Spirit, whereby God became the Father, and Jesus was born as the Son. He lived His life as a fully temptable human being must, and overcame the sin to which His nature disposed Him, never yielding to its impulses and always, in thought, word, and deed, doing the will of His Father. As a result of this, He was raised from the dead, caused to ascend into heaven, and placed in possession of the power and authority to which we have already referred.

Now a Unitarian could hardly offer prayer to Jesus as though He were God, since he entertains no such view of His person. A Trinitarian, on the other hand, might be expected to feel free to address his prayers to the supposedly triune Godhead as a whole, or perhaps to any of its supposed hypostases individually, as in a well known hymn whose verses begin successively:

ETERNAL FATHER, strong to save, Whose arm hath bound the restless wave. O CHRIST, whose voice the waters heard, and stopped their raging at Thy word. O HOLY SPIRIT, Who didst brood upon the waters dark and rude: ending each of the supplications with the identical words: O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril on the sea.

though it is this writer's view that such petitions are not so much trinitarian as tritheistic, treating each of the 'Persons' as a separate God with particular spheres of interest and potency.

Nevertheless, what is the subject of prayer in verse is not, in fact, the general practice in sober prose of those who accept the doctrine of the Trinity. At least until recent times there was a remarkably scriptural approach to the protocol of prayer in the official bre-

viaries. For example, in the section on "Morning Prayer" in the non-revised version of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer, the "General Confession" begins, "Almighty and most merciful Father"; the "Absolution" which follows begins, "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"; the "Second Collect" begins, "O God, who art the author of peace", and plainly means the Father since the same prayer concludes with "through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen." And it would be possible to be tediously convincing on the point by reciting ad infinitum numerous other examples to the same effect. In fact holders of the Doctrine of the Trinity deny frequently in practice what they affirm in theory, that the Father and the Son are eternally and co-equally God.

It is the more surprising in the light of this that there has grown up in recent times, by no means confined to Trinitarian circles, a movement to address prayers to Jesus as a Person

independently. Unitarians may feel inhibited from doing this, but both Trinitarians, and those who, like this author, see Jesus as the One Whom the Father holds highly exalted because of His victory over sin, may well feel that the One Who did so much by dying to redeem men to their Clod, and Who is certainly alive and sitting at the right hand of the Father, can be addressed in prayer and praise. It is very much a modern phenomenon, or at least a modern recrudescence, but it deserves sympathetic consideration for all that; and the ground for introducing consideration of it here is the unquestionable attribution of praise to "the Lamb" in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 currently before us.

They fell down before the Lamb, . . . , saying, Worthy art Thou to take the Book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase to God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, . . . (5.8-10).

Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing. (5.12).

To Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. (5.13).

Which can be followed up from the later part of the Book with: Even so, Come, Lord Jesus (22.20),

words which are undeniably addressed to the Son of God.

However, in discussing whether it is proper or desirable or allowable to address prayers to the Lord Jesus personally, it ought to be agreed at once that the passages here quoted from the Apocalypse do not decide in favour of this practice. For in chapter 5 the praises (they are not prayers) are accorded to the Lord Jesus by the heavenly powers designated as the Living Creatures and the Elders and the heavenly hosts. They are not directly, if at all, concerned with how the believers on earth should address themselves to heaven in prayer; while in 22.20 the petition is a direct answer to the Lord's own words, "Behold, I come quickly." The answer, whether given by John, or by the angel or angels in attendance, could hardly have been other than "Please do as You

say!", and this would afford no precedent for prayers on the part of those of later ages who have not participated in this process of revelation.

What we have to do now is to go to the other parts of Scripture in which the proper address in prayer is spoken of, and let these be our guide. The analysis which follows attempts to do this, and the general answer which emerges from it is clear and convincing.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Epistles, and Apocalypse, then, we have something like the following breakdown:

1

Invocations of grace and peace from the Father and the Son: Romans 1.7; 1 Corinthians 1.3; 2 Corinthians 1.2; 13.14; Galatians 1.3; Ephesians 1.1; 6.23; Philip-pians 1.2; Colossians 1.2 A.V.; 1 Thessalonians 1.1 A.V.; 3.11; 2 Thessalonians 1.2; 2.16; 1 Timothy 1.2; Titus 1.4;

Philemon 3; 2 Peter 1.2; 2 John 3; Revelation 1.4; 7.10-12.

2

Invocation of the grace of Jesus, without reference to

the Father. Romans 16.30; 1 Corinthians 16.23; Galatians 6.18; 2 Timothy 4.22 AV; Philemon; i 25.

3

Thanks and petition to the Father through the Son:

Romans 1.8; 5.11; 7.25; 15.6; 16.25-27; 1 Corinthians 15.57; Ephesians 5.19-20; Philippians 2.10-11; 4.6-7; Colossians 3.17; Hebrews 4.14-16; 13.15, 20-21; 1 John 2.1; 5.13-17; Jude 24-25 RV; Ephesians 2.18; 3.12.

4

The same to God, as "the Father of Jesus Christ": 2

Corinthians 1.3; Ephesians 1.3, 17; Colossians 1.3; 1 Peter 1.3; Revelation 22.21.

5

The same to the Father without mention of the Son:

Romans 6.17; 10.1; 11.1; 14.6; 15.13, 30.33; 1 Corinthians 1.3; 14.18, 25; 2 Corinthians 8.16; 9.11, 15; Galatians 1.5; Ephesians 3.14-21 RV; Philippians 4.20; Colossians 1.12; 1 Thessalonians 1.2; 5.23; 2 Thessalonians 1.3, 11; 2.13; 1 Timothy 1.16; 6.15-16; James 1.5; 1 Peter 1.17; 4.19; 5.10-11; Revelation 11.17; 15.3-4.

6

Glory accorded to Jesus Christ: 2 Peter 3.18; Revelation 1.5; 5.9-14.

7

Prayer to Jesus Christ specifically: 2 Corinthians 12.8-9; 1 Timothy 1.12; Acts 1.24-25; 7.59; 9.5, 10; 10.14; 22.10, 19; 26.15.

These last, in view of our subject, deserve particular attention. The first concerns Paul personally in relation to his own immediate problem, and cannot be extended to others. The same applies to 1 Timothy 1.12. Acts 1.24-25 is a specific request by Peter that the Lord will choose His own apostle to replace Judas, and has no relevance to later times. Acts 7.59 concerns Stephen, in receipt of a vision of the Lord Jesus, personally, and cannot with any

confidence be extended further. Acts 9.5, 10 are specific revelations to Saul and Ananias which again have no relevance to later times.

Acts 10.14, if it is relevant to all, concerns Peter only in a direct revelation. Acts 22.10, 19 are peculiar to Paul in similar circumstances, as is 26.15.

For the rest, the overwhelming evidence is that petitions to Jesus were not the norm, even on the part of those who had been or still were closest to Him. His grace, with that of His Father, is certainly invoked on the ecclesias, and glory is certainly accorded to Him, but prayers to Him are almost entirely absent. When we couple this with the fact that the Lord Jesus Himself invited, not prayers to Himself when He should be exalted, but that men should approach the Father in His name, the evidence is well — nigh irresistible that to pray directly to the Son is an innovation which conforms neither to New Testament practice nor to the Lord's own will. (John 14.13, 14; 15.16; 16.23, 26).

This is no way intended to weaken the honour which it is our glory and pleasure to ascribe to the Lord Jesus. It is our duty to bow before His Name, and our glad confession that all authority has been given to Him by His Father. But the Lord Whose earthly life was devoted to doing His Father's will and seeking His honour is best served by following His own counsel and precedents.

Chapter 6 Revelation 6:1-17

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST SIX SEALS (6.1-17) The Time Periods of the Apocalypse

There are no time periods at all mentioned in this chapter. Yet well-known expositions of the Book of Revelation present us with elaborate time-charts in which the events predicted in the Book are related to specific periods of history, and as a first step to evaluating whether this is the right way of interpreting the Apocalypse, it is well to form an impression as to how important, or how unimportant, actual datings are considered to be by the Author of the Book Himself. Here, then, is a list of the occasions when numbers which might conceivably be indications of periods of time are given:

1.

2.10

Tribulation ten days for the congregation in Smyrna.

2.

8.1

Silence in heaven about half an hour after the opening of the 7th Seal.

3.

9.5,10

Torment of men by locusts for five months.

4.

9.15

The hour and day and month and year at which the 4 angels were released at Euphrates.

5.

11.2

Treading underfoot of the holy city for forty two months.

6.

11.3

Preaching by the Two Witnesses for a thousand two hundred and sixty days.

7.

11.9, 11

The Witnesses' dead body lies in the street for three and a half days.

8.

12.6

The woman is in the wilderness for a thousand two hundred and sixty days.

9.

12.14

The woman nourished in the wilderness for a time, times, and half a time.

10.

13.5

The power of the Beast from the sea exercised for forty two months.

11.

17.12

Ten kingdoms receive power one hour with the Beast.

12.

18.10, 17,19

In one hour the judgement of Babylon is come.

13.

20.2,

The binding of the dragon for a thousand years.

3,7

14.

20.4

The saints reign with Christ for a thousand years.

15.

20.5

The resurrection of "the rest of the dead" after a thousand years.

Some of these periods may prove to be equivalent. Thus 42 months, 3.5 times, and 1,260 days probably represent the same length of time, and could arguably relate to the same actual period. Again, all the "thousand year" references of chapter 20 might prove, as most people including this author believe, to be the same period. The "one hour" of references 11 and 12 above could also be the same, if it refers to a specific length of time at all. Finally, the numbers of reference 4 might refer to a period of 391 days and 1 hour (assuming a year of 360 days), or they might mean, "for that precise instant", without specifying a time-interval at all.

There are at least three supposed precedents in the Old Testament for believing that days may sometimes be symbolic of years, none of them fully adequate. Thus the Prophecy of Seventy Weeks in Daniel, which certainly denotes 490 years, is of seventy "sevens" of the type of unit which Daniel has been enquiring about ("the number of years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet" Daniel 9.2, 24-27), and is therefore not concerned with weeks of days at all. In Ezekiel 4.4-6 the prophet lies on his side for periods of days which correspond to the experience of Israel and Judah in years: but he is plainly told that this is what he is doing. The one is no cryptic symbol for the other. While in Numbers 14.34 the symbolism is actually reversed! Israel is to suffer for 40 years in the wilderness, corresponding to the 40 days the spies spent in Canaan. This provides an uncertain foundation for any supposed "day-for-year" principle.

In any case, however, even were the principle admitted as proved, the figures in Revelation are quite inadequate to provide a historical framework. Most of the dates offered in interpretations which assume this principle are obtained from history books, without any kind of confirmation from the Apocalypse itself.

Moreover, the dates are of very uneven length, varying from Vz hour, through 1 hour, to ZVz days and 10 days, on to 1 year 1 month 1 day 1 hour, and then through 3Vz years to 1000 years. If all these figures were interpreted on the day-for-year principle,

they can be seen to vary in length when decoded from 7 1/z days to 360,000 years or more.

This is recognized and disallowed by those who propound the principle. By tortuous double applications of the principle or something like it, the 7¹/₂ days becomes 15 years, and the 3¹/₂ days becomes 3¹/₂ months of days and so 105 years; while the 1000 years is not interpreted at all, but is taken literally.

A "principle" which can be ignored or adjusted at random and which has to be left on one side in the many undated sections of this Book cannot be regarded as a very reliable guide to our understanding of it.

THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SEALS

While it is the general purpose of this exposition to let the Book of Revelation speak for itself as to its meaning, one cannot ignore the fact that the historical interpretation has secured a very wide following, and it seems important that it should be seen at its true value if alternatives are to be listened to with respect and attention.

Deviating, therefore, from the original intention of "Apocalypse for Everyman" to be purely constructive, and let other views stand or fall by their merits as readers perceived them, I have decided to use some very helpful notes provided by my cousin, J.B. Norris, to put the historical interpretation to a significant test. The following is a summary of his notes on the interpretation of the Seals.

The seals have been held to represent Roman history from the end of the 1st century to the middle of the 4th. Perhaps the clearest presentation of this view is to be found in R. Roberts, "Thirteen Lectures" (on the Apocalypse) (TL), and C. C. Walker, "Notes on the Apocalypse" (NA).

The first four Seals reveal four horses and their riders, said to represent the Roman state, appeal being made to the scholarly work of E. B. Elliott, "Horae Apocalypticæ" (HA), Volume I, part I, Introduction. Here the author cites extant coins and other evidences to show the use of the horse as a symbol of Roman power but appears to arrive at his conclusion somewhat negatively by disputing other possibilities. It is not surprising to find the war-horse figuring on certain Roman coins, but normally the coinage pictured some important local event or imperial achievement. The horse is not an outstanding emblem of the Roman empire.

THE FIRST SEAL: THE WHITE HORSE (6.1-2). In TL this appears to be given a double interpretation, first as a work of righteousness and peace to which Rome was subjected by the preaching of the gospel, represented by the rider with a bow "but no arrows" (sic); and second of the peaceful condition of the Roman Empire from 98 to 180. The second is open to ques-

tion, as we can see from this summary:

Trajan (98-117): Two major wars, in Lower Danube (101-106) and against the Parthians (113-117). Bloody struggle with the Jews all over the Mediterranean area (115-117).

Hadrian (117-138). Peaceful on the whole, but at the beginning of this reign he had to crush Samaritans, Moors (twice) and Britons, his celebrated wall being built in 122. Later he had to quell a determined Jewish rebellion (133-135) in which more than 1/2 million Jews were slain and many more perished by hunger, fire, and pestilence.

Antoninus Pius (138-161). No major wars, but rebellions and invasions everywhere, including Britain, Mauretania, Germany, Judaea, Greece, Egypt, Dania and North Africa. "It was peace where there was no peace" (Cambridge Ancient History, CAH, 11.337).

Marcus Aurelius (161-180). One long catalogue of war, plague, and famine. Invasions and revolts in Britain, Armenia, and Syria. Years of war with Parthians, Germans, Samaritans and Moors followed.

Conclusion: It is hardly true that "peace . . . prevailed to a great extent during the First Seal Period" (TL, p. 46).

THE SECOND SEAL: THE RED HORSE (6.3-4). This is said to cover the period 211 to 235 (TL), disgraced by numerous assassinations. But the symbol denotes war, not assassination as claimed by TL and N A, as will be seen in the commentary below. There was warfare, indeed, during this period, but the period was no more remarkable for war than the entire period from 161 to the end of the Western Empire in 476, and for centuries after that.

THE THIRD SEAL: THE BLACK HORSE (6.5-6), said in TL to cover the period 211-235. The black colour is fitting for mourning and woe and near-famine, or at least inflation, as suggested by the rest of the symbolism. But this period was no more marked by famine than were others: indeed, there was worse in the troubled half century which followed, while the last half of the period to which this seal is ascribed was quite good under the beneficent reign of Alexander Severus, to whose mother the Roman Christian Hippolytus dedicated a treatise on the resurrection.

FOURTH SEAL: THE PALE HORSE (6.7-8). The symbolism is a fair representation of the terrible era of Roman history from 235-284, but the rest of the symbolism fits far less well. A weakness is the attempt to link "the fourth part of the earth" with the supposed extreme suffering of Italy, one of the four imperial prefectures. But this is not the case: all parts of the Empire suffered frightfully.

THE FIFTH SEAL: SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR (6.9-11). Certainly the symbolism points to persecution, and it is suggested that the reference is to exceptionally severe persecutions under Diocletian. But there had been severe persecution under Marcus Aurelius (161-180) and Septimus Severus (193-211), Decius (249-251), and Valerian (253-259). For the first 18 years of Diocletian

(284-305) Christians were not persecuted, but really severe persecution began in 303. Suffering was terrible in the East until 311, but in the west the moderation of Constantius and his son Constantine (afterwards emperor), considerably softened the impact of Diocletian's decrees. The statement of TL, p. 53 that "these terrible visitations upon believers extended throughout the Roman Empire" is hardly correct.

THE SIXTH SEAL: THE GREAT DAY. Here the symbolism is held to refer to the overthrow of paganism during the reign of Constantine. The really awesome nature of the symbols is far from supporting this view. It is true that persecution of Christians ceased, and "the church" received many favours and privileges, but paganism was not ended. Constantine and his successors retained the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus (high priest of the old state pagan religion), protected the freedom of worship of pagans as well as of Christians, and showed pagan as well as Christian symbols on their coins. Constantine built two pagan

temples in his new capital of Constantinople. His policy was not so much to crush paganism as gradually to undermine its influences. There was no violent overthrow such as is demanded by the symbolism of this Seal.

THE SEVENTH SEAL: SILENCE IN HEAVEN (8.1). This is said to denote the peace which prevailed during the later years of Constantine. But there were wars with Alamanni, Goths, and Persians, and the "church" was greatly troubled by the so-called Donatist schism, and then by the long Arian controversy. There is a comprehensiveness about this seal in any case which cannot be confined within so narrow a compass. This will be discussed in a later historical note.

There is an important moral to be drawn from this survey. One exposition of the Apocalypse produces historical facts, which can only be assessed by a competent historian as to whether they represent a balanced view of the situation. The ordinary reader is not such a historian. It seems to this writer that J.B. Norris has already produced good evidence which is sufficient to make us doubt (to say no more) whether an acceptable interpretation of Scripture can be based on the view of history we have hitherto been offered. This is not to doubt the good faith of those who offered it: there has been, and is, far too much doubting of good faith already, and it is no bad thing if we all seek to be appreciative and understanding of the efforts of others to open to us the Scriptures. But the plain fact is that many Bible-readers have been put off seeking to understand the Apocalypse because of the critical knowledge of history which it has appeared to demand; and many others have been content to accept the view of the Book offered to them by respected leaders, learning the history — if they learned it at all, — in the form in which it was provided, and without either the time or the inclination to put it to critical test. It is this fact, among others, which has made the dogmatism

of many a non-historian about the meaning of the Apocalypse so unbecoming, and the intolerance so — intolerable!

But a further question is raised by this critical survey of the history of the supposed Seal-period. If the layman cannot be sure of the history, how can he ever be sure of the interpretation? And was it really the intention of the Lord Jesus to leave His servants at the mercy of competing historians if they would reap the blessings which He offers to those who read and understand (1.3)? Bible-knowledge, Yes, this is indispensable, and one of the immediate blessings which this Book affords is to require its discerning reader to familiarize himself with other parts of Scripture upon which the Book so heavily depends: but history is not the same: that is man's assessment of what has gone on in the world, and while it can be profitable to make it, one wonders whether it is likely to be essential. If "the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3.15), may they not do much to provide the wisdom needed to understand their own last Book? We are, at this point of the Book, on the threshold of finding out.

6.1-8: The four horses: white, red, black, and pale.

The interpretation considered historically above assumed that each of the four horses had its own historical period, running consecutively and continuously and not overlapping: that there was a "White Horse Period", a "Red Horse Period", and so on. But this assumption is nowhere suggested by the text itself, and does not conform to the analogy of other parts of Scripture. For:

6.1: When the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as with a voice of thunder, Come!

The words might mean "Come and see!" As in A.V., or they might mean "Come on to the scene!" as implied in R.V., and since John would have been looking intently in any case the latter is the more likely and the more dramatic. At all events the white horse does come out, and there is no indication whatever that at the conclusion of its errand it returned with its rider to stable. There is no command, "Now go back!" and no suggestion that it ever did. The same is true of the other three horses. For all the record tells us to the contrary there could have been a rapid breaking of these four Seals on the sealed scroll, followed by the emergence each in its turn of the four horses, and John might very quickly have seen four horses operating together on the earth's stage.

This is probable on Old Testament grounds. In Zechariah 1.7-11 the prophet sees in vision a man riding a red horse, behind whom there are "horses red, sorrel and white" which, evidently

concurrently, "walk to and fro through the earth". In 6.1-8 he sees four chariots come out from between two mountains, drawn respectively by red, black, white, and grisled bay horses, described as the "four winds of heaven" which go through the earth in different directions, and evidently operate simultaneously. With this background it seems quite clear that, in default of statement to the contrary, the situation in Revelation 6 is the same, and four horses are found together, doing whatever they have to do on the earth at the Lord's command.

Even if we cannot immediately discover it, there must be some relevance in the careful revelation of the Spirit that each successive horse was introduced by a different living creature:

Se

al Living Creature

Horse and horseman

1

First: like a lion

White: rider with bow and crown, conquering and to conquer.

2

Second: like a calf

Red: with power to take peace from the earth, armed with a sword.

3

Third: like a man

Black: rider with a scale; famine or scarcity on the earth.

4

Fourth: like an eagle

Pale green: called Death and followed by Hades.

Nothing systematic emerges at once from this. The creature like a lion reminds us of the Lion of the tribe of Judah which turns out to be the Lamb of God (5.5-6), and we shall see other excellent reasons for believing that it is indeed the work of the Lord Jesus primarily considered under this Seal; but an attempt to fasten similar identifications on the other three living creatures might be judged fanciful, and there is no desire to cumber this book with insubstantial suggestions. Suffice it that all the many facets of God's heavenly entourage — all four living creatures — are involved in and concerned with what is to happen on the earth.

The Seals and the Olivet Prophecy

The parallels between Revelation 6-8, the first of these in particular, and the Lord Jesus' prophecy reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, have often been drawn, and the following table may help to bring to mind some of the relevant points:

Revelation

Matthew

Mark

Luke

Topic

Elsewhere in Revelation

6.1-2

24.14

13.10

Conquest (by the gospel)

19.11,19,21

6.3-4

24.6,7

13,7,8

21.9,10

War

6.5-6

24.7

13.8

21.11

Famine

18.8

6.7-8

24.7AV

21.11

Pestilence

6.9

11

24.12

Loss of faith

6.11

24.14

13.10

Witness under persecution

7.13; 20.4; 11.3-10

6.12

24.7

13.8

21.11

Earthquake

8.5; 16.18

6.12

24.29

13.24

21.25

Signs in sun, moon and stars

8.12; 16.8

6.13

24.32

13.28

21.29

Parable of the fig tree

6.14

24.35

13.31

21.33

Passing away of the heavens

16.20

6.16

(23.30)

Hiding in mountains and rocks

6.17

21.36

Who shall be able to stand?

11.16

7.1

24.31

13.27

The four winds

7.3

21.18,28

The servants of God sealed (?)

7.14

24.9-21

Out of the great tribulation

8.3

21.36

Prayers of the saints

5.8

8.5 24.27

Lightning

4.5; 11,19; 16.18

The parallels are unmistakeable, and it is impossible not to suppose that the Seals and the Olivet Prophecy deal with related events. In the Olivet Prophecy, however, the "wars and rumours of wars", "famines and earthquakes in divers places", and "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world", to name only a few examples from the Matthew record, are not located at particular periods during our dispensation. There are no doubt special periods when these things are more evident than at others, but the phenomena are characteristic of the entire epoch since the Lord Jesus ascended. Though there were particular manifestations at, say, the destruction of Jerusalem, there have been plenty of other occasions when war, famine, pestilence and earthquakes have devastated the world, and the first four Seals can be readily understood as the Lord Jesus' revelation that the world in which the gospel is being preached will not be making constant progress towards the Utopia of the kingdom of God, but will be beset with evils which will plague it until the Lord returns. "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth," He had said, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword," (Matthew 10.34). All the phenomena will doubtless be at their worst just before the Lord returns, but there is no warrant in the description of the Seals for supposing that special epochs are designated for the operation of the first four, either separately or together.

6.2:7 saw and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a

bow; and there was given to him a crown: and he came forth

conquering and to conquer.

The association of whiteness with righteousness makes it natural to associate this Seal with preaching the gospel of the righteous Saviour. No attention should be paid to the fact that no arrows are mentioned, since a bow would be useless without

arrows, and the argument would at best be one of silence. In the Old Testament bows are often referred to without mention of arrows, and arrows without bows, yet no one doubts that the one requires the other. On the next page the references to both are set out in full, with crosshatching when they are mentioned together. The result is convincing reason for rejecting all talk of an "arrow-less bow". The rider of this horse was given the weaponry He needed for the work He had to do.

In Zechariah 10.4 the "corner stone, the nail, and the battle bow" are all associated with the tribe of Judah, and all together give a strongly messianic flavour to the symbol (Psalm 118.2; Isaiah 22.23, 25). Moreover, a bow is an excellent symbol for the power of the Lord to operate from afar, as the Old Testament examples on the next page will show.

There was given Him a crown.

The Rider is now identified, either as the Lord Jesus Himself, or as someone acting on His behalf. The original Outworker of the gospel is here, though no doubt the conquests which He wins are done through His servants bearing His message among men. He, the Lord, though made lower than the angels, is now "crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2.7, 9), but on account of this those who have been made to their God a royal priesthood have also

gained a crown which it is" their duty to guard (Revelation 3.11). The preachers of the gospel do their work as the legates of their King.

Conquering, and to conquer.

The Lord has already conquered sin and death for Himself, and in principle for His followers also. In the present context the word "conquer" practically defines the One to Whom, with His followers no doubt, it refers. For it is nikaff, rendered so many times "overcome", already encountered in this Book in 8 places, and again, with the rendering "prevail" in 5.5. Indeed, of all its 28 occurrences in the New Testament (all save 3 in the writings of John), there are only three (Luke 11.22; Revelation 11.7; 13.7) which do not refer to the victory of the Lord Jesus, or His followers through Him, over sin and its agents. Certainly this Horseman is the Lord, and His weapon is the ministry of the word. But the conquest is past, present and future. He has overcome sin and death; He is acting still, with the "weapons of our warfare which are mighty through God for the casting down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10.4) for the conversion of sinners who will receive Him. And there is the final victory to come, for Him and for His followers (Revelation 15.2; 17.14).

6.4: Another horse came forth, a red horse, and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given to him a great sword.

The passage already quoted (Matthew 10.34) shows how true this message of bloodshed was to be in the Christian era. It was not just that wars would continue, but that their cause would often lie in the reaction of men to the message of the gospel, "Christian" peoples fighting against "heretics", and claiming the blessing of God on their own part in the bloodletting. "Wars and rumours of wars" (Luke 21.9), again heightening in intensity as the end draws near, were never to cease even in the era when so many men professed to bear the banner of the Prince of Peace.

A great sword.

This may be an unhappy translation of the word makhaira. No doubt the real "great sword" is the rhompaia which is found in Luke 2.35, and in this Book in 1.16; 2.12, 16; 6.8; 19.15, 21. But it is going altogether too far to equate the word with a specialist term for a 'dagger', and so refer it particularly to a time supposed to be characterized by a spate of assassinations. The word is easily the most common one for sword in NT, and very clearly refers to an ordinary fighting weapon on every assignable occasion, rather than the assassin's knife. The references in full are: Matthew 10.34; 26.47, 51, 52, 55; Mark 14.43, 47, 48; Luke 21.24; 22.36, 38, 49, 52; John 18.10, 11; Acts 12.2; 16.27; Romans 8.35; 13.4; Ephesians 6.17; Hebrews 4.12; 11.34, 37; Revelation 6.4; 13.10, 10, 14. On none of these occasions is the idea of assassination in mind, and on most of them it would be incongruous, even grotesque. Death in battle is the clear import of the sword in this Seal.

6.5: I saw, and behold a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand.

The link between the Seals and the Olivet Prophecy would certainly associate this Seal with famine (Matthew 24.7), or at least with food shortage. So would the prices mentioned, for a 'measure, is a khoinix, which occurs only in this place, and is said to amount to about 1 litre, less than 2 English pints and about 1 U.S. quart. For that measure, at the prices mentioned

here, one would be paying about a day's wage (Matthew 20.2) which, according to Vine (ED) is about 8 times the normal price for those times, and only enough for "a person of moderate appetite for a day". There were very severe famines associated with the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 4.10; 5.10), and again by the Romans in 70, as Moses had predicted (Leviticus 26.26, 26); but it would not seem that the Lord is concentrating His attention on Jerusalem, since in Matthew 24.7 He speaks of famines and

earthquakes "in divers places". One such fulfillment is reported in Acts 11.28 in the shape of the "great famine which came over all the inhabited earth" in the days of Claudius Caesar, which was certainly not restricted to Jerusalem.

6.6: / heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

Once again the prophecy seems to be general rather than particular, and to be concerned with recurring ills which should afflict the earth over an unspecified period. Doubtless such events, again, will be at their worst in the culmination of the happenings which bring the Lord back to the earth, but a world where famines are by no means rare the Lord's prophecy has been proved to be true many times over, and it would be very difficult, and almost certainly misguided, to try to date events from such a prediction of shortage as this.

Strangely, the strong parallel with the relief of the siege of Samaria in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 7.1-20) appears to have been overlooked. There, when the Syrians fled, food was taken from their deserted camp, and "a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel". The measure here is a s'ah, said to have been one third of an ephah, itself (from a maze of conflicting estimates occupying more than four close-printed columns in Smith's Bible Dictionary) seems to have been around 8 litres, 1 Vz English gallons or so, and around 2 U.S. gallons. If the shekel of those days was the same as the stater of NT (Matthew 17.27 only), this would be about 4 denarii ('pence'), and so about half the price for a given measure given in Revelation 6.6 (perhaps a little lower if Tine flour' represents a more refined product than wheat). These are still heavily inflated prices, perhaps, but in the case of Samaria they represent the end of a siege in which "an ass's head was sold for 80 shekels, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five" (2 Kings 6.25).

These figures do suggest, in fact, that the hardships of this Seal are not quite as extreme as one would have expected if real famine, and particularly the famine conditions of a siege, were under consideration. It does not seem the intention of this Seal to present a situation in which men are reduced to despair by sheer starvation. There are shortages, certainly, but if a man could buy three times as much barley as he needed for a day's wage, he was having a hard time, of course, but not absolutely starving. This leads one increasingly to the view that the Seal is primarily concerned with acute and grievous shortages, and "never quite enough to go round", rather than near-foodlessness. This is an excellent if sad picture of the world as it has been, as it has

increasingly become, and as it shows every sign of continuing: it is a picture of rationing and unsatisfied bellies rather than of ruin. It is by no means a bad picture of the world we know, where the thousands of millions of people continue to explode in numbers, where food-production, if not exactly stationary, cannot at all increase in the necessary proportions, and

where many more than half its population are under-nourished or slowly yielding to gross malnutrition.

It is fatal, of course. There may not be involved in this scene the bloodshed by which death comes about under the Second Seal; it does not go to the sudden, crisis lengths which we shall meet again under the Fourth, but it is rightly represented by the black horse. It is funereal rather than catastrophic, but it is death none the less.

The oil and the wine hurt thou not.

The word 'hurt' is *adikeo*, do wrong, often conveying the thought of doing injury, or damage (Acts 7.26; 1 Corinthians 6.7), used in Revelation of injury to persons or to crops (2.11; 6.6; 7.2, 3; 9.4, 10, 19; 11.5, 5; 22.11, 11). It seems clear, therefore, that though essential foods will be rationed, oil and wine are to be available without restriction. Phillips renders: "No tampering with the oil or the wine", and this may acceptably render the spirit of the phrase: "Hands off our oil and wine!" Oil and wine occur together in Scripture in such places as Numbers 18.12; Deuteronomy 7.13; 28.51; 2 Chronicles 32.28; Joel 2.24 (where the Hebrew word for oil *š ytis*: hat); Deuteronomy 8.8; 2 Chronicles 11.11; Proverbs 21.17; Jeremiah 40.40 (where the word is *she-men*, the more common term); and in NT in Luke 10.34 and Revelation 18.13. In nearly all these cases the association betokens a glad and carefree enjoyment of abundance, often of both food and drink. The passage in Luke 10.34 is quite exceptional in its use of these materials for healing, and can hardly provide the pattern for the present passage, in which food and drink are so obviously combined together. When we note that in Proverbs 21.17 the search for wine and oil is compared with the desire for sensual pleasure, and is condemned as an end in itself, does it not seem most likely that here we are being told that, despite shortages of the staple things of life, men will indulge in pleasure for its own sake, so as to forget their troubles without solving them?

This is typical of the attitude of the ordinary men and women of the world to its problems, and it is more than ever so today. The "bread and circuses" which were devised to distract the Romans from their pressing and insoluble problems, are to be compared with the bingo, drinks, and drugs of today, which lead to forgetfulness and abandon, rather than facing the serious facts of life.

The philosophy is: "Let us eat and drink" (while we can and regardless of the future), "for tomorrow we die".

6.7-8: "When He had opened the fourth seal. . . I saw, and behold a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

This time the sword is the relatively rare *rhompaiā*, which has already been used of that proceeding from the mouth of the Lord (1.16; 2.12, 16: see also 19.5, 21). This is its typical usage (even, perhaps, in Luke 2.35), and it seems to be concerned, not with killing in battle or by the accident of war, but with deliberate, judicial, putting to death. The fact that we now meet 'famine' under its own proper name strongly suggests that the food shortages referred to under the previous seal were indeed that, and not the starvation which confronts us here.

The repetition of 'death' in 6.7, 8 gives food for thought. It is the same standard word *thanatos* in both cases. Death is the name of the rider of the horse, and Hades, seen by John 'following after', was either on the same horse or another. But how can one kill otherwise than with death? There seems little to commend the alternative 'pestilence' of RVm, and much more probable is that the word is used here to speak of deliberately inflicted death, or execution. The word is often used in this way, as in Matthew 10.21; 15.4; 20.18 and many other cases, so that again this Seal seems to be concerned with acts of judgement, rather than indiscriminate ravages of war and hunger. It is as though the one who wields the *rhompaia* is actively directing the evil events with which he is associated, preparing for the greater event to come in which he will reveal himself unmistakably. Even the reference to "wild beasts of the earth", though it has links with the punishments which God threatened on disobedient Israel (Leviticus 26.22; Deuteronomy 32.24), has uncomfortable associations with the Roman amphitheatre, and as *therion* is the word for the wild beast itself, so is *tKerionmakheo*, "fight with beasts," the word by which Paul describes the experience of the amphitheatre (1 Corinthians 15.21). It is surely not without its significance that the arch-enemies of the gospel introduced shortly into this Book are described by the same term (11.7; 13.1-19; 14.9, 11; 15.2; 16.2, 10, 13; 17.3-17; 19.19, 20; 20.4, 10). If this leaves uncertain whether the Seal is dealing with the sufferings inflicted by God on rebellious nations, or by the leaders of the rebels on God's saints, we need not be surprised, for perhaps the ambiguity is intended. Much of the rest of the Book, starting with the next Seal, is occupied with the world's persecutions of the saints, and much

again with the judgements inflicted by God on an impenitent world: the Olivet prophecy, too, is deeply concerned with both. If our recent experience of the behaviour of tyrannical governments is to guide us, not only are conscientious opponents its victims, but also those who fall foul of the authorities currently in power are as likely as not to face the tumbril and the guillotine.

Summary of the first four seals.

We are dealing with concurrent events, but there is a certain development. (I) the gospel is preached, but brings no peace to the world; (II) wars and bloodshed continue unabated, even enhanced; (III) shortages and hardships occur, and increase in intensity; (IV) men in power inflict hardships and death on the saints of God, and God brings by their own agency condign punishments on such people themselves. No time scale is offered for these events, which are too pervasive, too often repeated, to permit of such a thing, but they are plainly working up to a climax, which in the next Seal looms very close.

6.9: When He opened the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

We need no more than a moment's delay over trivialities such as the use of this verse to support the view of the immortality of the human soul. This is, indeed, a heavenly altar, for John is still experiencing the heavenly vision which began in 4.1; and the saints lie where, in the old Tabernacle and Temple made with hands, the foot of the altar received the blood of the sacrifices (for "the life is in the blood", Leviticus 17.11). But these souls are enjoying no heavenly bliss. They lie, as it were, where they have been poured out, waiting in sorrow that their death has so far gone unrequited, to all appearances in vain. Though their presence in the vision in this exalted place, and the granting of white robes (6.11) shows that they are approved of God, they are nevertheless dead people still awaiting the reward of their

faithfulness unto death. If there were any possible doubt about this, it would be set at rest by 20.4, where John sees "the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God" coming at last to life, to earn the privilege of reigning with their Lord.

These are people, then, who have died for their faith. But what most concerns us is now the import and the timing of the cry placed in their lips:

6.10: They cried with a great voice, saying: How long, O Master, the Holy and True, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

'Master' is despotes, used about the Father in Luke 2:20; Acts 4.24; Jude 4; about the Lord Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 2.1; and here, in the light of 3.7 ("He that is holy, He that is true") about the latter again. The word refers to one in authority, with the right to command; as though to plead: "Why do you not exert Your authority and put the nations in their place, and so vindicate us for our sufferings?" A desperate situation confronts the living saints, and their despair is put in the lips of those who have died before: "Have all their sufferings been in vain? When will the Lord return?". Yet in the sense of Genesis 4.10 it is the dead who speak: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground". The words "How long?", though, are rhetorical: "How much longer do we have to wait?" we should say to-day. As in Psalm 94.3; Zechariah 1.12, this very adequately captures the spirit of the plaint, closely akin as it is to the importunity of the widow in the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18.1-8);

Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry to Him day and night, though He bear long with them?

How long dost Thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The parallel is closer yet, for in the parable the Lord suggests that the persistence of the widow will have become a rare thing when He returns: "When He returns: "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find the faith on the earth?", while in this Seal the cry has all the appearance of being a despairing one. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint", but here fainting is very near, suggesting that the saints at the time in question are finding the greatest difficulty in maintaining their confidence firm to the end.

But what is the time in question? The question was "How long?", and the answer was "Yet a little time", as though to say, "Not long now!". And when that "not long" period had come to an end, the result would be that God would, through Jesus, "avenge the blood of His martyred saints. This must mean at the time of the Second Advent, for the same expression is used again in 19.2 when, at a time very close to that advent, we are told of the fall of the symbolic Babylon that "God hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand". The 'avenging', using the verb, *ekdikeo* (as in Luke 18.3, 5, 7, 8) — which in its substantive form is also used of the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21, 22 which can hardly suit our present context — will take place at a time when saints have almost ceased to expect it, a condition which corresponds very closely to the Lord's words in the Olivet Prophecy again:

"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of the many shall wax

cold" (Matthew 24.12). Though we have no means of saying for

sure what "not long now" means in God's terms, it seems evident that the time of the Fifth Seal is much closer to the time of the Lord's Return than it is to the time when the Apocalypse was given. We are in modern times by the time this Seal is fulfilled, much nearer the end than the beginning.

6.11: There was given them to each one a white robe, and it was said to them that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow - servants also and their brethren, which .should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled.

Important conclusions arise from this, both expositional and exhortational. The expositional one is quite simply, that if this analysis is at all correct, we are informed from within the Apocalypse itself that its major portion is concerned with the time close to the return of the Lord Jesus. At least as far as the end of chapter 11 the message is so continuous that, once that conclusion has been reached, we cannot look back until, in 11.15, "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ". Only nine verses on from the beginning of the real disclosure of the future in this chapter, we are already in the time of the end. If this is really so, then Revelation is doing again what has been done so often in Scripture, leaving out a large section of intermediate history and going on to detail the events which will accompany the time of God's direct intervention in the world's affairs: as though to emphasize that "no man knoweth the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25.13; 24.36; Mark 13.32, 33,35). Such a gap is found in Joel 2-3, in Daniel 11-12, in Daniel 9, and also in the Olivet prophecy.

In the last-named, which we have already found to provide the pattern for much in Revelation 6, there is a period which has proved to be more than 1900 years of which no detail at all is given, and which is covered only with the words, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21.24).

Once this is seen, then the Book of Revelation is no longer to be considered as a gigantic exception to God's previous rule, that saints must in all ages wait and see, and are not to expect a timetable drawn out before their eyes, whereby they can judge how far the world has progressed towards the Second Coming of the Lord. God has not, in this event, been pleased to give us a carefully marked out yardstick, nor yet a code from which we can work out the time of the Lord's coming. We can take some comfort from this fact, for one of the unfortunate obstacles to

faith which, as it were, man has placed before his own feet, is the setting of dates for the coming of the Lord, and then the need to find some reason why the date did not work out. This unhappy process is still going on, and even the lapse of over a century since the first date predicted by a respected name in our midst (and longer yet for predictions by other interpreters) has not stemmed the tide of frustrating speculations. This does not, of course,

exhaust the study of the time-periods of the Book (already referred to), but if the remainder of our study should confirm that the Book of Revelation is, indeed, primarily concerned with an advanced time in the purpose of God, we need not be surprised that attempts to establish a chronological framework have met with so little success.

But there is a darker side to this conclusion. For in this Fifth Seal we are told, not only that martyred saints have been long dead and unrequited, but that living saints are not immune from the earlier sufferings. The former will not rise to glory before the latter have been through fiery trials. The words are now seen to speak clearly of a latter-day persecution.

This conclusion was so unwelcome to the writer that he meditated long and hard before concluding that it was inescapable, and that the duty of saying so could not be evaded. It is only the firmest conviction that the passage plainly states that there is to be a latter-day persecution of the saints of God which has led to the matter being written down at all. Indeed, were it not for the conclusion that the Book is actually and primarily written to prepare the saint for the problems which he will need to face as the coming of the Lord draws nigh, it is doubtful whether this writing would even have been contemplated. This writer knows how much, should he be alive and remaining until these things come about, the grace and strength of the Lord will be needed to make it possible for him to endure to the end.

The persecution of the last days.

We must obviously not be satisfied to base so far-reaching a conclusion as this, that saints will be called upon to face a fiery trial before the Lord returns, merely on the evidence of the interpretation of this Seal. If there were no indications elsewhere in this Book, or the rest of Scripture, and especially if there were counter-indications, we might be able to dismiss the present interpretation of the fifth Seal and look for a more palatable one. But when we do face the rest of Scripture, it becomes ever plainer that there is no escape from the conclusions arrived at here.

We have repeatedly stressed the parallels with the Olivet Prophecy: then can the warnings of Luke 21.12-19; Mark 13.9-13; Matthew 24.9-13, be restricted to the events immediately before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70? Plainly they cannot, but must also, perhaps in some cases primarily, refer to the events preceding the Lord's return. It even looks as though the "tribulation (thlipsis) of those days" in Matthew 24.29; Mark 13.24, is intended to point to another such tribulation to come later.

In Revelation itself this persecution becomes a recurrent theme. The saints of God are "sealed" so as to know that the judgements poured out by Him on the nations are not intended for them (7.3; 9.4), but the hatred of men and nations raises itself against God's Two Witnesses (11.7-10), being directed by the dreadful and terrible Beast from the Sea, or from the Abyss (11.7; 13.7, 15-17; 14.12; 15.2), and by the harlot for a time mounted on its back (17.6; 18.6, 24). The reference to the "great tribulation" in 7.14 points the same way. The "prayers of the saints" in 8.3, 4, are doubtless called forth by their urgent need for strength in the face of their problems as the wicked world is visited by the wrath of God. The ominous reference to those "that die in the Lord from henceforth" in 14.13 may not refer to those who die in their beds.

The Tightness of our exposition of 6.11, though, is placed beyond reasonable doubt by 20.4, where a very plain parallel is drawn out:

6.9 The souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony, which they held.

6.11 Their fellow-servants also and their brethren which should be killed even as they were.

20.4 Them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God; and such as worshipped not the Beast nor his image and received not his mark.

That is, there are two categories of martyrs, dying for their witness: one is noted in the Fifth Seal as having already died, and no doubt including all those righteous men from Abel to Zacharias the son of Barachias whom the Jews had slain in Old Testament times, as well as Stephen and the New Testament martyrs, and others later yet (Matthew 23.29-39; Acts 7.52, 59; 1 Thessalonians 2.15); and the other arising not long before the Lord's return, predicted in the Fifth Seal, and occurring under the leadership of the Beast which the Lord will destroy in the Lake of Fire after defeating it on His return (17.13; 19.19-21). We are told almost categorically, it would seem that the persecution in issue is a thing of the last times, and so Revelation 20 tells us that the Fifth Seal is close to those times.

The Book of Revelation is doubtless applicable to the saints of all ages, and even though we are now led to the conclusion that it has a special message for the saints at the time of the end, this would not detract from its message to earlier times, for the saints of those days did not know the day nor the hour either, and their own sufferings would no doubt be seen — rightly — as things to be endured in preparation for the blessing promised to those who die in the Lord. Words which we now know were not ultimately fulfilled in the experience of these earlier saints of God would, nevertheless, have their proper message to them. Indeed, as we have already seen, some of the words about persecution addressed to the Seven Congregations of Asia actually do point to things occurring after their days. The constant message to "him that overcometh", reflecting as it does the Lord's own triumph over the world which persecuted Him, has the same overtones (2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21; John 16.33; Revelation 12.11; 21.7). The Book if heeded will prepare its readers of all times for the crisis which might overtake them, so that those living at the actual time of crisis will be prepared when the appointed, but as yet unknown, time arrives.

To each one a white robe.

This is the assurance to the living saints as that time of danger comes that the earlier saints have not died in vain. Their lives and their names are safely recorded before God, and their rest will terminate in glory when "all those who died in faith, not having received the promises, will receive that better thing which God hath prepared for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11.13, 40).

6.12: / saw when He had opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood. 6.13: and the stars of the heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind.

The Fifth Seal has already taught us that we are near the time for saints to receive their reward: that is, the time of the Lord's return. That in itself locates the Sixth Seal close to that time. If on that ground alone, to place this Seal in the fourth century, in the days of Constantine, is quite unacceptable, for in those days the Christian epoch had scarcely run one

sixth of its anticipated course. But there are many other reasons for discarding any such interpretation, of which some have already been given in the historical sketches (pages 110-111).

First there is the great earthquake. In 11.13 such an earthquake immediately precedes the kingdom of this world becoming the kingdom of God. In 16.17-18, similarly, it is placed at the very end, when the Lord pours out the vial of His last judgement on the earth. That this is the same period is the natural interpretation. Then there are sun, moon, and stars, taking us back again to the Olivet Prophecy (Luke 21.25), and through that to Old Testament prophecies of similar manifestations (Joel 2.31 = Acts 2.17-21; Joel 3.15; and other places). This group of signs points plainly to events occurring on a "day of the Lord", of which in the Christian epoch either the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 or the time close to the coming of the Lord Jesus, represent the only possibilities. In the Luke version of the Olivet prophecy that time is already past (21.20, 25), and the latter in any case is the only event which meets the other details of this Seal. We are, on God's time scale, very close to the time of the Lord's return.

Other passages in Scripture where these heavenly symbols are used include: Genesis 37.9 (Joseph's dream); Deuteronomy 4.19; 17.3; 2 Kings 23.5 (all of heathen worship); Isaiah 13.10 (a 'day of the Lord' involving the destruction of Babylon); Joel 2.10 (a 'day of the Lord' on which 'locusts' are brought against Israel); 2.31 (the 'day of the Lord' in days following the outpouring of the Spirit; Acts 2.19-21); 3.15 (the 'day of the Lord' when God sets up His kingdom); Ezekiel 32.7 (the destruction of Egypt); Matthew 24.29; Mark 13.14; Luke 21.45 (just prior to the second advent of the Lord); Revelation 6.12; 8.12 (the Fourth Trumpet).

Though the first of these, Genesis 37.9, links sun, moon, and stars with the family of Jacob, and hence with Israel (a point of importance later when we reach Revelation 12), it is plain that the symbols do not always denote Israel, particularly in view of Isaiah 13.10 and Ezekiel 32.17. Even in Joel 3.15, where the sufferings of Israel and the Land are to the fore, since these are described in literal terms in the context it is not likely that they would be the subject of a symbolic reference too. It seems best, in general, to take the darkening of sun, moon, and stars as a composite picture of portents spoken of by the Lord as, "the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21.26), a dissolution of the world's existing order of things that "those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Haggai 2.6; Hebrews 12.26-27), a proper prelude to the inauguration of the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3.7-13; Isaiah 56.17; Revelation 21.1).

But the words, "the stars of heaven fell to the earth", need further consideration. Daniel has "some of the host and of the stars of heaven cast down" by the power called "the little horn of the he-goat" (8.10); the king of Babylon exalted himself "above the stars of God", and was told he must be cast from heaven

(Isaiah 14.13, 14); and the Dragon of Revelation 12.1 casts down "a third part of the stars of heaven" (12.4). In view of this connection, we can reasonably understand the symbol to mean the disruption and destruction of earthly powers and authorities as the time of the Lord's coming draws near.

If it were thought that the stars must have some connection with Israel, this would be strengthened by the words "as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs", particularly in the light of the end of the Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24.32-34; Luke 21.29-30), and the very similar words

used in "the controversy with Zion" in Isaiah 34.4, 10. But Isaiah is concerned with the destruction of Edom and other nations rather than with that of Israel (34.1-7). The more likely view would be that once again we are concerned with the toppling of earthly powers in the upheaval which accompanies the preparation for the Lord's return.

6.14: The heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were removed out of their places.

The Lord has already promised in the Olivet prophecy that His word will survive the passing of heaven and earth (Matthew 24.35). In Revelation 20.11 we read that "heaven and earth fled away" before the face of the One seated on the great white throne; and 21.1 is only one more of several passages in Scripture where the passing away of existing heavens and earth is spoken of (see 2 Peter 3.10-13; Hebrews 12.16-27; Haggai 2.6, 21; Isaiah 65.17; 66.22). Apart from all the evidence already adduced, it is impossible to understand the language here being used of any smalltime activity of some human monarch playing God before his friends and enemies. This in context, in language, and in setting, is a message about the activities of God Himself, directed towards bringing to an end the existing order of things and ushering in a new. It is true that the new order does not yet emerge in these verses: much has to be said and done before it does. But we are told that it is on its way, that we are in the "yet a little time" of 6.11, which is to culminate in the "great day of the wrath" of Him from Whom the nations so understandably seek to hide in fear.

Every mountain and island removed. At the first coming of Jesus" every valley was exalted, and every mountain and hill made low" (Isaiah 40.4; Luke 3.5) as John the Baptist cleared the path for His coming to offer salvation. Mountains of obstacles in the way of His saints can be removed before their firm faith (Matthew 17.20; Mark 11.23; I Corinthians 13.2). And at His second coming every barrier will be cleared from the path of the Lord again as He prepares to subdue the rebellious nations and be glorified in that

day in His saints (2 Thessalonians 1.8-10). These words, too, are used again later in the Book at a point when there can be no doubt that the establishment of the kingdom of God is imminent (the Seventh Vial, 16.20). The figure draws on that used in Ezekiel 38.20 when God announces His victory over the hosts of Gog; the terror is the same as that which excepts only the saints in Psalm 46.2-3. It is as though every obstacle which would hinder the triumphant march of God to victory is trampled down or brushed aside; as He plants His footsteps in the sea, the islands are nudged into place to provide His stepping-stones. And we might picture men fleeing to the islands to look for refuge, only to find the refuge withdrawn from them as, in the figure, God moves the very islands themselves where He will.

6.15: The kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. All people of all kinds will come within the orbit of God's worldwide purpose. It is impossible to restrict the scope of this language to the fear that some men might have felt in bygone days at the advance of a human conqueror. It is no less impossible to suppose that an earth with many kings can be cut down to the size of a land, even the promised land, with a few kinglets. It is true that the word rendered earth can, on a mere lexicon basis, also be rendered 'land', in Greek as well as in Hebrew. But here we have nothing less than the "LORD coming out of His place to judge the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity (Isaiah 26.21). The language is drawn, of course, from Isaiah 2.2-22, where, just before God establishes His house in the top of the mountains for all nations to worship there (2.2-4), His

terrors strike the world so that men "enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD (2.10, 19, 21). Nothing less than the Second Advent can satisfy the language here before us.

6.16: They say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us. The Lord Jesus is here quoting His own former words, spoken as He went to the crucified (Luke 23.30), themselves taken from Hosea 10.8. In Hosea they were used of the destruction of northern Israel, and in Luke of the pending destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. But here their canvas is extended to cover all nations, and the One who wreaks the vengeance is the Lord Himself.

Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

Here there can be no doubt at all. The Ones who go into action in the last stages of the conflict with the world are specifically

named. And the Book itself is telling in the most explicit terms how it is to be interpreted. The worst thing we can possibly do in the face of this plainest of all language is to deny it, and suggest an interpretation according to which some misguided men mistook a merely human conqueror, Constantine by name, for Messiah, and mistakenly ascribed to him quasidivine honours.

If we are to interpret Revelation rightly, then when it actually tells us in the plainest possible terms what it means, we must humbly listen and accept. If this principle is ever forgotten, we are bound to fall into the most grievous mistakes.

The One who sat on the throne (4.2) is the Father, God, beyond a shadow of a doubt. The Lamb is Jesus Christ, equally emphatically (5.6-7). Such language in which to express their terror could not have been known to the superstitious adulators of Constantine: the Book is telling us that it is the outpouring of the heavenly judgement of the Father and the Son that it is talking about, and we close the door on our understanding of the Book if we refuse to accept its guidance.

6.17: The great day of their wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?

Everything in these words points the same way. It is "the day of the Lord" again, on which we have written already. "Who shall be able to stand goes right back to Malachi 3.2: "Who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?". Absolutely everything in Scripture cries out that Revelation 6.12-17 is pointing to the time of the end. It may well be that the breaking of this Seal leaves, in terms of our ephemeral lifetimes some years, some decades, before the phase which it introduces actually culminates in the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth; but that it is that return to which this Seal points the way is one of the most certain things in all Scriptural interpretation. At the close of the events depicted by this Seal we are very near, on the cosmic time scale, to the return of our Lord. There may remain much to be done, but on that same time scale it will be done quickly.

Excursus VI: The interpretation of prophecy. The certain, the probable, and the possible

THE CERTAIN. A fulfillment of prophecy can only be regarded as certain, for our finite and imperfect minds, when the fulfillment has already come about, or when its terms are absolutely incapable of any meaning save one: both factors would make our assurance doubly

sure. Thus, we know that 2 Samuel 7.12-16 and its counterpart in 1 Chronicles 17.11-14 were in part fulfilled in Solomon, because David so understood it in part (2 Chronicles 28.6) as did Solomon himself (2 Chronicles 6.9-11). We know that it

was not entirely fulfilled in Solomon because David clearly looked beyond Solomon's time (2 Samuel 7.19), and because the New Testament tells us explicitly that it referred to Jesus (Acts 13.33; Hebrews 1.5). Again, we know that the Bible promises the literal return of the Jews to the land of Israel, and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth, and many other such things plainly taught in Scripture because the terms of these prophecies do not admit of any other faithful interpretation.

THE PROBABLE. A fulfillment can be regarded as probable when the events we see in history are seen to correspond closely with the terms of a prophecy. Thus, it is hard to see that we could be mistaken in regarding the presence of some millions of Jews in the Holy Land today as, in part at least, a fulfillment of the prophecies of their return. It is probable, too, that this heralds the near return of the Lord. Some prophecies about the return of Israel to the land contain such apparently plain indications that they must suffer great afflictions before the final deliverance from their enemies (Ezekiel 36-39; Zechariah 14), that we consider it probable that they will in fact suffer in this way.

THE POSSIBLE. Things "possible" may have all degrees of likelihood from high probability to being highly unlikely, and the decision we come to in any particular case is bound to be in some degree subjective. We can hardly expect absolute unanimity, even among those sharing the same doctrinal foundation. Thus, to take an example already referred to, it is possible to regard the "sun, moon and stars" of Revelation 6.12-13 as referring to the nation of Israel; it is also possible to doubt this, since the symbols are certainly not invariably used in this sense in Scripture. Which conclusion we come to (if we come to a precise conclusion at all) is not, however, of the first importance, since other passages state in plain terms what may or may not here be intended by the symbols. Indeed, it is not at all unlikely that we are sometimes moved to understand symbols in a particular way because we have already concluded on what are quite different grounds that certain things are true: in that event it is not the symbols which are teaching us, but we who are reading (right or wrong) our own meaning into them. This fault is more common than we sometimes realize, and we should be on our guard against it.

Within the category of 'possible', too, must be put all detailed predictions of things yet future which are not most categorically defined in Scripture itself— unless, indeed, our predictions are so outrageous as not to be thought possible at all. And in view of the fact that the New Testament often provides us with interpretations of Old Testament prophecies which we should not have thought of for ourselves (such as those of Hosea 11.1 in Matthew 2.15; and of Jeremiah 31.15 in Matthew 2.18), we need to be very careful before we pronounce an interpretation impossible. Even so, since it required the guidance of the Holy Spirit to enable New Testament writers to offer such interpretations to us, we might feel that our own feet should remain firmly on the ground when we are disposed to adventure our own understanding of Scripture's prophecies.

Since we have arrived in our study of the Apocalypse at the point where we see in the Sixth Seal events no earlier than our own day, and both here and elsewhere will be meeting events which certainly lie in the future — even though the time interval may not be large — it follows that detailed interpretations are bound to be speculative in some degree, even when

they are offered at all. It might even be that no detailed interpretation is possible. But this is not in itself to be regarded as any weakness in the expository basis: it may simply be that information is inadequate for any assurance as to the meaning until the events have actually occurred.

To this it cannot properly be objected that a prophecy which one can only understand when it has happened is of little use. For in the first place its general tenor may be plain even when the detail is not; and in the second place it can be very valuable and reassuring to know that we have reached a certain point in the fulfillment of God's purpose, and can look forward now to the next stage. The point we have reached in the present study is such a point: if we combine the fact of Israel's partial return to the Land with the promise of "a time of trouble such as never was", and if we see around us all the ingredients for the time to come when "men's hearts shall be failing them for fear" — a very apt summary of the mood of the Sixth Seal — then we shall not be taken by surprise when the terror does descend. And if we see in the Fifth Seal a promise that such a time will be marked by a period of persecution for the saints, that, too, should find us prepared, and ready to ask our God for strength to endure to the end when it does arise.

In any case, if anyone is disposed to be superior about the weakness of saying, "I do not yet know", it is well to look back on the records of those who thought they did know, and to a greater or lesser degree have been proved to be wrong. Jesus did not return in the mid-1800s, as the Millerites thought He would; He did not return in 1914 as the Russellites thought He would. He has not returned at any of the times when our own associates, and perhaps we ourselves?, thought He would. Current events have not conformed precisely with the detailed predictions of any interpreter we know. This is not a reason for refusing to try to find the solution of the problem ourselves: it is a very good reason for not being over-confident that we are right, and for asking for kindly treatment when we are wrong!

SUMMARY: Revelation chapters 1 to 6

Chapter 1: A vision of the risen and glorified Jesus Christ, in command of the angels in heaven and the Christian congregations on earth.

Chapters 2 and 3: This same glorified Christ sends messages to seven existing congregations in Asia, not as a detailed prediction of the future, but with a view to providing comfort, strength, warning, and the promise of ultimate blessing to the faithful.

Chapters 4 and 5: John is transported in vision to heaven, where he sees the Almighty enthroned with the heavenly powers

around him. He sees, too, a Book sealed with seven seals, the opening of which will disclose the things about to come to pass, but which no one is qualified to open: until "the Lion of Judah", in the form of a Lamb which has been slain, appears on the scene, takes the Book and sits down by the Father's side. Having received the praise and blessing of the heavenly multitudes, He prepares to break the seals.

Chapter 6: The first six Seals are broken. The first four reveal forces which will be operating on the earth during the Christian epoch, in which the preaching of the gospel (the First Seal) is unavailing in stemming the forces of evil in the form of war and bloodshed (the Second Seal), grave food shortages (the Third Seal), and violence and tyranny in high places (the

Fourth Seal). So little progress seems to have been made towards achieving the fulfillment of God's purpose that the martyred saints are pictured as being in despair (the Fifth Seal) as to whether they have died in vain, and at this late stage in the outworking of God's purpose we are told through words addressed to them that only a little time longer remains before the Lord's return, during which the living saints must suffer yet another persecution. During this last phase (the Sixth Seal) events will reach a climax in which the pending intervention of the Father and the Son provokes the world to a terrified anticipation of what is to come to pass.

Chapters 7,8 and 9 Revelation 7:1 – 11:19

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER 7: AN INTERLUDE FOR REASSURANCE

7.1: After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or on any tree.

This is a picture of world-wide scope. "The four corners of the earth" is a phrase used in Isaiah 11.12 of the ultimate regathering of the exiles of Judah and Israel, and in Ezekiel 7.2 (where in its context it must be so limited) to the entire compass of the doomed land. So the four corners mean the uttermost limits of the area under consideration. In Revelation, where the kings and mighty men of the earth have just been introduced to us (6.15), it is clear that the entire earth is intended.

The point is still further emphasized by the four winds of the earth, a phrase used in Jeremiah 49.36 of the international forces to be gathered against Elam, as a result of which "there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come". In Ezekiel Israel is to be scattered to "all winds" or "every wind" (5.12; 12.14; 17.21), and it is "from the four winds" that the breath is to come to the land to give life to the nation's dry bones (37.9), interpreted on the spot as the regathering of the people from among the nations (37.12, 21). More directly to the point, when in Daniel 7.2; 8.8; 11.4, the four winds strive on the Mediterranean Sea, or the legates of Alexander assume power in four directions over his wide empire, the nations of the world are clearly involved. Zechariah 2.6-13 refers to the widespread scattering of exiled Israel and Judah and their regathering.

In the New Testament the symbolism of Ezekiel and of Zechariah is taken up of the gathering together of God's saints from all nations (Matthew 24.32; Mark 13.27), a fact particularly appropriate to this chapter, where it is the sealing of God's saints, wherever they may be found, which we shall discover to be its theme. It is true that the winds here are winds of retribution and judgement for the world, but it is for the wide world in which the saints of God are living.

7.2:7 saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the Living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the

servants of our God on their foreheads.

The servants of our God are to be told that they are safe in God's care before He pours out His judgements on a wicked world. No wind shall blow until they are sealed on their foreheads. The word forehead is a speciality of this book, for the Greek *metopon* occurs here eight times (7.3; 9.4; 13.16; 14.1, 9; 17.5; 20.4; 22.4), and elsewhere in NT not at all. It is used in the Greek of Exodus 28.38, 38 for the forehead of Aaron on which the golden plate, engraved HOLY TO THE LORD, was to be exhibited; in 1 Samuel 17.49, 49 for the spot where David's stone struck Goliath; in 2 Chronicles 26.19, 20 for the spot where the leprosy broke out on rebellious King Uzziah; in Isaiah 48.4 for the hardened brow of rebellious Judah; and especially in Ezekiel 9.4, which we quote in detail:

Set a mark in the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations . . . Goye through the city and smite; let not your <ye spare . . . but come not near any man on whom is the mark: and begin at My sanctuary.

The brow of the saint of God is not hardened against Him. He is a priest to his God and bears gladly for all to see the inscription HOLY TO THE LORD (for that is what a saint is). Like the chosen faithful of Ezekiel's sad times, he is to be saved from the things that God will soon inflict on the world. In what sense he will be "saved" more must later be said, but ultimately, at all events, "not a hair of his head will perish". It is his safeguard, specifically, under the Fourth Trumpet (9.4), and it stands in sharp contract to another mark imposed by another power upon its own follow-ers(13.16; 14.9; 20.4). It becomes plain as the Book proceeds that these are the two divisions into which mankind will be irreconcilably divided shortly before the Lord returns.

The reference to the earth, the sea, or any tree anticipates references later to judgements on all these spheres: on the earth in 8.5, 9; 9.1, 3; 16.2; on the sea in 8.8; 16.3; and on the trees in '8.7; 9.4. These, then, are the judgements which are to be deferred until the sealing process has been carried out: that is, before God brings any of these afflictions on the world, He will have assured His own people, as He is doing here, that their own ultimate security is safeguarded. The four angels, who are charged with delaying their punishments on the earth until the sealing is concluded, are very probably the same as those in the Sixth Trumpet (8.2; 9.13) "bound at the great river Euphrates", and at that point we are very close indeed to the last phase of God's conflict with the world, when the saints will need all the assurance which this Book offers that they are safe in God's keeping.

7.4-8:1 heard the number of them which were sealed, 144,000 out of every tribe of the children of Israel. Of the tribes of Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin, 12,000 each.

At first sight this looks like a thoroughly Israelitish picture, with the authentic tribes named and numbers given, almost as though we were back at the numbering of the tribes around the Tabernacle in the Wilderness (Numbers 2.1-34; 26.1-62). Even the Tabernacle itself is represented by the heavenly shrine at which John is present in his vision, with its mercy seat and incense and altar (4.2ff; 6.9). But this impression of literality is quickly dissipated. The numbers, at exactly 12,000 per tribe, are too artificial to be a real estimate of the number of faithful people within each of the tribes of natural Israel. No attention is paid to the four tribal groupings in Numbers, Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan (at East, South, West, and North respectively). Dan is omitted completely. Levi is counted among the twelve tribes, while in the Numbers reckoning the tribe was considered apart, centered on the Tabernacle rather than being grouped with any of the other tribes. Is it conceivable that each tribe should produce exactly 12,000 faithful, save Dan which would produce none?

The name of Ephraim, too, appears to be omitted from the list, but this is more apparent than real. Mention is made of both Manasseh and Joseph, and since Manasseh was the elder son displaced from his birthright in favour of Ephraim by his grandfather Jacob, he must appear under his own name, while Ephraim can properly be called Joseph as the legal heir of that son (Genesis 48.8-20).

The meaning of the 144,000.

At first glance there are two groups of saints in this chapter, the 144,000 (drawn from most of the tribes of Israel), and an innumerable multitude (7.8) (drawn from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues), and many expositors have concluded that they are two different bodies of people. Most notorious among these

Thus Peter Watkins (EAF) writes, "Repeatedly, emphatically, they are declared to be Israelites. The twelve tribes are mentioned, one by one: from each of the tribes 12,000 are sealed. It is not suggested that the numbers are to be taken literally; that there are exactly 12,000 from Manasseh, and not a single one from Dan. . .". He lists three contrasts between the 144,000 and the Great Multitude: .i. that John heard the former and beheld the latter; ii. that the number is specified for the former and not for the latter; and iii. that the former is Israel and the latter all nations;, and concludes "These three points are sufficient to

are the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose teaching, in brief, is this:

There are to be exactly 144,000 exalted persons who "are to serve as kings in the heavenly New Jerusalem . . . who alone enter the heavenly New Jerusalem . . ." ("Then is Finished the Mystery of God", New York 1969, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society pages 88-89). They are not all Israelites after the flesh, but the unfinished number from the time when Jesus Christ came is made up of specially privileged people of all races, the inmost circle of Jehovah's Witnesses. The heavenly Jerusalem where they will live is truly in heaven, of which the Mount Zion of 14.1-5 is symbolic. Some members of this exalted company formed part of the Seven Congregations of Asia (p. 94), because they are called "kings and priests" (1.5). They make up the "little flock" of Luke 12.32, as distinct from the "other sheep" (John 10.16) who are not of this prime fold. "In due time Jesus Christ shares this 'new name' with His 144,000 joint heirs . . . No other creatures in heaven or on earth will be privileged to share in that very private, most intimate, new relationship of Jesus Christ with His God Jehovah." (p. 179). The "other sheep" make up the "great multitude" who, "although not being spiritual Israelites, are in a proper spiritual condition to have a standing before God . . . God is pleased to give them recognition from His heavenly throne by assigning them a part in the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy . . . The 'great crowd' carries on an expanded part in this Kingdom preaching along with the anointed remnant of spiritual Israelites who act as 'ambassadors substituting for Christ' (2 Corinthians 5.20). . . The 'great crowd' act as envoys under supervision of these Kingdom heirs" (pp. 206-208). It appears that few present-day Jehovah's Witnesses' regard themselves as belonging to the 144,000, and it also appears that there is some subjective means whereby those who are aware of it, for only these partake of that Society's annual breaking of bread.

Apart from the inconsistency of seeking to be half literal and half not, this reading of the chapter and of the rest of Scripture on the point is readily disposed of on other grounds: so readily, in fact, that it would not have been given attention in this book were not so many people influenced by it, and so many true believers

demonstrate that whereas the 144,000 represent the redeemed of Israel before the door of opportunity was finally closed to them, the 'great multitude' represents, as the words imply, the redeemed from all nations" (pp. 151-152). It is curious that the tribal names are to be taken literally and the numbers not, an evident weakness in the case.

H.A. Whittaker (RBA), however, takes the two groups as being identical, giving independently some of the reasons advanced here (pages 92-98).

The treatment of the same subject by John Thomas is said by JJ. Hadley (I A p. 94) to be voluminous and diffuse, and is in any case concerned with his view that the sealing took place primarily in the days of Constantine, an opinion which cannot be accommodated within the compass of the present exposition, and has little intrinsic probability.

confronted with the necessity of combatting it.

First, negatively: the distinction drawn between the "little flock" of Luke 12.32 and the "other sheep" of John 10.16 is unreal, and can only have been arrived at by sewing crudely together two verses drawn from entirely different contexts. In Luke the "flock" is "little", not in relation to another and larger flock, but in relation to the enemies of the gospel. There are not two different flocks of believers: there is one "little flock" of believers opposed to a large multitude of enemies.

But second, positively, it is remarkable that John "hears" the numbers sealed of the twelve tribes of Israel, but then says "I saw, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues" (7.9). It is as though John says, "I heard one thing with my eyes closed, but when I opened my eyes I saw something quite different. Instead of a precisely counted 144,000 I saw a countless multitude, and instead of Israel only I saw all nations". How better, in the dramatic guise of this Book, could the Author of all truth have set out for our guidance that the elect of God are not exclusively drawn from natural Israel, but are drawn from all nations. John is witnessing in his vision the inmost truth of the expansion of the gospel to all, wherever they are from, who truly believe in the God of Abraham as He is now revealed in Jesus Christ.

This is further confirmed by the fact that no blessings whatever are referred to the 144,000 as such. They are merely "sealed". It is only of the "great multitude" from all nations that John hears that they are arrayed in white (7.13), that they have come successfully through the great tribulation, and that they stand before the throne of God in His temple (7.15), in the immediate presence of the Lamb (7.17). So far from (as the Jehovah's Witnesses suppose), the 144,000 being in heaven, and the great multitude in some lesser situation on earth, in fact the great multitude is, in the Apocalypse's language, in the heavenly temple, and are plainly in a position of privilege which cannot be bettered. The fact that when the 144,000 are again referred to (in 14.1-5), we are told that they are "redeemed from the earth" (14.3), and "follow the Lamb wherever He goeth" (14.4 = 7.17), further establishes that they are the same people as the "great multitude".

It follows, therefore, that John in his vision is being taught to declare, what John in waking life already knew, that the redeemed of God are not chosen on account of their fleshly descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but on account of their faith in the God of these patriarchs, and in the Seed appointed to them, so that, being in Christ, they are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promises" (Galatians 3.29). John is conveying to us what Peter learned in his vision at Joppa, that "all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the earth, and fowls of the heaven" (Acts 10.12; 11.6), had been sanctified by the grace of God. "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common," Peter had learned; and that "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek" was the lesson brought home through John to all his readers in Revelation 7. (See Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11). This is entirely as we should expect. It is impossible on the one hand that the gospel should break down the "middle wall or partition" (Ephesians 2.14), which used to divide Jew from Gentile, and that this partition should then be re-erected when we speak of the glory of the future kingdom. The

distinction between the Jew who believes in Christ, and the Gentile who believes in Him, is utterly eliminated, and Peter was to be blamed when, no doubt from the best of motives, he allowed himself even for a moment to interrupt his new-found willingness to "enter in unto men uncircumcized and eat with them" (Acts 11.2; Galatians 2.11-16).

This is not the only time when Revelation represents the multitude of God's redeemed by a symbolism formerly appropriate to natural Israel. The New Jerusalem which John is later to see has twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (21.12), like its counterpart in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 48.1-34); and a provocative parallel is suggested between these facts and a passage in the Gospels already referred to:

The 12 apostles sit on 12 thrones

The 12 apostles have their names on the 12 foundations of the New . Jerusalem

judging the 12 tribes of Israel

whose gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel

The fact that both utterances come from the Lord Jesus suggest that He may have intended the second to be a commentary on the first, and that, though the disciples were indeed promised high rewards in the kingdom to come, it might be a mistake to link this too literally with the actual tribes of which natural Israel is made up. Just as the new "Israel of God" supersedes natural Israel within the framework of the gospel, and as Peter uses the typically Jewish word diaspora, or dispersion, to describe what is evidently a largely gentile community (1 Peter 1.1; 2.9-10), and James very probably uses both this word and the expression "twelve tribes" in a non-nationalistic way (James 1.1) — for there is nothing in his letter which would restrict its message to Jews

only — so here, certainly in chapter 7 and therefore at least probably in chapter 21, and hence in the promise in the Gospels, the twelve tribes form the basis on which the introduction of men and women of all nations is impressed on the prophet and on his readers (see Acts 10.35).

The omission of Dan from the names of the twelve tribes.

Since no reason is given in the inspired record, any explanation offered must be tentative. One such suggests that, since Dan lapsed into apostasy at an early stage in Israel's history (Judges 18), its name is blotted out. But this cannot be sustained for (1) notorious though Samson's faults were (Judges 13.3-25), he is still reckoned among the men of faith in Hebrews 11.32; (2) Dan figures in subsequent Old Testament history (2 Samuel 24.2; 2 Chronicles 2.14); (3) there is no such elimination of Dan from the list of tribes in the restored land in Ezekiel 48.1, 2, 32.

Possibly the meanings of the tribal names, as given by the mothers of Jacob's sons to their own and their adopted children,

See my ACTS and EPISTLES, pages 223-245.

"The view set out here has been opposed in R. Abel, "Wrested Scriptures", page 63, on the singular ground that it is "usually inconclusive"! The differences between the 144,000 and the great multitude, cited above as evidence in favour of the identification, are there offered as evidence against it. The author emphasizes the word "firstfruits" (14.4), so as to suggest that the 144,000 represents the saints who will be living at the time of the Lord's return (which is acceptable enough, though the same blessing must await all other saints, and is in harmony with the use of the same word in James 1.18). It is hard to see that "Christ the first-fruits" (1 Corinthians 15.22-23) offers any support to either view, since "they that are Christ's at His coming" are not obviously included in the term.

But to go on and suggest that the great multitude refers to the end of the Millennium (20.11-15) is to offer a very improbable interpretation indeed. Quite apart from the fact that those rewarded both at beginning and at end are certainly drawn from all nations, so that there could be no warrant for describing the former alone in Jewish terms, it should be noted that Revelation 7 is not concerned with resurrection and judgement at all. It is concerned with the sealing of the servants of God, so that they can be assured that they are not forgotten in the tribulations which are shortly to come. It would be utterly incongruous to bring in a post-Millennial group at this point, since it is said of this great multitude that "these are they which came out of the great tribulation" (7.14). This fits splendidly with the condition of those who have to endure the persecution to come (9.4), but has absolutely no bearing on the presumed peaceable lives of those coming to obey the gospel during the Millennium. The objections raised in "Wrested Scriptures", in fact, only serve to strengthen the interpretation offered here.

may contribute to the answer. Thus, "The LORD hath looked on my affliction" (Reuben, Genesis 29.32); "the LORD hath heard that I am hated" (Simeon, 29.33); "now will my husband bejoined to me" (Levi, 29.34); "with mighty wrestlings I have prevailed" (Naphtali, 30.8); "fortunate" (Gad, 30.11 RV); "happy am I" (Asher, 30.13); "God hath given me my hire" (Issachar, 30.18); "now will my husband dwell with me" (Zebulun, 30.20); "the LORD add to me" (Joseph, 30.24); "God hath made me to forget all my toil" (Manasseh, 41.51); "this time will I praise the LORD" (Judah, 29.35); "son of the right hand" (Benjamin, 35.18). All of these contain messages of hope, confidence and reward; but "judgement" (Dan, 30.6) fits ill into this optimistic picture in Revelation 7, which is concerned with blessing and not with possible rejection.

All this being said, though, the interpretation remains conjectural; but what can be said with certainty is that the omission of Dan gives the coup de grace to any idea that the picture is one of the natural twelve tribes of Israel.

7.9: After these things I saw and, behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands.

This is the same multitude as that extolled by the heavenly host in 5.9-10, another good reason for believing that it is the same as the 144,000, which would otherwise be unaccountably absent from that scene. John has already taught us that the redemption of this multitude has been accomplished, and now he actually sees them in the glory which will be their own when the coming tribulation is over. Their robes, we learn, are white because they

have been "washed in the blood of the Lamb" (7.14), and they bear palms just as the 'babes and sucklings' did when the Lord entered Jerusalem. Then it was to suffer, but now we are anticipating His return in triumph. The palms reflect a sort of Feast of Tabernacles with its thanksgiving and rejoicing (John 12.13; Leviticus 23.39-44;

7.10: They cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation to our God Who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb.

This must mean, "Let us ascribe to God and to the Lamb praise for the salvation which they have accomplished", as it does in 12.10 and 19.1. It is as though the cry of "Hosanna!" ("Save, we pray!"), which they cried during the triumphal entry long ago, will now be cried again in its fulfillment, when the salvation which was then ignorantly asked for will truly have been accomplished, and translated into, "Thou hast saved us!" (Matthew 21.9, 15 ;

Psalms 118.1-29).

7.11: All the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God.

These are the angels of 5.11, now singing their doxology of ultimate triumph as the saints are seen in the glory shortly to be achieved. First they offer their own Amen to the thanksgivings of the saints and then, uttering their own song of praise, invite the reader of their words to give assent in his turn (see pages 28-29).

7.13: One of the elders answered, saying to me, These who are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence come they?

That the 'elder' should ask the question is by way of saying to John and all his readers: "You would like to know who these represent, would you not? Ask, and you will be told." For the answer is important to our understanding of much of the rest of this Book. Here we have another of the divinely provided clues as to how the Book is arranged, and only confusion and problems can arise from ignoring it. These people who are seen by John as having been sealed are those who must, when the Seventh Seal is opened, begin the last period of tribulation before the return of the Lord Jesus, and are being told that if they remain firm to the end they will be granted the privilege of entering the temple of God, now depicted symbolically in the heaven where John is given his visions, but then to be set up on the earth.

7.14: These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The blessings they will enjoy are repeated later of that glorious time, when they shall "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (14.4), and "God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (21.4).

7.15: Therefore are they before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike on them nor any heat: for the Lamb Who is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them to fountains of waters of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

The passage is rich in allusions to other parts of Scripture, in both Testaments. We have Jesus promising Bread of Life, from eating which men shall never hunger (John 6.35), and also the Water of Life, after drinking which there is no thirst (4.14). We have Isaiah using words which are almost exactly quoted here:

"They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat or sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them (49.10). It would be hard to ignore the echoes of Psalm 23, with its words, "He leadeth me beside the still waters" (23.2); while the words already quoted in 1 Corinthians 15.54 about the triumph of the resurrection sound out again here in: "He hath swallowed up death in victory (for ever, RV); and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isaiah 25.8).

It is one of the most compelling indirect evidences of the divine inspiration of this remarkable Book that it should so artlessly draw on the treasury of Scriptures past, as though the anguished writer in the quarries of Patmos had all the time in the world to consult his concordance, and present us — for all the crudities which they tell us his Greek contains — with so polished a picture of the whole counsel of God.

CHAPTER VIII

8.1: THE SEVENTH SEAL

One of the principles of the present exposition has been, and remains, that we will not impose a structure on the Book of Revelation unless the Book itself tells us to do so. There are those who tell us that the Book has a 'telescopic' structure, which means that the first six seals follow in historical sequence, whereas the seventh seal includes all that is contained in the seven Trumpets which follow; while the seventh of these, in its turn, includes all the 'vials' of chapter 16. Whether this is so or not, the Book itself must inform us. Up to this point the answer is a qualified Yes: the first four Seals may not represent a sequence, but they are succeeded by the Fifth, and Sixth and Seventh, and this Seventh does immediately lead to the sounding of the Seven Trumpets. Even if the sealing of chapter 7 had not prepared us for it, therefore, it is plain that the Trumpets are to be compressed within the short period of time which follows on the expectation of the near return of the Lord, with which chapter 6 ends. The earth and sea are to be sorely "hurt" by the pending judgements of God (7.2-3), and now that the servants of God have been securely sealed there is nothing to prevent those judgements being executed.

8.1: When He opened the seventh seal, there followed silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels . which stand before God; and there were given to them seven trumpets.

Whatever problems may be presented by the "silence for about half an hour", there is no problem about the meaning of "heaven" in the present context. It is where John has been admitted in his vision (4.1), where in symbol the throne of God is to be found (4.2), and in which the Lamb now sits by His Father's side (5.3ff), opening the Book of the future. It is beneath the altar in this symbolic heavenly temple that John has seen the lives of those that were slain (6.9-11). Here is no 'political heaven' where the rulers of this world dwell but God does not. God's angels are here (8.1-5), and hither the prayers of the saints ascend (8.3). And there is as little warrant for convoluted double reasoning about the length of the half hour as there is for ignoring this meaning of the word 'heaven'. To take half an hour as a 24th of a day

(which it is not), and, having made that into 1/24 of a year, and then go through the exercise again, taking the 15 days which this would represent and expanding them to 15 years, is to take liberties with

exposition after which nothing would be impossible. If we have to say simply that, when the Seventh Seal is opened, heaven holds its breath ever so briefly to give dramatic effect to the terrible things then to happen, then it is better to leave it so.

8.3: Another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand.

During this period John sees enough to occupy the half-hour very profitably. Not only do the seven angels of retribution present themselves before the throne and receive their trumpets (8.2), but another angel emerges, and stands by the altar with his golden censer. Into this censer is silently filled the sweet incense, prepared for the worship of God, and to be used for this alone (Exodus 25.6; 37.29) and, as the prayers of the saints rise up from the afflicted earth, the incense intensifies and sanctifies their petitions, which thus come up acceptably before God. The same vessel from which the incense has been offered is then filled with fire from the altar, which is to be cast down to the earth when the silence is broken. This understanding of the half-hour is enhanced by the parallel between these verses and the great day of atonement (Leviticus 16.12-13), where the period of expectancy would correspond to that of the congregation as the high priest, once in the year, entered into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9.3-10); or perhaps also to that silent period when the people waited without at "the hour of incense" (Luke 1.10), where again prayer and incense are linked together (see on 5.8, pages 100-101). "The LORD is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2.20; Zechariah 2.13).

8.5: The angel took the censer, and he filled it with the fire of the altar and cast it on the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

The contrasts with the Feasts of the Old Testament are as striking as the parallels. As we found in the replacement of the single lampstand of the Tabernacle with the seven detached lampstands of the Congregations of the Apocalypse, so here we find changes of the type noted so tellingly in the Letter to the Hebrews. In the Old Testament the golden altar of incense, though it appertained to the Most Holy Place, was separated from it by the Veil. Here there is no veil: the altar is "before the throne". The cloud of smoke from the incense is not intended for the protection of the high priest "that he die not" (Leviticus 16.13), for now the High Priest is there, on the throne itself, seated at the right hand of God (3.21; 5.7-14; Hebrews 10.12).

The Lord has already made the atonement, and is there in fulness of power to judge the world, and in fulness of love to be touched with the feelings of the infirmities of His saints, to offer grace to help in time of need. And this is to be a time of need such as never before has been (Hebrews 2.18; 4.14-16; Daniel 12 1-Luke 1.25-26).

It has already been noted that the word translated in Hebrews 9.4 is *thumiaterion*, and refers to the golden altar. The word so translated in Revelation 8.3 is *libanotos*, and refers to the portable fire-vessel in which the burning incense was carried. It is the former word which is

used of the portable vessel in the Greek of 2 Chronicles 26.19 and Ezekiel 8.11, while the latter word is used in 1 Chronicles 9.29 of frankincense itself. The word normally used of the portable censer in the Greek Old Testament is *pureion*. Though it is not said that the censer carried in the hand was of gold (and there is a tradition that such a censer was only used on the Day of Atonement), we are told in Numbers 7.14, 18, etc., that the princes of each tribe brought among their offerings each "one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense" at the dedication of the altar. Since we have just concluded that the 144,000 of chapter 7 no longer refer to 12 natural tribes of Israel, but represent saints of all nations as one body in Christ, it is fitting that the censer whose incense supports their prayers should be one vessel replacing the 12 censers of those natural tribes.

The angel with the censer is "over the altar" (8.3 RV), which is parallel to Amos 9.1, where the prophet sees the Lord (*adonai*) standing "upon the altar", perhaps overshadowing it, since the altar itself was only about half a man's height. And this is not the only parallel, for in Amos God is about to execute judgement on His people, searching them out wherever they are (9.2) and sending them into captivity. The prophet is himself employing the symbolism of Psalm 139.8 ("Whither shall I go from Thy spirit... If I ascend up into heaven Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there"), and allowing no-one in the condemned land to escape the coming judgements of God. So it is in Revelation when the fire is cast on the earth.

The altar which receives the incense also dispenses the fire of judgement. The censer which sweetens the prayers of the saints also casts the fire of God's wrath on the earth. Fire in Scripture is always like this, destroying what is corruptible, and refining that which shall be fitted for survival when once it has been purged. "The sinners in Zion" — and elsewhere — "are afraid" at the thought of dwelling with the "devouring fire and everlasting burnings" (Isaiah 33.14); but though God's refining fire may also be painful for the elect themselves, the "trial of their faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth though it be proved with fire, will be found unto praise, and glory, and honour at the

revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1.7).

8.5: Thunders, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake.

The word for thunder (*bronte*) is practically a speciality of the Apocalypse. Apart from the nickname given by the Lord Jesus to the sons of Zebedee (Mark 3.17), and the public impression of thunder when God spoke to His Son (John 12.29), the word is exclusive to Revelation, where it is used 10 times: in 4.5; 6.1; 8.5; 10.3,4,4; 11.19; 14.1; 16.18; 19.6. In the four cases emphasized "voices and lightnings" are also referred to, and in the last three of these an "earthquake" too. In all these four cases the portents issue from the throne of God in heaven, and correspond to increasing intensity in the retribution visited on the earth. In 4.5 they are potential only; in 8.5 the visitation is imminent; in 11.19 the signs follow the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet and herald in the coming of the kingdom of God; while in 16.18 they are linked with the Seventh Vial, itself the latest phase of the Seventh Trumpet, and the immediate prelude to the war between the Lamb and the kings of the earth (16.14). When we compare these visitations with similar ones in the Old Testament (Exodus 9 in association with the Plague of Hail; 19.16 and 20.18 at Sinai before a terrified Israel; 1 Samuel 7.10 against the Philistines; and 12.17-18 to reveal God's displeasure on His people for choosing to have a king "like all the nations"), we see how fitting the symbol is for the outpouring of God's wrath. The word in the Old Testament, though, is the common word for

'voice', gVwl, rendered in LXX by the corresponding Greek phdrit, (except for 1 Samuel 7.10 where the verb 'to thunder is used), so that the 'voices' of Revelation relate the phenomena even more specifically to the Old Testament manifestations.

The thunders and voices are more than mere inarticulate noises: they convey a message too. Men who misunderstood the words to Jesus in John 12 mistook a true message for a mere thunderclap (12.18-20), but there was a real message for those with ears to hear. It is the same in Revelation. To the heedless they are merely formless threatenings, but to those who understand they speak the message of the voice of God fulfilling His purpose. When, later, the "seven thunders uttered their voices" (10.3-5), what they said to John was so clear that he would have written it down had he been allowed. There is something of the same truth on the other occasions also. It is as it was in the Old Testament, where "The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem" (Joel 3.16; Amos 1.2; 3.8; Jeremiah 25.30-31).

CHAPTER IX

8.6-11.19: THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

Before considering any of these in detail, one point of the greatest importance must be developed, which is the striking parallel between the Trumpets here, and the Vials of chapter 16. This is tabulated below:

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

THE SEVEN VIALS

1 (8.7)

Hail and fire mingled with smoke ON THE EARTH. The third part of earth and trees burned up, and all the grass.

1 (16.2) A noisome and grievous sore, ON THE EARTH on those bearing the mark of the Beast, and worshipping his

2 (8.8)

A great mountain INTO THE SEA: the third of sea, ships, and sea creatures affected.

image. 2 (16.3) Poured INTO THE SEA. Every living soul in the sea dies.

3 (8.10)

A burning star falls on the third part of RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS, of which a third part becomes wormwood, and many die.

3 (16.4) Poured on RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS which are turned into blood of which men drink.

4(8.12)

The third part of SUN, MOON AND STARS are smitten and darkened.

4 (16.8) Poured on THE SUN, which scorches men.

5 (9.1)

Star falls on the earth; abyss opened; invasion of locusts; Darkness. Beast worshippers tormented.

5 (16.10) Poured on throne of the Beast. Darkness. Men gnaw their tongue for pain & blaspheme.

6(9.13)

Angels at Euphrates

loosed, and kill the third part of men. Vast armies assembled.

6(16.12) Poured on River Euphrates, to gather all nations to battle.

7(11.15)

Pending conquest of the world to bring about the kingdom of God, resurrection, and judgement. Lightnings, voices, thunders and earthquakes.

7(16.17ff) Babylon destroyed, conquest of the Beast. Resurrection and judgement. The Millennium Lightnings, voices, thunders and earthquake.

There is no denying the common plan. The capitalized words in the first four cases show that the spheres of operations, whatever their significance, are the same: EARTH - SEA - FRESH WATERS - HEAVENLY BODY OR BODIES. There are torment and darkness in the fifth of each series; the River Euphrates and the assembly of armies are found in the sixth; and the portents of thunder, voices and an earthquake introduce the kingdom, resurrection and judgement in the seventh.

Yet the series are far from identical. In the Trumpets it is repeatedly emphasized that a third part of the area affected is desolated. Suffering is grievous, but it is not universal. No such restriction operates in the Vials, in one of which "every living soul" in the sea is said to die (16.3), and the remainder have every appearance of finality. It is as though two sets of judgements are inflicted by God on the world, Trumpets first and Vials afterwards. And between the two there is strong evidence of a period of witness — which will be elaborated later, but is referred to in 10.8-11; 11.3-12, and 14.6-7 — giving the nations their last opportunity of repentance before "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven . . . taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1.7-8).

Chapters 10-14 Seals, trumpets, vials and woes

CHAPTER X

SEALS, TRUMPETS, AND VIALS

It is a question needing to be answered, why the three series of disclosures should be given these names: to be sure, seals have to be broken to make it possible to open the Book, and to that extent the symbol might not have any special appropriateness of its own. But trumpets and vials are freely chosen signs, and there must be some good reason for selecting them. And so there is, and for the seals too. For if a Book is unsealed its contents can be read. There may not be anything in the contents of the Book which speaks of special action on God's part, but at least there is His foreknowledge of what is to come, and it is this pre-eminently that the Seals do disclose. Horsemen will be at large as forces of good and evil compete in the world. One of them may denote the witness to the gospel of God, but he does not symbolize any particular sets of actions on God's part. Even the Fifth seal with its souls under the altar does not speak of God's dealings with the world, but only gives an assurance that the deaths of the martyrs will not have been in vain. And though the Sixth Seal speaks of the terrors of God's judgements shortly to come, it is occupied with the fears of men in anticipation, and not with those actions themselves. So the breaking of the seals does what the action implies — unseals the events about to come to pass; but not until the Seventh Seal is broken is God seen to be taking an active part in world events.

It is the Seventh Seal which ushers in the Trumpets, and these Trumpets are sounded by God's angels. Trumpets sound alarms to call people together, or they sound the note to assemble armies to battle; or they issue a warning of dangers against which precautions must be taken. In the Old Testament the silver shofars were used to summon Israel in the Wilderness to make or strike camp (Numbers 10), and accompanied the dedication or rededication of the Temple, while the shophar was used both in religious services and in calling people to battle (e.g. Leviticus 25.9; Joshua 6.4-20; 2 Samuel 2.28, etc.) . So here in

the Apocalypse the Trumpets sound alarms and warnings. Here is action by God, which people can heed if they will, and in heeding might avert the worse things yet to come.

It is a commonplace to say "shophar, or ram's horn", but there seems to be nothing in Scripture to say that this is what it was. The name bears no resemblance to that for 'ram', which is 'ayiyel, and there appears to be nothing in the etymology to support the notion. The related verb might mean "beautiful, shining", which would seem more appropriate to an object made of bright metal.

But if Trumpets are warnings, Vials or Bowls are outpourings. We have gone beyond mere disclosure, and again beyond the sounding of the alarm, and have reached the point where there is no return, nothing provisional: the end has come. God is pouring out His final judgements on the world, and there can be no turning back. There are a number of parallels in the Old Testament, where the verb shaphak is used in just such a way of the ultimate emptying out of God's irreversible judgements on His own or other people (see Psalm 69.24; 79.6; Isaiah 42.25; Jeremiah 10.25; Lamentations 2.4; 4.11; Ezekiel 7.8; 9.8, etc.; Hosea 5.10; Zephaniah 3.8).

This analysis itself supports the position at which we have arrived in this discussion of the meaning of the Book. It relates the major course of human history as a fact; it approaches the end and issues a warning. The warning is ignored; and it then describes the pouring out of the final judgements. It would not be easy to make logical sense of this if the period between the Trumpets and the Vials were to be prolonged.

THE TRUMPETS: GOD'S WARNING VISITATIONS

That God's own specific intervention in world affairs is now in issue can be brought out again if we summarize briefly the symbolic events of the Trumpets:

8.7

1st

Trumpet

i

Hail, fire, and blood cast on the earth from heaven.

8.8

2nd Trumpet

A great mountain cast on the earth from heaven.

8.10

3rd

Trumpet

A burning star cast on the earth from heaven.

8.12

4th

Trumpet

The heavenly bodies themselves are darkened.

9.1

5th

Trumpet

A star falls to earth from heaven.

9.12

6th

Trumpet

The four angels at Euphrates are loosed by divine command.

10.1

Seven thunders sound at the voice of an angel.

11.4

Two witnesses have God-given power to smite the earth with plagues.

11.15

7th

Trumpet

The Kingdom of God takes over from that of men.

Similarly miraculous events accompany the pouring out of the Vials. The parallel between some of these visitations, at least, and

the plagues of Egypt and the miracles of Elijah seems to put them into altogether a different category from the events of the first five Seals, and to demand a recognition that God is now actively at work, bringing about precise judgements on a world which, having first been warned, must on its rejection of the warning then be punished.

It may not be possible to show that the events listed under Trumpets and Vials will be evidently miraculous in the way that Moses' plagues were. But it would be foolish to deny that they could be so: if it pleases God to intervene as dramatically as we know He will when the Lord Jesus returns, it would be folly to close our minds to the possibility that He will prepare the way for that return by actions no less miraculous. At least it seems quite plain from the record that the events in the Trumpet category will be so plainly the work of God to every perceptive eye that, when coupled with the witness of preaching with which it will be associated, the world ought to perceive God's hand and repent, and will be held guilty when it fails to do so.

CHAPTER XI

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL BETWEEN TRUMPETS AND VIALS

It has already been intimated (Page 151) that the period between Trumpets and Vials will include a witness, which will convict the world of deliberate guilt when it rejects it. Perhaps the following, slightly repetitive, analysis will make the point plain:

Trumpets: Partial but severe visitations on Earth, Sea, Fresh

water and Heavenly bodies (8.7-12); Vials: Complete visitations on Earth, Sea, Fresh

waters and Sun (16.1-9);

and between the two the following plain calls to repentance and faith:

10.11

Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.

11.3

I will give unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy.

14.6-7

I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim . . . Worship Him that made the heavens, the earth, and sea, and fountains of waters.

The parallel is unmistakable. If the order of the spheres in 14.7 has been slightly changed to put the heavens first (no doubt to bring the thought of creation into line with "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, Genesis 1.1), the terms are so carefully chosen that we cannot doubt their purpose to link together Trumpets and Vials, by way of this warning to take heed to the message of the Creator of all those spheres of operation on which the first judgements have already been visited, before the pouring out of the later and more severe punishments if no repentance is forthcoming.

The situation is very like that when Moses confronted Pharaoh when, as has often been pointed out, there is a progression, more or less, in the manner of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, thus:

Episode

Miracle

Outcome

Genesis

Preliminary

Rod into serpent

Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

7.13

First plague

Water into blood

Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

7.22

Second plague

Frogs

Pharaoh hardened his heart.

8.15

Third plague

Lice

Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

8.19

Fourth plague

Flies

Pharaoh hardened his heart.

8.32

Fifth plague

Murrain

Pharaoh's heart was stubborn.

9.7

Sixth plague

Boils

The LORD hardened his heart.

9.12

Seventh plague

Hail

Pharaoh hardened his heart.

9.34

Eighth plague

Locusts

The LORD hardened his heart.

10.20

Ninth plague

Darkness

The LORD hardened his heart.

10.27

All the first five plagues result in a spontaneous refusal by Pharaoh himself to learn the lesson. "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" may in itself allow of the possibility that the hardening came from without, but the further comments that "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, he refuseth to let the people go" (7.14), "neither did he lay even this to heart" (7.23), and "he hearkened not to them" (8.19), all suggest that the unrepentant attitude was wilful. In three of the remaining four plagues, however (for no repentance was possible after the tenth), we are told that God Himself took the initiative, as He had said to Moses He would (7.3). If this presents a moral problem, this is dealt with in Romans 9.17-24, where it is apparent that Pharaoh was "a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction", whose perversity God endured through repeated tests until, the man having established by convincing evidence that he was truly unrepentant at heart, God deprived Him of the possibility of avoiding the destruction to come, and compelled him to go on to the bitter end along the road he had willingly chosen for himself.

No doubt the same thing was true of Judas Iscariot, whom the Lord appointed as one of the Twelve in the clear knowledge that he would betray Him (Matthew 10.4 ; John 6.64-71), and who yet had abundant opportunities to repent of his treacherous plan until at last he took his freely-chosen decision to sell his Lord for gain, and became beyond redress "the son of perdition" (John 17.12). God does not predestine to incurable evil men who are willing to repent, but He may and does raise up for His purpose those whose mind He knows to be set against accepting His will, and whom without injustice He can consign to the end they have chosen for themselves.

What is true of individuals like Pharaoh and Judas is true of groups and of nations too. The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, apparently for 120 years, until it became an established fact that only the family of Noah would respond to His call (Genesis 6.3,5; 1 Peter 3.20). Sodom would not have been destroyed if there had been ten righteous persons

there, and Lot's intercession for his sons-in-law might well have been the last of many attempts which this righteous man made to get the men of Sodom to change their ways (Genesis 18.32; 19.14; 2 Peter 2.7-8). Abraham's descendants were not allowed to dispossess the Canaanites immediately, for "in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full" (Genesis 15.16). Judah was not dispossessed of its land until its consistent rejection of the prophets brought about a situation for which "there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36.16). The Jews of the Lord Jesus' day were not told that their "house was left to them desolate" until they had decisively rejected the Lord's oft-repeated attempts to "gather them and keep them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" (Luke 13.34; 19.42). Even the former abandonment of the heathen world to a "reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" was not done until men had established that they "did not like to retain God" in their knowledge (Romans 1.16-32).

It need not be surprising then if, before the most final of all His judgements, God should take steps to ensure that the world had been properly informed of its responsibilities, and had heard and rejected the invitation to reform. Indeed, it might be surprising if this were not done, in view of the examples just given, and the Book of Revelation gives convincing evidence that this is indeed God's purpose. The same thought is adumbrated in the Lord Jesus' earlier words, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24.14). It is true that the Roman world had heard the gospel even in the days of the apostles (Colossians 1.6), but this was prior even to the destruction of Jerusalem, and in no way fits the chronology of the events now being discussed, where the preaching referred to lies between the first six Trumpets and the final outpouring of the wrath of God revealed in the Vials.

The analogy with Pharaoh is, therefore, that the world wittingly hardens its own heart during the admonitory punishments of the Trumpets, and God give it no opportunity of repentance during the final visitation of the Vials.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD CLOSED.

After these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, clothed in pure and bright linen, and girt about their breasts with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished. (15.5-8)

This passage, preparing the way for the last judgements, points the same way. After the preaching of 14.7 John sees a vision of the saints in the temple (15.2) which resembles that of the sealed multitude (7.4, 9, etc.). But as these saints, like the souls under

the altar (6.9), await their assured blessing, for the rest of the world the "temple of the tabernacle of the testimony" is closed. The angels come out to pour God's vengeance on the world (15.6), but only those who have already repented and received the gospel have now any right to His care and protection under the visitations to come. A very clearly written NO ADMITTANCE notice is posted outside the sanctuary, and, like the unrepentant Pharaoh of the Exodus, the world must now accept and endure the tribulations which it has brought upon itself by its refusal to listen to the final appeal.

It is difficult indeed to believe that this overall survey of chapters 8 to 16 can be upset, and so, before attempting any more detailed analysis of these chapters, let us summarize the general position arrived at:

a At a time when the saints have been told that the end is not far away (6.11), and men are recoiling in fear from the anticipated pouring out of God's wrath (6.15-17), the saints are reminded that they are secure in God's care whatever now may come (7.1-17), and whatever may befall them (8.3-4).

b Under the symbolism of the Trumpets, God then proceeds to pour out severe and destructive, but not final, judgements on every sphere of human interest — earth, fresh waters which may be drunk, salt waters for navigation and fishing, and the heavenly providers of heat and light (8.1-12); followed by yet more severe judgements in the shape of the last three Trumpets, the "three Woes" (8.13, 9.12; 11.15).

c In the course of the Sixth Trumpet, the Second Woe, the gospel is powerfully preached throughout the world (10.11; 11.3, 6; 14.7), to which men in general decline to respond by way of repentance, just as they did during the judgements (9.20, 21; 11.7) which precede this witness, d As a result, the world is now told that the door to fruitful

repentance is to be closed (14.7, 15.5-8).

e The last, inescapable, judgements are then poured out on the impenitent world, and finally, after the "battle of the great day of God Almighty" (16.1-16), the "kingdom of this world" is abolished, and replaced by "the kingdom of our God and of His Christ" (11.15-16, in anticipation; 16.17-20, in realization).

This summary shows clearly how much this Book concentrates on the last days. It needed but one chapter (6.1-11) to bring us within eyeshot of the end-times, but then it takes nine (7-15) to prepare the scene, by way of the preliminary judgements of the

Trumpets, before the final outpourings which herald the coming of the kingdom, no less than two of which represent interludes (7, 15), designed to reassure the saints of their remembrance by God in the trials to come. We then have four more chapters (16.1-20.3) in which the last crisis is worked out in detail, and we are taken to the installation of the Lamb and His saints on the thrones of the kingdom. The nearer we approach to the culminating events, the larger the time-scale becomes, much as in turning the pages of an atlas designed for a particular region we move from a map of the universe on a minute scale, through progressively larger-scale and smaller-scope maps of the world, a continent, a country, and a state or county, until we reach the feature of particular interest.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS (8.1-13)

The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast on the earth; and the third part of the earth was burned up; and the third part of the trees was burned up; and all the green grass was burned. (8.7)

The affliction under the First Trumpet is in some ways like that of the Plague of Hail (Exodus 9.22-26). In both the hail is mingled with fire, and in both it injures trees and crops. Ezekiel (38.22) threatens a similar judgement on the hosts of Gog, and the obviously supernatural character both of the plagues on Egypt and of the judgements on Gog raises the very important question as to whether it could be right to interpret the event of this Trumpet — or of the remainder — as being merely human political or military actions symbolically represented.

Once again the point emerges (as on page 151) that these are divine judgements, and we might think that the world should see them to be such, as clearly as Pharaoh did the signs wrought through Moses, and as clearly as we believe will be the judgements wrought against Gog. In these circumstances it is doubly difficult to make any confident guess as to what the signs will prove to be on fulfillment: because they will be inflicted in some way by God Himself, and because we have not yet reached the point referred to. What we can confidently say is that it is the earth which is the scene of the present affliction, the earth on which man has his home, grows his crops and rears his beasts, and pursues his ambitions and pleasures.

When this Trumpet sounds, the very core of man's daily life will be painfully touched, with damage comparable with the wreck of the agriculture of Egypt by the Plagues of Hail and of Locusts. If the Exodus type is followed further, it might even be the case that, as Goshen escaped the hail, so the saints of God may have peace within their dwellings — at the very least peace of mind — while the hearts of other men are failing them for fear (Luke 21.26; Psalm 46.2; Isaiah 26.3, 20-21).

As fire and hail are found together in the passage just quoted, so are fire and blood combined in Joel 1.20, and though the first application of this passage may be to the dreadful events which occurred at the destructions of Jerusalem, some years after the Pentecostal outpourings (Acts 2.17-21), accompanied by the deliverance of those who fled to Pella — "in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape (2.32 RV and RSV; Luke 21.21) — yet its link in Joel with the days when all nations will be gathered against Jerusalem to battle (3.1) takes us also inescapably to its greater fulfillment in the time of the end.

The second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed. (8.8-9)

The Second Trumpet (8.8-9) concerns the sea, an indispensable source of food, and an important medium of international trade and communication. With this, man is bound to be affected at yet another point in his precariously balanced economy.

The sign is in some degree based on the First Plague of Moses (Exodus 2.14-24), but extends beyond the river of a single land into the oceans of all the world. The great mountain (8.8) reminds us of Jeremiah's description of Babylon as a "destroying mountain", and, in view of the prominence of a power called in this Book 'Babylon' (Jeremiah 51.24-25; Revelation 14.8; 16.19; 17.5; 18.1-24), this suggests that the infliction may well be brought about through the evil designs of this power, whatever it might prove to be. There is no difficulty in imagining what forces, already available to the 'nuclear powers', might be put into operation to bring about, with terrible literalness, the desolations spoken of under this Trumpet. It has to be said again, though, that the structure of this section of our Book seems to require that man will be able, if he is willing, to see the finger of God in what will happen, so that he can, if he will, repent and turn to God and His ways.

The third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell on the third part of the rivers, and on the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died because of the waters, because they were made bitter. (8.10-11)

The Third Trumpet extends the visitations to the "rivers and fountains of waters", which become bitter like those of Marah in Exodus (15.33). The symbolic cause of the bitterness is a "star from heaven" (a phenomenon repeated in the Fifth Trumpet, 9.1). Such a phenomenon again has its contacts with Babylon in Isaiah 14.2, in the famous passage, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning (Daystar, Son of Dawn, RV)". The phenomenon of falling stars is not new to the Apoca-

lypse either, since it appeared in the Sixth Seal (6.13). It will also be met again in connection with the activities of 'the Dragon' in 12.4, 9. Apart from the Lucifer prophecy, the symbol is also rooted in the Old Testament in Isaiah 34.4, "all the host of heaven shall fall down", if the A. V. reading is accepted; and is anticipated in the Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24.29). In all these cases it is associated with the judgements of God upon nations. The name 'Wormwood' (apsinthos), given to the star, is never used in LXX to translate the Hebrew la'enSh, wormwood, so we have no linguistic clue to the interpretation. On a purely literal level, though, it is easy to see how this infliction could be brought about when we reflect on the pollution of water supplies already being produced on a frightening scale by the hand of man, and on the ability of scientific warfare to contaminate waters by bacterial or chemical means.

The fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner. (8.12)

With the Fourth Trumpet we return to more familiar symbolism, with signs in sun, moon, and stars, which we have several times seen to be closely associated with events leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus. The reference to darkness, though, once more takes us back to the Plagues of Egypt (the Ninth Plague, Exodus 10.21-23). There the darkness was physical and supernatural, and while we cannot yet determine the extent to which this may be true on the occasion to come, there have been enough examples of darkness in daytime caused, say, by volcanic eruptions, for the possibility by no means to be excluded. There is no mistaking the contrast, however, between the effect on the heavenly bodies in the Fourth Trumpet, and the effect on the Sun produced in its companion Fourth Vial (16.8-9). Here darkness covers the earth as the light of sun, moon, and stars is temporarily extinguished (see Genesis 1.16; Joel 2.10; 3.15), as the people who walk in darkness refuse to see the bright light (Isaiah 9.2;

60.2); but in the Fourth Vial the effect on moon and stars is ignored (for the former has no light of its own, and the latter are dimmed by distance), because of the overwhelming brilliance there displayed by the sun as it burst out into preter-

Since a falling star always indicates the discomfiture of the power concerned, no less in Revelation than elsewhere (see especially 12.4, 9), it seems that we are to look for afflictions associated with the downfall of some authority. The lamentation of the nations over the fall of 'Babylon' in 18.1-24 seems to provide a parallel.

natural light and heat, and men are scorched with the intensity of the sun's exaggerated brightness. God may blind men's eyes to the saving truth if this is the way they have chosen for themselves, but He may also wither them with His excess of brightness when in their last rebellion they turn against Him. It is this that the Fourth Vial says He will do when His warnings and appeals have been ultimately rejected.

Whatever the partial darkness of the Fourth Trumpet may prove to mean, it denies to men the light they have come to take for granted, and plunges the arrogant race, which has come to suppose that with its inventions it can turn night into day, into a groping and bewildered night in which not only its Broadway glitter is extinguished, but even its basic amenities, at least for token periods, are taken away. Those who have experienced some taste of this in the blacks-out of war, or the forced economies of industrial unrest, may have some faint idea of the helplessness it will signify. Only those who have the light of life can appreciate that "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8.12). What the world endured for three hours when it crucified its Lord (Mark 15.33), must in some manner be experienced again shortly before they "look on Me Whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12.10).

None of this is intended to reject the possibility that sun, moon, and stars, which are sometimes intimately associated with Israel, may prove to have some such import in the fulfillment of this Trumpet. Had it not been for the links between these Trumpets and the Plagues of Egypt, as well as later prophecy (Joel 2.10; 3.15) this might even have been the preferred solution. But in the present context we are concerned with God's judgements on the unbelieving world at large, and to restrict any of these signs to Israel uniquely seems alien to this context.

CHAPTER XIII

THE THREE WOES

/ saw, and I heard an eagle (angel, AV), flying in mid-heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels who are yet to sound. (8.13.)

The manner in which the last three Trumpets are introduced shows very clearly that what they portend is far more painful to the earth even than the grievous things which have already been signified. "Woe, woe, woe!" might have been taken (like "Holy, holy, holy" in Isaiah 6.3, Revelation 4.8; and "Overturn, overturn, overturn" in Ezekiel 21.27 (perhaps), as simply emphatic indications of how deep the woe would in general be, were it not that the three Trumpets severally are now designated as the first, second, and third woes (9.12; 11.14). The word "woe" seems to be an onomatopoeic word, ouai, and occurs in the following places:

Matthew 11.21; 18.7, 7; 23.13,14,15, 16,23, 25, 27, 29; 24.19; 26.24; Mark 13.11; 14.21; Luke 6.24, 25, 25, 26; 10.13; 11.42, 43,44,46,47,52; 17.1; 21.23; 22.22; 1 Corinthians 9.16; Jude 11; Revelation 8.13, 13, 13; 9.12, 12; 11.14, 14; 12.12; 18.10, 10, 16, 16, 19, 19.

In every case except the ones in Revelation 18 the word is rendered "Woe!", but in these the translation "Alas!" is substituted. In all cases except these the meaning is plainly that the subject of the woe is warned of judgement to come because of sins, or else (on one occasion) of suffering to be experienced when judgement falls on others (Mark 13.7). The last cases are only different in that the mourners express their own grief and sense of loss when 'Babylon' falls victim to the Lord's judgements, and they themselves participate in the outcome. The occurrence in Revelation 12 is singular in that the sufferings are brought on the inhabitants of the earth by 'the devil', now dethroned from a position of power (see pages 211-212), but even so the sufferings arise because of the outworking of God's purposes against sin.

The present passage is unique, though, in using the interjection as a noun. "The three woes" are three particularly severe inflictions which the world must endure, evidently exceeding all that has gone before. Since the last of them (if the same pattern as before is followed) also includes within itself the Seven Vials of the "seven last plagues" (chapter 16) there can be no surprise

about this case, but we must be prepared for suffering on a scale not before experienced even in the case of the first two of the Woes, the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets.

The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen to the earth: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss. And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And out of the smoke came forth locusts on the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was said to them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months; and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it striketh a man. And in those days men shall seek death and shall not find it; and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like to horses prepared for war; and on their heads as it were crowns like to gold, and their faces were as men's faces. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was on the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war. And they have tails like to scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months. They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he hath the name Apollyon. The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter. (9.1-12)

As with the Seals, much more space is given to the three last Trumpets than to the first four. In fact, it will help us to see the true perspective if we note the relative space devoted to each member of all the principal series, using numbers of verses in the Revised Version, thus;

Number

Seals

Trumpets

Vials

1

2

1

1

2

2

2

1

3

2

2

4

4

2

1

2

5

11

12

2

6

6

9

5

7

5

5

5

In other words, in every case the first four revelations are greatly condensed in relation to the other three: two per unit as against at least 7 for the seals; 1/2 as against at least 9 for the

Trumpets; and 3 as against at least 4 for the Vials, which are themselves exceptional since there is no subdivision to follow them. The figures marked are minima since it is possible to put the interludes which follow under the same heading and so enlarge them greatly.

This might be regarded as mere barren statistics, but it is more than this. It shows that in each case the first four parts out of seven are a general description compared with the relatively great detail of the remaining three. In the first four of each series an overall picture is given of what things are, or will be, like: the Seals of a world with various forces, of good and evil, at work until the end draws near; the Trumpets of kinds of judgement to be poured out on the world until the last opportunity of repentance is ushered in by a severe visitation, followed by an intense campaign of witness; and the Vials of similar but more devastating inflictions preceding the destruction of earthly systems of government and of apostate religion, and their replacement by the kingdom of God. Such a division into the brief and the detailed would be hard indeed to explain on any 'continuous historic' system of interpretation.

The Fifth Trumpet (9.1-12)

As, in the Seals, the Fifth brought us very close to the end on the time-scale of that series ("Yet a little while", 6.11), so here we are moving at an accelerated pace towards the climax by the time the Fifth Trumpet is reached. It may even be that the visitations of the first Four Trumpets will parallel the events of the first Four Seals in operating together, announced by the four trumpet-blasts but combining their forces. At all events, though "yet a little while" is not repeated, there is one of the few notes of time in the Apocalypse at this point, as we learn that during its period men are to be "tormented five months". If this period is to be understood literally, it is also very short, which is in accordance with what we have increasingly come to expect. But if it is not literal, and is to be interpreted on the basis of a day for a year, then it becomes unconscionably long, for 150 years at this point, when the world has just been warned of impending doom (8.13), would lack all the elements of horror and fearful expectation with which these chapters are charged. This Trumpet is, moreover, followed in the next with the declaration that "there shall be time no longer" (10.6).

It is true that there was a comparable period of 120 years "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (Genesis 6.3; 1 Peter 3.20), but then human longevity was such that this was a mere fraction of a lifetime, compared with the three or four generations it would represent here. It is hard to see the appropriateness of warning one generation of something which would come upon their great great grandchildren.

The pit of the abyss (9.1,2,11). We meet the expression for the first time in the Apocalypse here, but the term "abyss" is not new to the Scriptures. It is found in Luke 8.31 of the place to which demons feared to be sent, and in Romans 10.7 of the hidden place where Christ lay in death (but where the allusion is to Deuteronomy 36.12-13 in which "beyond the seas" is the equivalent expression in LXX). The Greek term *abussos*, of which it is a transliteration, occurs some 35 times in LXX, where it corresponds to "the deep" of the Hebrew, sometimes apparently in the sense of wells of water. It is found in Revelation in 9.1,2,11; 11.7; 17.8; 20.1, 3. The word here translated 'pit' is found in Luke 14.5 ('well' RV); John 4.11, 12 (of Jacob's well), and in Revelation 9 three times, though on the other occasions 'abyss' stands alone, evidently as a condensed expression for the same concept. The corresponding term occurs over 50 times in LXX, but never in association with *abussos*.

It would be very unwise to attempt to interpret the expression without reference to the other occurrences in the Apocalypse, which are therefore set out below:

9.1,2

A star from heaven opens the pit of the abyss,
from which emerge smoke and locusts.

9.11

The king of the locusts is the angel of the abyss, named Abaddon or Apollyon.

11.7

The Beast from the abyss will slay the Two Witnesses (doubtless the same Beast as that which emerges from the sea in 13.1).

17.8

The Beast on which the Harlot is seated will come out of the abyss and go into perdition.

20.1,3

An angel binds the Dragon and, armed with a key, locks him in the abyss, so that he shall deceive the nations no more for 1000 years, after which he is to be released, and then cast into the Lake of Fire where the Beast (and False Prophet)

In Genesis 1.2; 7.11; 8.2; Deuteronomy 8.7 (depth); 33.13; Job 28.14 (depth AV); 36.16 (?); 38.16 (depth AV); 41.22, 22, 23 (?); Psalm 33.7 (depth AV); 36.6; 42.7, 7; 71.20 (depth); 77.16 (depth); 78.15 (depth); 104.6; 106.9 (depth); 107.26 (depth); 135.6; 148.7; Proverbs 3.20 (depth); 8.24 (depth); Isaiah 44.27; 51.10; 63.13 (depth RV); Ezekiel 26.19; 31.4, 15; Amos 7.4; Jonah 2.6 (?); Habakkuk 3.10. Where ? appears there is no exact correspondence with the Hebrew. The thought is often that of an inaccessible and therefore mysterious place deep below the surface.

have already been confined (20.10).

In the light of this list it seems plain that the abyss has a consistent meaning throughout. Thinking simply of the story told in symbol, when the abyss is opened the Beast emerges, and by means of its locust forces brings affliction on the world. It then assumes dominance over the world, and slays the Witnesses of God. It is subsequently dominated for a short time by the Harlot, but the kings who have given their power to it destroy her, and the Beast remains to make war with the Lamb, loses the war, and is sent into 'perdition' in the Lake of Fire. The abyss from which it has emerged, however, becomes the temporary abode of the Dragon (evidently possessing authority greater than that of the Beast, 13.2, 4), but the Dragon emerges at the end of the 1000 years, leads a rebellion against the saints of God, and is in its turn, destroyed in the Lake of Fire.

This makes a consequential story in symbol, and ought to be taken as the basis of any interpretation of the meaning of the abyss, and of the Beast which emerges from it. Any interpretation — and such interpretations do exist — which gives totally different meanings to the abyss in chapters 9 (sometimes associated with a geographical location in the near east), and 20 (nearly always, and very understandably, associated with the condition in which sin is restrained), should be scrutinized with the utmost care. It will not be sufficient, even if it is possible, to show that historical events can be discovered which fit the symbolism attractively: it will be necessary to show, even if this is done, why scriptural consistency should be sacrificed to such attractions. Meantime this scriptural consistency seems to show most clearly that we are talking in these passages about one abyss, and one Beast, only.

Everything else points to the Tightness of this conclusion. We have already seen convincing ground for believing that the Beast as this Book reveals it is a latter-day phenomenon; what is more likely, then, that it should assume sovereignty over the nations at the time of the last-day preaching of the gospel, and so be able to accomplish the martyrdom of the Witnesses (11.7)? It would then be in the position in which we find it in 17.13-14, to lead the nations in their antagonism to the Lamb, so laying itself open to the destruction of 19.20. This is not the place to say what can be said about the identity of the Beast, which is first described to us in chapter 13, but at least we see it emerging at the right time for the tasks to be performed, before the Lord shall destroy it with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2.3-12).

In 13.1 the Abyss is identified with "the Sea". It may represent humanity in all its unfathomable iniquity, lying latent until it is opened up when a suitable leader arises (the "angel of the abyss" of 9.11), or to which evil may be consigned when it pleases God to bring it under control. The evil represented by the 'demons' of Luke 8.31 could be submerged in it when the swine were drowned in the Sea of Galilee. It would be the place of eternal death had not the Lord Jesus risen from the dead (Romans 10.7). When the Beast to whose uprise we are being led comes to prominence, it represents something which was active once before, has lapsed and been consigned to this limbo for a while, and emerges for its last fling before being totally extinguished in the Lake of Fire (17.8, 11; 19.20).

It may be, nevertheless, that a geographical location is to be considered as the place of uprise of the Beast, since the 'sea' of 13.1 is to be compared with that of Daniel 7.2-3, from which the beasts of Daniel's world empires arise. This, though, should wait until chapter 13 is considered.

The king of the abyss (9.11). We have seen the likelihood that this leader is to be identified later as the Beast of chapters 11, 13, 17, and 19. His Hebrew name of A:bhaddown, and his Greek name of Apolluon, point the same way. The former is found in Job 26.6 in connection

with the extinction of the dead in the grave, sh':"owl,, the same is true of 28.22, while destruction remains the theme in 31.12. Psalm 88.11, Proverbs 15.11; 27.20, repeat the message of Job 26.6. As for apolluon, this is derived from the very apollumi, destroy, and to the noun apoleia, destruction, the word rendered 'perdition' in Revelation 17.8, 11, and also used of the 'son of perdition' in 2 Thessalonians 2.3 (see above).

In fact, a strong case is beginning to emerge for seeing in the events of the Fifth Trumpet the development of a power which corresponds to the 'man of sin' of 2 Thessalonians, and as we see the characteristics of the Beast and its agent unfold in the chapters which remain, up to its final destruction in chapter 19, the case for this will be strengthened yet again. In Thessalonians the evil power is "according to the working of Satan" (2.9); here it receives its authority from "that old serpent called the devil and Satan" (12.9; 13.2). There it exalts itself above God and demands worship (2.4), and here it is the same (13.3, 4, 8). There it is supported by apparently miraculous signs, effective in the minds of those who refuse to obey the truth (2.9-12); here it is those whose names are not written in the Book of Life who fall down before it in worship (13.8), not being sealed by God in their foreheads (9.4). There it is restrained for a while before it comes to view: here it is released from the abyss at the appropriate time

(9.1). There the Lord slays and destroys it (2.8); here the Lamb prevails against it and its associate kingdoms, and overcomes them (17.14).

These are startling and irresistible parallels. Once again we see the evident hand of God in establishing such detailed unity between two apparently unrelated parts of Scripture from different authors, and written in very different circumstances, each without any explicit reference to the other, and yet they are so inextricably interwoven that we must see the common Hand providing the revelation given to both.

They should not hurt the grass (9.4). This is a strange Power which emerges from the abyss. Unlike those visitations already sent by God Himself in the first Four Trumpets, this power does no damage to the environment, but operates exclusively against those "who have not the seal of God in their foreheads." It emerges from the world, but the unbelieving world is its victim. If it were not for events which have now become commonplace we might be hard put to it to think that this could possibly mean. Even now we cannot be certain, but so much has been seen since 1917 of the uprise of peoples' liberation movements which, even if they got rid of one tyranny, only replaced it by another as bad or worse, from which escape is infinitely harder, that such things may provide our clue. If Rehoboam could threaten to chastise his own countrymen with scorpions instead of whips (1 Kings 12.11, 14), we can see how appropriate such language is to the slavery of the 'Peoples' Democratic Republic' of the world, in which the Big Brother is paramount, onerous, and irresistible. The very practice of sealing the borders of whole countries to that those who live there shall be unable to escape to freedom reveals how hard the bondage already is. Imagine such a power in control of the whole world, and how hard would then be the lot of those groaning under the yoke of their supposed liberator?

In such circumstances the world has already seen cases where men "seek death" (9.6), because there is no other deliverance. But such an approach to the interpretation of the promised reign of terror, even with the horrors of the world's ruthlessly executed revolutions of the past few hundred years to guide us, is inadequate to account fully for the extreme language used here. As with all prophecy which has not yet been fulfilled, we can at present

only wait and see. The military symbols employed ("horses prepared for war", 9.7; "the sound of chariots, and of horses rushing to war", 9.9; harmonize well with the glorification of military might in 20th-century tyrannies. The symbols are substantially drawn from the Old Testament, for the invading locusts of Joel are like horses too (2.4); they too have teeth as of a lion (1.6); and

they too make noises as the sound of chariots (2.5); and if this does not comprehend all the symbols used under this Trumpet, the correspondence is so close as to suggest, yet again, that the Trumpet is leading us in the same direction as Joel's prophecy, toward the "great day of God Almighty" (Joel 3.1-2; Revelation 16.14). As a step towards achieving power over the world, the despotic systems of our day use their military might to subdue their own and satellite peoples, before going on to conquer those around by the same means, or by the threat of them. When these words were first written, all countries save those in the southern peninsulas from eastern Europe to far-eastern China, had come under such a yoke, or were under threat. To attempt to identify other, similar developments, actual or anticipated, could only date this work. Every reader will be able to make his own additions for himself as the events unfold.

Such as have not the seal of God (9.4). In the face of the terror to come, the saints of God are again reassured that this is without prejudice to their standing before God. While it would be going too far to say that the saints are promised immunity from the sufferings, and quite contrary to the evidence of this Book to say that they will be spared the enmity of the world (13.7, 15; 14.13, etc.), it does seem quite plain that what God is inflicting on the world at this point will, indeed, spare His chosen ones. The means whereby the Beast will identify its own slaves have not yet been revealed (see 13.16), and so the matter is put negatively: the judgements do not fall on those wearing the seal of God. Later we shall learn of judgements which do fall on those branded with the mark of the Beast (14.9, etc.), and these are conversely worded statements of the same discrimination.

Five months (9.5, 10). We have already given good reasons why this period can hardly be supposed to signify 150 years (see pages 165-166). In the absence of any evident scriptural precedent for this figure in prophecy, we may find help in natural history: "The general period of a locust plague is about five months: 'As the natural locusts commit their ravages only for five months, so the ravages of these symbolic ones will be only for a short period' (Stuart)" (Ellicott, in loc.). A short and sharp tyranny comparable with, if not necessarily equal to, the duration of a locust plague, is the closest we can come to an identification of the period.

The Sixth Trumpet (9.12-21). In fact this sixth trumpet must continue through to 11.14, which is the first time we meet the Seventh and last Trumpet, but the passage is so long that it must be taken in stages. This is the last time we hear of the "third part" (9.15, 16) of the potential victim, and the sphere of injury is now widened from vegetation (8.7), marine creatures and ships (8.8-9), fresh waters (8.10-11), and light from the heavenly bodies

(8.12) to the persons of men themselves. It must represent a vast increase in scale now, compared with the "many men who died because of the waters" of 8.11.

9.13: The sixth and sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which had been

prepared for the hour, and day, and month, and year, that they should kill the third part of men. And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their mouth proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and the smoke, and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails: for the tails are like to serpents and have heads: and with them they do hurt. And the rest of mankind, which were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the work of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood: which can neither see, or hear, nor walk; and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts. (9.21)

The forces involved show close parallels with those of the Fifth Trumpet, though stopping short of identity, as the following list shows. They each have horses (9.3, 7; 16, 17); with resemblances to lions (9.8; 17); reference is made in both cases to breastplates (9.9; 17); in each case power is contained in the tails (9.10; 19) to hurt or kill men (9.10; 15, 20).

From the horns of the golden altar (9.13): this is the altar of incense as in 8.3, at which have been offered heavenly odours to reinforce the prayers of the saints, that they might be given strength and endurance to face the coming time of trouble. As this trouble now approaches its peak, and the angels of worldwide tribulation are about to be loosed (7.2; 9.14), the saints are again reminded that in all this they are not forgotten.

Bound at the great river Euphrates (9.14). The four angels of 7.2-3 were at "the four corners of the earth". These now about to be loosed are at the River Euphrates. But this does not so much reduce the scale of the operations as bring them to a focus. It will be from the typical Euphrates that the events will emerge. But why Euphrates? The river is referred to again in the Sixth Vial (16.12), where it is dried up to make ready the way for "the kings

from the sun's rising." Ever since Joseph Mede the opinion has been widespread that the reference in the latter case is to the downfall of the Turkish Empire, which was to be the last step in Revelation before the "battle of the great day of God Almighty", and the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. This is already rendered improbable by the fact that the bigger part of a century has passed since Turkey ceased to control the Holy Land, in 1917, without the Kings from the sun's rising having made their appearance; and neither intrinsic probability nor the structure which we have found in the Book seems to allow for such a long delay, nor for the events which follow the Sixth Vial being so long-drawn out; and in any case to introduce the power of Turkey is not to provide a biblical solution of the problem, attractive though it might have seemed under the political conditions of the seventeenth century, when the Turkish Empire actually bestrode the literal River Euphrates where it passes through areas of biblical interest.

The biblical solution must surely go back to the Old Testament, where the river is mentioned by name 19 times. It is one of the four streams of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.14); it was to form the north-eastern boundary of the Promised Land (Genesis 15.18; 2 Samuel 8.3). It is the river which must be crossed to reach the capital city of Nineveh, located on its twin river Tigris, the capital of an empire described in Isaiah 8.7-8 as "the waters of the River, strong and mighty", which was to overflow its banks and overwhelm unfaithful Judah. But it is

preeminently the River of Babylon, especially in the Book of Jeremiah, and when that prophet sent Seraiah to bind a stone to the manuscript of the prophecy of the fate of Babylon and cast it into Euphrates, he linked the River with the fate of the city in a way which must provide the basis for the interpretation of both symbols (see Jeremiah 13.4, 5, 6, 7; 46.1, 6, 10; and especially 51.63).

Though we have not so far met the name Babylon in Revelation, we shall do so in 14.8; 16.19; 17.5; 18.2, 10, 21. Here Babylon clearly appears as a principal enemy of the gospel and of the saints, shortly before the Lord returns. In 16.19 the city appears in close proximity with the River, and when we recall that the literal city fell when a by-pass channel was constructed so as to dry up Euphrates, so that a way might be provided for the kings from the Sun's Rising, those of the Medes and Persians (Isaiah 41.2,25), there can be little doubt that the fall of the actual city in Old Testament times provides the model for the fall of a spiritual Babylon-on-Euphrates in the Apocalypse.

The hour and day and month and year (9.15). One can, of course, add these units together, and, assuming a 360-day year, arrive at a grand total of 391 days and one hour. One can then attempt to relate this to history by assuming that it signifies a period of 391 years and one month. But not only does the Book itself refer to no starting date for the supposed period, but RV and RSV convert the idea of a time period, which might possibly be read into AV, into that of a precise moment: God now sets in motion the activities of the angels which had been reserved for "this precise instant". The words then resemble those of 14.7, "the hour of His judgement is come", and the urgent "that there should be time no longer" of 10.6. The appointed crisis is now close at hand, and nothing shall be allowed to interfere with its outworking.

The number of the armies (9.16). That a worldwide conflict is intended by the symbolism seems very plain. John hears the number here, much as he heard the symbolic 144,000 of 7.4, but this time there is no surprise as he lifts up his eyes; what he hears corresponds with what he sees: "I saw the horses in the vision". It is almost as though we are being told that there is no illusion here: the numbers of those involved really are vast. If the number given were literal, it would mean that 200 millions of fighting men are involved. This would have been quite unthinkable with the world's population as it was in John's day, but it harmonizes remarkably well with the situation in our own.

If we assume that there are around 4000 million people on the earth, of whom about 50% are male, and of these again about 40% between the approximate military ages of 18 and 45, then there might be 750 million men of military age in the world, of whom 300 million would live in Asia. The figure in 9.16 is therefore a very reasonable approximation to the number of men who could be put in the field by, say, an eastern bloc, or the governments of the western countries. It may yet prove to be a mark of the inspiration of this ancient Book that it could speak so sensibly of the kind of numbers of fighting men with which the 20th century is concerned. In any volume written before the 19th century, at the earliest, such figures would have seemed absurd.

The nearest scriptural parallel to these numbers is found in Daniel 7.10 and Revelation 5.11, where the figure, slightly larger than 100 million, suggests the thought: "The numbers are so great as even to defy comparison with the numbers of the heavenly hosts themselves".

We find increasingly as we move out of the past into the soon-expected future, that exact interpretation eludes us. The words speak of massive warfare and vast carnage exceeding anything known before, such as should be enough to convince the survivors that the only alternative to the complete dissolution of the existing order is surrender to God. Yet we are told the plagues will fail to accomplish their purpose: the fact that repentance is refused shows that it has been demanded, an indication of the latter-day witness which we shall find fully established in what follows. When the plagues are inflicted, it is plain, the world will have abundant evidence that they issue from God, and this in itself is good reason for feeling that the import of the signs must await the time when they are actually fulfilled for its full elucidation. In the meantime the sharpening of the tribulation in the Sixth Trumpet compared with the Fifth is all too plain.

The rest of mankind which were not killed with these plagues repented not of the works of their hands (9.20).

The huge size of the 'armies', the burning fiery breastplates in place of dead, cold iron, deadly serpents in place of painful scorpions, power in heads and tails in place of stings in tails alone; ability to kill in place of power to hurt: all these mark out the most dreadful affliction the Book has yet revealed, a fitting accompaniment to the pending call to repent before it is too late.

Two types of offence condemn the unrepentant here. The first is their idols, the works of their hands (9.20); the second is their deeds: murders, sorceries, fornication and thefts (9.21). As to the former, there is at first an air of unreality about the notion that men in our epoch should be accused of worshipping demons (as idolaters in the first century were in 1 Corinthians 10.20), or reproached for making Images of gold, silver, brass, and stone which cannot see, hear, or walk (just as though they were heathen of the 8th century before Christ, as condemned in Isaiah 40.18-20; 41.7; 44.9-20, or even earlier, as in words from Psalm 115.3-8 which are actually quoted here).

But we are accustomed to the prophets describing our days in terms which would have been understood in their own. If the reference is indeed to our own days, the horsemen of 9.16 presumably do not mean that such a war will actually be fought with cavalry, any more than the mention of cavalry and swords and spears in Ezekiel 38.4 and Joel 3.10 implies that the last battles before the Lord sets up His kingdom will actually be confined to hand-to-hand fighting. If, then, we may reinterpret such terms as referring to modern armaments, we may no doubt understand the idolatry here referred to in terms of its modern counterparts. The world is as guilty as it ever was of having other gods beside the LORD, and of making to itself graven or molten images (Exodus 20.3-6). The humanism of today consists in tacitly denying the work of God, and worshipping the powers of men to do with their own hands and heads whatever they will. The idolatrous worship of our cleverness, achievement and wealth, our buildings, even our homes, is as truly idolatry as that formerly expressed in obeisance before actual images of gods. Homo sapiens, in spite of persuasive evidence to the contrary, still professes that his salvation is in his own hands, and his goal attainable with his own powers alone. And although a large part of the world now officially professes atheism, that very profession makes gods of its leaders and of its race.

As to the second charge, there is nothing anachronistic about the vices here condemned. The first and third of them are increasingly rife in a violent and lustful world. So is the last, not only in petty larceny and great bank-robberies, but also in market rigging and selfish wage

demands at the cost of jobs and the security of the aged, and every expression of human greed. Sorceries might seem more difficult to fit into our materialistic world picture; and yet it is a fact that decay of faith in the one true God, and His sober revelation in the Scriptures, has been accompanied by a resurgence of superstitions of all kinds, including spiritism, black magic and related so-called 'satanic' arts, astrology, and other pursuits which in Old Testament times might have come under the heading of 'necromancy', or consulting with those that had 'familiar spirits', and would have been visited with the capital penalty (Leviticus 19.31; Deuteronomy 18.11; Exodus 22.18). It is even possible that the offences here described will include giving heed to the apparant wonders and signs of the Beast and his False Prophet, which will shortly come into the picture (13.13-14; 16.14).

Since it is agreed by those holding the continuous historic interpretation of the Apocalypse that by the time we reach chapter 10 we are in a period close to (or actually after!) the return of Jesus to the earth, this might be the right moment to pause for the next of the historical surveys by J.B.N., to find out how well the historic interpretation stands up to critical analysis.

THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TRUMPETS

The first Four Trumpets have been held to represent barbarian onslaughts on the Western Roman Empire during the fifth century, and the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets the attacks of" Arabs and Turks on the Eastern Roman Empire from the seventh to the fifteenth centuries. This view is succinctly expounded in R.R. and C.C.W.

THE FIRST TRUMPET. (Here A. V. does not make clear that in the original we have also "the third part of the earth was burned up". This is rectified in R.V. and modern versions). R.R. refers us to the division of the Roman Empire, following the death of Constantine in 337, among his three sons Constantine, Constantius and Constans. But this division was extremely short-lived and is of no significance. Constantine lasted three years and Constans 13, and so within 16 years of the death of their father Constantius was sole ruler of a united Empire. After his death, and those of his two successors, the Empire was again divided, this time into two parts, East and West, a division which became permanent in 395 after a few years of union under Theodosius the Great. C.C.W. omits this part of R.R.'s interpretation.

It is then claimed that the hail and fire of the First Trumpet fell on "the Roman third", in particular on Rome itself and on Italy, the Goths being the instruments of the judgement. Alaric, the formidable Gothic leader, certainly harried Italy and sacked Rome itself, but 30 years before another Gothic host had wrought havoc in south-eastern Europe, which was part of the Eastern Empire, and had inflicted on the Eastern Roman army one of the worst defeats in all Roman history. This fact disposes, too, of the somewhat unimpressive idea in W.H.B. that the threefold division of the Empire comprised the Latin West, the Hellenic East, and the

Hellenized East, for the Gothic onslaught was directed against the Latin West and the Hellenic East alike.

THE SECOND TRUMPET. This is evidently a maritime judgement. In the works referred to it is attributed to the terrible ravages inflicted on the Empire by the Vandals, whose destructive barbarities have given their name to present-day people who delight in destroying property and amenities. The Vandals did indeed engage in maritime activity: "Almost alone among the Teutonic invaders of the Empire, he (Genseric) set himself to form a powerful

fleet, and was probably for thirty years the leading maritime power in the Mediterranean." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, under VANDALS). Having conquered North Africa, Genseric made Carthage a naval base from which his fleet plundered throughout the Mediterranean, twice defeating Roman fleets. This linking of the Second Trumpet with the Vandals might have been acceptable had the other Trumpets been interpreted with similar historical plausibility.

THE THIRD TRUMPET. For this we are referred to Attila the Hun, whose devastations, we are told, "were principally inflicted on the Alpine region of northern Italy, to which the description 'rivers and fountains of waters' is particularly applicable ... It could not apply to any other region of the Roman Empire". Further, 'wormwood' (apsinth) is the name of a river in the Illyrian region ruled by Attila, while 'the great star' is suggestive of "a meteor, which rushed and blazed with destructive brightness, and then disappeared in the midst of the destruction he caused" (R R page 75).

It is agreed that Attila's power and family disappeared as soon as his work was done; but it is hardly true to say that the description "rivers and fountains of waters" could only apply to the Alpine regions of Northern Italy. The Pyrenees, Dinaric Alps, and mountain areas of Anatolia and Armenia, especially the last, are possible candidates too. But suppose that the claim is accepted: were the devastations of the Huns concentrated here? Advancing from the steppes north of the Caspian Sea in 372, the Huns successively vanquished Alans, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths. In 433 the notorious Attila became their king, and pushed west to the Rhine, reaching the walls of Orleans; but in a decisive battle at Chalons he was heavily defeated by a mixed army of Romans and Visigoths under Aetius, the last western imperial general of note. Next year Attila ravaged northern Italy, and Rome itself was only saved by the courageous pleading of Pope Leo I. Attila died in 453, and his empire rapidly disintegrated.

It is therefore not correct to say that his devastations were principally inflicted on the Alpine regions of northern Italy; the Hunnish 'capital', moreover, was not in Illyria, but in upper Hungary near the Danube; nor was Attila an Illyrian, being born much further east. We have been unable to find the minor river

Apsinth, but a far better river-representation of the Huns would have been the Volga or the Danube. The only item in the description which at all fits the Huns would be the ephemeral, blazing meteor.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET. R.R. considers that the symbolism here is obscure, but applies it to the fall of the Western Empire in 476. This fall, however, was no sudden, catastrophic affair. The Western Empire declined steadily after the death of Theodosius the Great in -I- 395, and the murder of the great general Stilico in 408. The abdication of the last Western emperor Romulus Augustulus (called not only after the first emperor Augustus as stated by R.R., but also after Romulus, the founder of Rome itself), was merely the final, pitiful end of the old regime. Moreover, his two barbarian successors, Odoacer and Theodoric (476 to 526), retained much of the Roman system. In fact, under Theodoric, Rome and Italy enjoyed a happier time than they had seen for over a century. The result of the ending of the old Empire was certainly not "a state of things exactly answering to the symbol". Further, the Western Empire at the beginning of the fifth century was appreciably more than half of the Roman dominion, and so could not be called "the western third".

THE FIFTH TRUMPET. The sixth century is omitted in the historic interpretation, which passes to the third decade of the seventh. In this Trumpet a star falling from heaven to earth is given the key of the abyss, which it opens; a great smoke ascends, and armoured, crowned, horse-like locusts issue from this to torment for five months those not having the seal of God. The judgements so symbolized are identified with the rise of Mahomet, and the conquest of the East by Arab armies which had embraced the new religion. This view is Scripturally, geographically, and historically untenable.

In it the abyss is identified with the exceptionally deep depression through which the river Jordan flows to the Dead Sea, a depression which continues on through the Arabah to the Gulf of Aqaba. But Scripturally the word *abussos* means a great deep. By the first century A.D., with Jewish thought now corrupted by contact with Babylon, Persia, and Greece, the term was also used to denote a supposed place of punishment for fallen angels, conceived of as far below the earth and connected with the surface by a long shaft. In the minds of first-century readers the term would denote a sink of evil, capable of releasing evil powers. Geographically it is obvious at a glance at a map that the Arabia from which Mahomet and his hordes came could not possibly be likened to an abyss, for "in general terms Arabia may be described as a plateau

The Times Atlas, the Times Historical Atlas, Chambers' Encyclopaedia and the 15th Edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica, are all innocent of the name. The last-named does, however, refer to the Apsinthii, "an ancient Thracian tribe", belonging both to the wrong area and the wrong epoch!

sloping gently from S.W. to N.E., and attaining its greatest elevation in the extreme S.W. The western escarpment of the plateau rises steeply from the Red Sea littoral to a height of from 4000 to 8000 feet. . . (E.B., 11th Edition, article ARABIA).

The towns of Mecca and Medina, the two centres of Mahomet's power, are in this western escarpment. When in the middle of the 19th century Sir Richard Burton travelled from Mecca to Medina, his route lay on a high plateau throughout. So the Mahomedan power did not come out of any abyss. This problem is avoided by explaining that the depression of Jordan and the Arabah was "the door through which the Mahomedan myriads passed from Arabia to Europe. Consequently it was more appropriate to take it as representing the whole region to which they belonged, of which they formed a part" (R.R., page 81). But the Jordan rift was not the door through which the Mahomedan hosts passed into Europe: the rift was neither an obvious nor an easy terrain to traverse. In fact the Arabs burst upon the Eastern Empire via Bosra, to the east of the Decapolis, the fate of the eastern territory being settled at the battle of Yarmuk, east of the Sea of Galilee, followed by the fall of Damascus and Antioch. All this area is well to the north of the Jordan-Aqaba rift.

As for the locusts, we are told that "Arabia is the native country of locusts" (R.R., page 81). This is misleading. While locusts breed naturally in dry, sandy areas such as the Arabian desert, the desert areas of Africa and Central Asia are just as suitable. In its article LOCUSTS, E.B. does not even mention Arabia. The locusts of this Trumpet, curiously, were not to damage the vegetation, their natural food, but to torment without killing those lacking the seal of God. But Arabs did kill, and not only Christians at that, and it would be difficult for them (as this interpretation suggests they did) to distinguish apostate from true Christians. Early in his career Mahomet slaughtered Jews, after its surrender a large part of the people of Damascus was killed, and much indiscriminate killing marked the conquest of Persia, Syria,

Egypt, and North Africa. It is true that on the eve of the Arab campaign the successor of Mahomet instructed the army not to destroy palms, fruit trees, or fields of corn: this was in the interests of the conquerors, but it was certainly not obeyed in North Africa, for according to the Arabs' own testimony fruit trees were cut down, means of subsistence extirpated, and fertile land changed into desert.

With regard to the statement that the locusts were only to hurt those not having the seal of God, it is said that "one of the reasons for their success in government largely consisted in the wise policy of toleration which they practised towards Jews and Christians" (Fisher, History of Europe, page 138). But this was after the excesses of the earnest years. Moreover those movements in the Christian church known as Monophysitism (which held the more scriptural view that Christ had one nature, not two), and Monothe-litism (that He had a single will, not two), were strong in that part of the Eastern Empire, and were more akin to Islam than current orthodoxy, and so less likely to incur Moslem hatred. But in the heat of conquest Arabs would be unlikely to distinguish between

Christians of more or less scriptural persuasions.

Torment by the locusts was to last 'five months', said to mean 150 years. But Arab domination of the East and the Mediterranean lasted much longer, and so, despite being told that five months is the normal period for locust activity, we are told that the repetition of the period (9.5,10) means that there were 10 months, interpreted as 300 years. We are told (C.C.W., page 23), that in 932. 300 years after the death of Mahomet, Arab secular power fell. But the case is nothing like so clear-cut. After the death of the famed Harun-ar-Rashid in 809 there was a gradual break-up of the once united Arab power. In Persia three local regions with distinctly national flavour were established in 820, 867, and 892. In 868 Egypt broke away, and earlier still Spain (756), Morocco (788), and Tunisia (800) became virtually independent. In the 9th century the Caliphs in the Arab capital of Bagdad lost power to various army commanders, and later (945 on wards), to the mayors of the palace. "From the 11th century the world of Islam was in visible decay, and subject to attacks from 'Christians' in the west and Turks in the East. In 1055 Bagdad fell permanently to the Turks.

Two final points. It is said that the locusts had breastplates of iron. This was not typical of Arab armies, which consisted mainly of cavalry and archers, the lances and bows of whom were their main weapons (Hitti, History of the Arabs, page 173). Such defensive armour as they had was lighter than that of the Romans. Then "they had tails like scorpions, with stings." This is said (by R.R. and C.C.W., but not by W.H.B.) to represent the Greek fire with which they attacked their enemies. Greek fire was indeed used effectively, but not by the Arabs: it was rather used by their Roman opponents, enabling them to win the seven years' war against the Arabs threatening Constantinople (674 to 680). In the reign of the great Roman Emperor Leo III (717 to 741), Greek fire was a potent weapon in repelling a second Arab attack on the capital. The Greek fire was invented in Constantinople by a Syrian refugee, and was habitually used by the Roman forces, the secret of its manufacture being most jealously guarded.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET. The loosing of the four angels hitherto bound in the river Euphrates, with a view to a third part of men being slain during a set period by an immense host of fiery cavalry,

'Underlining the point here made, we quote the following from Encyclo-paedia Britannica, 15th Edition, article GREEK FIRE: "It apparently took fire spontaneously when wet, and could not be quenched with water. Greek fire launched from tubes mounted on the prows of Greek ships wrought havoc on the Arab fleet attacking Constantinople in 673. It was later used effectively by Leo III the Isaurian against an Arab attack in 717, and by Romanus I Lecapenus against a Russian fleet in the 10th century. Its deadliness in combat, especially at sea, has been cited as a prime reason for the long survival of the Byzantine Empire in the face of many enemies. The art of compounding the mixture was a secret so closely guarded that its precise composition remains unknown to this day." — A.D.N.

is referred to the various Turkish hordes which swept over the Eastern Empire from the 11th to the 15th centuries. The four angels are said to correspond to the four waves of Seljuks, Mongols, Tartars, and Ottomans who, crossing the Euphrates, afflicted and at last overthrew the Eastern Empire. Apparently omitted are the Persians, Normans, and Crusaders, the last of whom inflicted more damage to the Empire than Mongols and Tartars combined.

It is correct that upper Euphrates "marks the natural line of communication between northern Persia and the West, a route followed by the nomad Turks, Mongols, and Tartars on their way to the rich lands of Asia Minor" (E.B. IX.895, article EUPHRATES). It is also true that the Seljuk Turks, held to represent the first of the four angels, invaded Asia Minor under Alp Arslan and crushed the Roman Imperial army at the decisive battle of Menzikat (1071), much of Asia Minor now coming permanently under Turkish rule.

The terrible Mongols from eastern Asia are held to represent the second angel. Under the leadership of Genghiz Khan, they established the largest empire the world has seen, extending from China to Central Europe. But the Mongols hardly came into contact with what remained of the Roman Empire, owing to some fortunate diversions. Neither did the Tartars, who are held to represent the third angel. These reached their zenith under Timur, and devastated India and much of Central Asia, and, by their crushing defeat of the powerful Turkish sultan Bajazet, actually prolonged the life of the Roman Empire by over fifty years. The fourth angel is held to be represented by the Ottoman Turks who, despite their heavy defeat by Timur the Tartar, recovered after his death and gradually subdued the rest of the Empire, until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought to an end an Empire which had lasted nearly fifteen centuries.

The four angels were prepared for "an hour, a day, a month, and a year" which, assuming a day for a year, is given as 391 years 1 month (R.R. and C.C.W.), or 396 years 121 days (W.H.B.). Constantinople fell on 29 May 1453. Subtracting the two periods we get figures a trifle earlier than 1057 and 1052. The Seljuks first invaded the Roman Empire in 1050, Armenia and Georgia being conquered in 1065 to 1068, but they were driven back over the Euphrates in 1068 to 1070. But in August 1071 the Roman army was decisively defeated by Alp Arslan, and most of Asia Minor fell to him. Yet if a time period is given in Revelation 9.15 it is exact, not approximate, and the attempt to make it fit the period in question is not only unconvincing from a chronological standpoint: it does little justice to what might be called the dignity of divine revelation.

Even if the huge number of 200,000,000 horsemen is accepted as a reasonable representation of the myriads of cavalry comprising a great part of the Seljuk, Mongol, and Tartar hordes (though a formidable infantry corps formed the strongest part of the Ottoman armies), the

horsemen of Revelation 9 were no ordinary cavalry: fire, smoke, and brimstone proceeded from their mouths. This is said to represent the Turks prevailing over the Romans by

the use of the newly invented gunpowder, the Turks being said to be the first to use cannon drawn by horses. But Seljuks, Mongols, and Tartars did not use cannon, and Gibbon implies that at Angora, when the Turks were crushed by the Tartars, they did not then employ cannon, for he writes: "Had they borrowed from Europe the recent invention of gunpowder and cannon, the artificial thunder in the hands of either nation must have turned the fortunes of the day" (E.G., IV. Ixv). In the last days of the Empire the Ottoman Turks did use cannon effectively against Constantinople, but not horse-artillery, so heavy were the batteries used.

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER 10: The Sixth Trumpet (continued)

10.1: / saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was on his head, and his face was the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.

This angel has evident associations with the Son of God Himself. The rainbow was around the heavenly throne (4.3) shortly to be approached by the risen Lamb (3.21; 5.7). His "face as the sun" is like that of 1.16, and that of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17.2), while the "feet as pillars of fire" express more vigorously the idea of "feet of burnished brass" in 1.15. Yet this is clearly not the actual return of the Lord Jesus to the earth, since the Book this Being bears (10.2), and the use to which it is to be put (10.11), still betoken activities to be performed by His servants before His literal second coming. We would not expect, either, the Lord who bears the name which is above every name to be described as indifferently as "another strong angel". There is nothing amiss in the use of the word 'angel' about the Lord (as in Malachi 3.1), but there He is the Messenger and compared with no other, a very different matter from making Him one angel amongst others. Yet this exalted Being is clearly acting intimately on the Lord's behalf as His special messenger, anticipating rather than fulfilling the promise of His return. He is to the Lord Jesus what the angel of God's presence was to Israel in the wilderness (Isaiah 63.9). He is announcing things so very soon to come to pass, with the fulness of the authority conveyed to him by the Lord Jesus Himself.

10.2: He had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the earth; and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth: and when he had cried the seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders uttered their voices I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not (-10.4).

The "little book" is *isabibliaridion*, a term used in 10.8,9,10, and Ezekiel 2.9 in a closely similar episode. The book in Ezekiel is "written within and without" (like that in Revelation 5.1) and carries a message of "lamentations, mourning and woe", very much the theme of this part of Revelation. Ezekiel was required to eat the roll, as John is here (10.9); but though Ezekiel was to speak its message to Israel, John must prophesy "again over many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (10.11). For each the book was "sweet as honey", and while in John's case his "belly was made bitter", in Ezekiel's the prophet went about "in bitterness". Like Ezekiel, therefore, John learns that a message of woe must be given: in the prophet's case to Israel, in the apostle's to the world. Ezekiel must speak the unwelcome news personally to his people, and though John's message might be thought of as contained in the

remainder of his Book (since RV and RSV speak of prophesying over nations rather than to them), this is hardly sufficient. It seems clear that the nations must be made to know what is being said against them, so that they will be accountable for their response. It is interesting to compare this situation with that of the prophet Jeremiah, who was "ordained a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1.5). It was evidently intended that his message should reach those whom it concerned, because the effect of his words would be to set him "over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (1.10). If when the nations heard his message, they should "turn from their evil", then, God assures them, "I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them" (18.7). Jeremiah had the authority to compel the nations to drink of the cup God had prepared for them (25. 15-31). In other words, his prophecies were not mere fulminations against the nations, given for the pleasure of his Jewish readers: in some way, whether by his own lips or by those of others, the nations were actually to receive his message, and were to be held to account for the way they reacted to it.

The same applies to the instructions to John, "Thou must prophesy again". Either in his own person (which in view of the time schedule could hardly be), or in some other way, the message concerning things to come must reach the nations, so that they may repent if they will — even though it is known to God that they will not.

The angel's feet were "on the sea and on the earth". The message concerns the whole world. No place is to be exempt from the events now to be disclosed.

The seven thunders (10.3). In other places Revelation reveals what Daniel keeps sealed up. In Daniel the prophet is instructed to "seal the book, even to the time of the end" (12.4), while Revelation is devoted to unsealing a book (5.1; 6.1ff; 22.10), which is an incidental confirmation that we have correctly recognized the main period with which Revelation is concerned, for the sealing up in Daniel was to be "even to the time of the end", at which the significance of the matters discussed would be disclosed. Here in the Apocalypse the disclosure is taking place. But the "thunders" constitute an exception. Their significance is not to be revealed at that time:

"Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (10.4).

In view of these words it seems wrong to try at this stage to arrive at the meaning of the Thunders. There were seven of them, as with the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials yet to come, and of all save the Thunders considerable detail is given. The instruction is categorical: Do not write them down! And if John was not allowed to describe them, it is inconceivable that we should be able to interpret them. We have the plainest of all possible indications that we must wait and see. All we are allowed to know is that, just before the Last Trumpet sounds, the Seven Thunders will burst unheralded on the world, and we shall know that the Lord is at the door. When the sounding takes place, saints will be in no doubt, for it heralds the end of the long ages of waiting:

It is agreed at least by some exponents of the continuous historic programme that we should not seek to interpret the Thunders at this stage. Though he adopts a different timetable for the events of this and other chapters, R.R. writes (page 82): "What is recorded is for the guidance of the servants of Christ during His absence. But at the time of the seven thunders He will not be absent. He will be amongst them (the saints), and they will be gathered around Him, and will themselves be the executioners of the seven-thunder or nation-breaking programme. The

knowledge of what they will do then, would be of no special value to them now". This is not how we understand the position at the time of the Sixth Trumpet, nor does it well accord with the tremendous leap backwards in history which the same author makes in dealing with the next chapter, which as far as 11.13 also lies within the period of the Sixth Trumpet. But it does accept that we cannot know the detail of the Seven Thunders in advance of their occurrence. A very different view is taken by H.A.W. He considers that the Seven Thunders are not interpreted here because they will be disclosed in detail later, in the seven disclosures of (1) 14.6,7; (2) 14.8; (3) 14.9,10; (4) 14.15; (5) 14.17; (6) 14.18; (7) 16.1. The view is developed with the author's customary wealth of scriptural detail, but seems to involve an unnatural interpretation of "seal and write not". That there is a sevenfold sequence in chapter 14 (and 16.1) may well be true, but it seems better to leave the Seven Thunder unwritten.

H.A.W. also takes the view that "time no longer" should be read "the time shall not be yet", but if that is so it is hard to see why it should be said at all. The Book itself would show that by its discussion of things yet to occur. Imminence, and not further delay, seems to be the very spirit of the message. (See H.A.W., chapters 24 and 29).

10.5: The angel which I saw standing on the sea and on the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there should be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which He declared to His servants the prophets (-19.7).

The promise is absolute. The angel who reveals the universal message "swears by Him" than Whom there is no greater (Hebrews 6.13,16), "Who lives for ever and ever" (10.6) that the period of waiting is at an end and, "no more time will pass". There will be no time for repentance even, no looking back, no stay in the momentous march of events towards a climax rushing on apace. All unrevealed mysteries will be disclosed. This is no doubt the burden of the message which those represented by John must declare to the nations (10.11). But it is not to be unrelieved. It is "the good tidings (or gospel) which He declared to His servants the prophets". It is "the eternal gospel" (14.6), and it really is good news if only men will repent in time. This is to be the world's last opportunity of accepting the blessings into which the faithful will enter when the indignation is overpast (Isaiah 26.20).

10.8: The voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went to the angel, saying to him that he should give me the little book. And he said to me, Take it and eat it up, and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it my belly was made bitter. And they say to me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings (-10.11).

The essential points of these verses have already been discussed. John represents those whose business it will be to remember again the sweetness of the gospel of salvation, and to make it known in this last hour to the nations. Yet the message will pain them within, not because of anything lacking in it, but because those to whom it will be preached will decline to heed it, and will thus bring on themselves the final afflictions awaiting them before the blessings are brought in. The preachers' sadness will be like that of Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4.19,27), exhorting the king to a repentance which would avert the threatened disgrace, but knowing that he will not show it. It will be like that of the Lord Jesus weeping over a doomed

Jerusalem (Luke 13.34-35), knowing how needless its sufferings were, and how readily averted if only the people had turned to Him and to their God. It will be like that of Paul, rejoicing that salvation had been offered to him and accepted, but grieving over the hardheartedness of those who had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 9.1-5). And, of course, it will be like that of Ezekiel, whose prophecy forms the foundation for the symbol used here (Ezekiel 2.9).

Chapter 15 The two witnesses (Rev. 11)

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER 11: THE TWO WITNESSES

11.1. There was given me a reed like a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship there; and the court which is without the temple leave without, for it hath been given to the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty two months (-11.2).

The imagery of this section continues that of Chapter 4. We are still in the heavenly temple and in the presence of the altar of incense (4.8; 8.3). The saints of God are regarded as belonging to this temple, even though they are living on the earth or sleeping in their graves (6.9; 7.10). All believers worship in the Father's true house, in spirit and in truth (John 14.2-6,23; Ephesians 1.3; 2.6; Hebrews 4.16; 10.19-22), and this measuring of them together with the temple at this point is yet another reassurance that they lie under the protection of God in the tribulations which are to follow, a confirmation of the sealing of Chapter 7 which is to be renewed again in 14.1-5; 15.1-4. The symbolism of the reed for measuring the temple is taken from Ezekiel's prophecy of the restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 40.3ff; perhaps also Zechariah 2.1-5), but it is not of that temple that we learn. No measurements are given: but they are known to God, and cannot be changed by any act of man.

The Tabernacle and Solomon's temple had Most Holy and Holy Places, and an Outer Court. The temple in which the saints worship makes no distinction between the Most Holy and the Holy Places, for the veil has been torn down (Matthew 27.50 ; Hebrews 9.3; 10.20). Outside that sanctuary, though, all has been usurped by the Gentiles (11.2). The true disciples are in a beleaguered fortress, while all around are their enemies, possessing everything except the citadel.

"The holy city shall they tread under foot" takes us back again to the Olivet Prophecy, where "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled" (Luke 21.24), but it can hardly be of literal Jerusalem that God is speaking here. Revelation has its own "holy city" (3.12; 20.9; 21.2; 22.19), which shall be "measured" in due time (21.16), and that city is not the literal Jerusalem, great though the glory of that city also shall be.

It is a characteristic of this Book to give a second and less literal meaning to many Bible terms and prophecies. The reed of this chapter is making no such measurement of actual buildings as that in Ezekiel 40ff. The description of the gates and foundations of the city of Ezekiel 41.31-34 becomes one of the qualities of the inheritors of eternal blessing in Revelation 21.12; the trees of Ezekiel's vision become the Tree of Life (Ezekiel 47.12; Revelation 22.2); the river of Ezekiel becomes a river of waters of life (Ezekiel 47.1; Revelation 22.1)fSo here the Holy City is not that literal city so designated in Matthew 4.5; but is that which will ultimately represent the eternal possession of the saints. At present there is no earthly site for it, though: the Gentiles are in occupation of the earth.

Forty two months. This is the first appearance of this intriguing time period in Revelation. It will recur in the 1260 days of 11.3 and 12.5, as well as in the "time, times, and half a time" of

12.14; and as 42 months again in 13.5. The same period, as "time, times, and half a time", originates in Daniel 7.25 and 12.7. It refers to very diverse events, which are tabulated below:

Daniel 7.25: The saints of the Most High are in the power of the Fourth Beast.

Daniel 12.7: The power of the holy people shall be broken in pieces.

Revelation 11.2: The holy city shall be trodden under foot by Gentiles.

Revelation 11.3: The Two Witnesses will prophesy, clothed in sackcloth.

Revelation 12.6: The woman who bears the Manchild will be nourished in the Wilderness.

Revelation 12.14: The same.

Revelation 13.5: The Beast from the sea shall continue, and during the period will make war with the saints and overcome them.

But the corresponding literal period (whether it is literal in Daniel and Revelation or not) is also that during which no rain fell on the earth in response to Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 17.1; 18.1; Luke 4.25; James 5.17), and it has the same length as half of the last week of years in Daniel 9.27.

Evidently at least some of the periods correspond. The persecution of the saints is a common factor in Daniel 7.25; 12.7; Revelation 13.5. It could well be implied by the language of 11.2,3; and since when the woman is nourished in the Wilderness in 12.6,14, the power called "the Dragon" is making war with "the

remnant of her seed that keep the commandments of God" (12.17) the same is effectively true there also. Since there is "no rain" while the Witnesses are prophesying (11.6), the parallel with Elijah is being deliberately drawn out, too.

Since everything we have so far found points to a short and

sharp sequence of events during these days, it would seem that, if

a precise period is defined by this time-period at all, it must be a

literal 3.5 years, and could not be anything approaching an actual period of 1260 years, which a principle of a day for a year would require.

This is the appropriate time to introduce an examination of the view that the period is really 1260 years, as seen in a continuous historic view.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORIC VIEW OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Expositors of this view have assumed that all the periods referred to above must be understood as referring to 1260 years, and have accordingly looked for periods of history of this duration when evil powers were in the ascendant, and the people of God afflicted. But the various historical periods selected are unconvincing, and there are other objections. One

should not start, either, with the assumption that the oppressing power is to be identified exclusively with the Roman Catholic Church or the Papacy.

We take the most popular choice first. The period of Papal power is said to extend from a decree of the Eastern Roman emperor Phocas, confirming papal headship of the church in 604, to the end of papal temporal power in 1870, a period of 1266 years. But Pope Gregory the Great (590 to 604) was one of the greatest of the 270 or so Popes of Rome (and incidentally one who looked earnestly for the Lord's Second Advent), and undoubtedly advanced the prestige of his office. This man did not need, in the last year of his life, any support from Phocas, perhaps the biggest scoundrel of all the Eastern emperors. In fact the support was probably an embarrassment to the papacy, especially when it declared that while Rome was the head, Constantinople was the first, of all the churches. The decree acknowledged the Pope as the head of the church, but it gave him no temporal power: to have done that would have transgressed a first principle of the ecclesiastical policy of the Eastern Empire. (Papal temporal power did not begin until 150 years later.)

The foundation of papal temporal power was laid when the Frankish king Pepin III handed over to the Pope's sovereignty certain lands in Italy, including Rome and district, formerly belonging to the Eastern Empire, but recently conquered by the Lombards. This took place in 755 to 756, and accordingly an older student of the Apocalypse, Robert, Bishop of Clogher, writing in 1751, expected the end of the papal temporal power 1260 years after that, in 2011. In fact that power ended in two stages: in 1861 when the formation of the Kingdom of Italy under Victor Emmanuel deprived the Pope of all his dominions except the 'Patrimony of St. Peter', reducing his provinces from 20 to 5 and their population of more than three million to about 685,000; and in 1870 when these, too, were incorporated in the Kingdom. Time has proved the bishop wrong, but his interpretation was at least consistent.

Moreover, the downtreading of the spiritual holy city (if Revelation 11.2 were to be so understood) did not begin with the assumption of temporal power by the Popes, nor did it end with the loss of that power. We may ask finally: is it really to be expected that the Holy Spirit would pay so much regard to periods of this kind unless they were far more clearly defined and characterized, historically and especially spiritually? •

An even less convincing calculation of the supposed 1260 years is in connection with the prophesying of the Two Witnesses in 11.3, a calculation also applied to the nourishing of the woman in 12.6. This is the period from 312 to 1512, based on interpreting the Two Witnesses as (1) aggressive and (2) pacific protesters against corrupt ecclesiastical powers. It is said that this witnessing began with the accession of Constantine in 312. But true witnessing in the face of imperial persecution began centuries earlier, against which it is claimed that the witnessing must be understood as being against professing Christian but actually apostate authorities. It is hard to discover any basis for this, and in any case Constantine's government was not Christian, even though it favoured Christianity. Moreover, Constantine's persecution of the Donatists (supposed to be early witnesses) did not begin until 316, and soon ended. Further, the main difference between Donatists and the orthodox was not doctrinal, but consisted in the stand the former took that clergy who had surrendered sacred books during the recent persecution under Diocletian should be debarred from office in the church. The Novatians around half a century earlier had similarly maintained that those who sacrificed to idols during the persecutions in the mid 3rd century should not be restored to fellowship even when repentant.

The terminal year of 172 we find to be baseless. The persecution of Huguenots in France went on until the Edict of Nantes in 1598 gave French Protestants the right to worship according to their belief. In Britain under Elizabeth I (1558 to 1603), Protestants as well as Catholics were persecuted and martyred. The last religious martyrdom in Britain was the burning of an anti-Trinitarian at Lichfield in 1612. Persecution of nonconformists occurred under Charles II (1660 to 1685). The Conventicle Act of 1662, for instance, forbade religious assemblies other than those of the Church of England. John Bunyan was imprisoned for twelve years under this Act. On the Continent, Protestants were persecuted in Bohemia and much of southern Europe. In 1685 the revocation of the Edict of Nantes led to many Huguenots fleeing to Britain and North America. The period of 312 to 1572 thus fails to satisfy the requirements of 'sackcloth witnessing'.

We consider next the death of the Witnesses, with their dead bodies lying in the street of an evil city before being raised from the dead and caused to ascend to heaven, followed by a great earthquake (11.7-13). The end of the 'sackcloth witnessing' continued, not only in France but in England, on the Continent until far into the 17th century. In France, in fact, after a quiet period from 1598, persecution gathered momentum after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and continues well into the 18th century.

Accordingly, C.C.W. and R.R. proceed to date the death of the Witnesses as in 1685. But in that event what becomes of 1572? And incidentally, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, despite the persecution which followed, was the signal for a Huguenot revival. Protestantism drew new life from the persecution. Finally it must be recorded that Huguenots accepted infant baptism, the Trinity; and the immortality of the soul. John Calvin fiercely attacked and even persecuted all who thought otherwise. A

We come now to the somewhat desperate efforts made to account for the dead bodies of the Witnesses lying unburied in the street of the great city for 3½ days (11.8-9). On the principle of a day for a year, this should be 3¼ years, which cannot be fit in anywhere. Recourse has been had to an interpretation by the Baptist Pastor Bicheno of Newbury (1793). He reckoned the 3¼ days as lunar and not earthly, thus 3¼ × months or 105 earth-days, and arrived at 105 years as the meaning, this being the interval between 1685 and the French Revolution (1785 to 1794). What, then happened in the French Revolution which might be said to mark the end of the lying of the Witnesses in the street, their resurrection, and ascension?

The answer is that the "Great voice" (11.12) calling the raised Witness to heaven is to be interpreted as the royal convening of the archaic French States-General in 1789. King Louis XVI was a well-meaning but simple weakling, whose summons could hardly be called "a great voice from heaven". Even more incredible is the view that, as a result of this, the Witnesses "ascended to place and power in the political heaven in multitudes" (C.C.W.). This is wholly untrue of God's Witnesses. What happened is that the French Revolution brought about the eclipse of the monarchy, a major reduction in the power of the nobles and the church, and an alleviation in the lot of village priests, freedom and relief for the peasantry, and a reign of terror which deluged the country in blood. Since the Witnesses cannot possibly be identified with those who came to power in the French Revolution, many of whom were ruffians and members of extreme political clubs, but some of whom were idealists, R.R. leaves the Witnesses on one side, and writes about the common people being "raised to power in a cloud".

The "great earthquake" (11.13), in which "a tenth part of the city fell", is applied to the French Revolution and the fall of France. But immediately after the Revolution there follows one of the most glorious eras of French history, with the rise to power of Napoleon. As for "the remnant giving glory to the God of heaven", this is linked with the revolutionary leader Robespierre having had a decree enacted which proclaimed the existence of a Supreme

Being (1794). This was done to oppose both Catholicism and atheism, but is little more than a passing curiosity. The sentimentalism of Rousseau which inspired Robespierre could scarcely be described as giving glory to the true God of heaven.

Finally, is it really likely that the Holy Spirit would devote so much attention to France from 1572 to 1794? The identification of France with the "street of the great city" is without substance. France may have been called 'the eldest son of the church', but its relations with the papacy became increasingly troubled throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries.

With this quite devastating rebuttal of the continuous historic view of Revelation 11 and its Two Witnesses in mind, we return to our study of the Witnesses themselves.

11.3: / will give unto My two Witnesses, and they shall prophesy 1260 days clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth (-11.4).

There is absolutely no doubt that the "two olive trees" are drawn from Zechariah 4.1-4, as is the symbol of the lampstand (one only in Zechariah, two here), and the picture of the Two Witnesses "standing before the Lord of the earth". The prophecy in Zechariah was spoken when Jews had returned to their land from the exile in Babylon, and in great adversity were engaged in rebuilding the temple. At that time their leaders were Zerubbabel (4.6,9,10), and Jeshua or Joshua ben Josedech, the high priest (3.1-9). They were to be strengthened in their hard task by God's Spirit, which they were to receive in symbol from the Lampstand in the Holy Place. This symbol might, though, also mean that they themselves were to pour the oil they received from God into the candlestick so that it might give light, which fits better their description as two olive trees (or sons of oil), the source of pure olive oil for the Lamp (Exodus 27.20). The fact that in Revelation the Lampstands become two, one corresponding to each Witness, is fully in harmony with the substitution of seven individual Lampstands for the Congregations in place of a single branched Lampstand (see pages 42-43). These Witnesses have no association with a material temple, for wherever they are gathered together in His name, there is the Lord Jesus in their midst (Matthew 18.20).

It is plain already, therefore, that the prophecy is concerned with faithful followers of God, called on to proclaim the gospel in adversity, who will in some sense carry out their task, not by human power alone, but supported by God's Spirit. They work among men, but they stand before the Lord of the earth in which the men live even as they do so. They remain in "the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" while they "make known to principalities

and powers the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3.10).

11.5: If any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies: and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner he must be killed. These have power to shut heaven that it rain not during the days -of their prophecy; and they have

power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they shall desire (-11.6)

That "fire proceeds out of their mouths" means, no doubt, that at their word the fire comes from heaven to destroy their enemies, as it did at the word of Elijah (1 Kings 1.10-14), something which the Lord predicts at this point, though He refused to emulate it during His own period of witness (Luke 9.54). It is from Elijah, too, that the power to shut heaven that it should not rain is drawn, which, together with the period of 3¹/₂ years, leaves no doubt that Elijah is one of the models from which the Witnesses are derived. The other one is no less plain, for the power of the Witnesses to turn water into blood, and smite the earth with every plague, is as surely based on the pattern of Moses in Egypt (Exodus 4-12). ffo-a VtA-

This departure from the peaceful preaching of the gospel by the Lord and His apostles must be for very good reasons, which are not far to seek. By the time we have arrived at in this Book the world has already refused to repent, and is to be given its last opportunity to do so. In view of the frightful visitations which must now result, is it surprising that God should use such powers as these men possess in the last effort to save some, snatching them out of the fire (Jude 23)?

11.7: When they shall have finished their testimony, the Beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

This is our first introduction to "the Beast", but it will be prominent in the picture until nearly the end of the Book from now on (13.1ff; 14.9,11; 15.2; 16.2,10,13; 17.3ff; 19.19-20; 20.4,10). The power it represents becomes the principal enemy of the gospel and its adherents, and not until it is destroyed is the kingdom of God to be set up. It is introduced at this point simply to show us how the Witnesses, powerfully protected though they are while they preach, become its victims when their work is done. In this they are like their Lord before them, upon Whom none could lay hands for as long as His "hour was not yet come", but Who gave Himself willingly into their hands when that day came (John 7.30; 8.20; 12.23; 13.1; 17.1).

Indeed, the passage before us seems to make the comparison deliberately, for the dead bodies of the Witnesses lie "in the street of the great city where also their Lord was crucified". The servant is not greater than his Master (John 13.16), and these servants suffer as their Lord has suffered before them. Moreover, whether literally or not, the place of their suffering is the same. ;The city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt is certainly in the Old Testament Jerusalem. Sodom is applied to Israel at large, Judah in particular, and Jerusalem minutely, in Isaiah 1.10; 3.1,9; Jeremiah 23.14; Lamentations 4.6; Ezekiel 16.45-48, and in prophecy even as early as Deuteronomy 32.32. It is true that the term is also used a couple of times in relation to Babylon (Isaiah 13.19; Jeremiah 49.18), but this is much more rare and less direct than the ascription to Jerusalem. As for Egypt, the references here are more oblique, as in Ezekiel 23.3-19, but the long history of Israel turning back to Egypt in the Wilderness, making unholy alliances in Egypt in the days of Solomon and onwards to Zedekiah, and seeking to flee there against the instructions of God when Jerusalem had been taken, all point to Egypt as a proper spiritual description of Judah's apostacy (1 Kings 3.1; 2 Chronicles 36.4; Jeremiah 42.14). So, whether literally or not Jerusalem is plainly the right description of the place where the Witnesses meet their death.

There is at least one more link between these Witnesses and Moses and Elijah. When the Lord Jesus was transfigured, there appeared with Him Moses and Elijah, who were witnesses of His glory (Luke 9.30). This in itself is striking enough, but what are we to say when we learn that these men spoke with Jesus of "his exodus which He should accomplish at Jerusalem"? On the mountain these two prophets played their part in preparing the Lord for His death in Jerusalem; now, at least as far as the bare meaning of the words goes, the Lord prepares us for the exodus of those bearing the same names, and in the same place. It is unbelievable that this should be a mere coincidence.

"Even now we are not quite finished. When the Lord Jesus came first, the Jews had expected Him to be preceded by Elijah, basing their expectations on Malachi 4.5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord". The Lord Jesus says, to be sure, that this promise was fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist (Matthew 17.10-13; cf. Luke 1.17), but there is a widespread opinion that there is to be a further ministry of Elijah at the time of Jesus' return. Is it not therefore remarkable that Revelation should speak in such terms, and actually place Elijah in company with Moses, which is perhaps what Malachi 4.4 does also, when it bids the people "remember the law of Moses My servant which I commanded him in Horeb", immediately before speaking of the coming of Elijah?

If the words were to be understood literally, the picture would be terrifying indeed, for then the real Moses and the real Elijah, recalled each from his lost burial or hiding place (Deuteronomy 34.6, 2 Kings 2.9-12), who were brought before the Lord at the transfiguration to prepare Him for His death, would then, preserved or sleeping in some manner we know not, be recalled again to participate, as leaders of a larger company perhaps, in the last call to the nations, and would then suffer death for the faith they preach just before the Lord returns. C&J -4n •

This would be possible, but that is all we can say. In such a Book of symbol, and in a chapter where things elsewhere literal (like the temple) are given a spiritual meaning, it would be wrong to be insistent that Moses and Elijah, however circumstantially they are identified, must refer to these two men in person. There are, of course, difficulties of another kind in imagining that these men, who suffered so much in their natural lifetime, should be brought from the dead to be used so cruelly. So we cannot affirm that this will be the manner in which this chapter will be fulfilled; but those who do expect the literal return of Elijah should take due note of this chapter and consider how painful that return could be. A humble, if rather fearful, watchfulness to see what form the fulfilment will take may be all, for the moment, that we can maintain.) But the parallels in this chapter are too numerous and detailed to be devoid of the most pertinent meaning.

The very striking parallels between this chapter and Psalm 79 (79.1 = 11.8; 79.6 = 11.18, omitting from the list in H.A.W., pages 148-149 others which seem less convincing), adduced to show that the Two Witnesses represent the nation of Israel, and their death the temporary extinction of the nation, do not, the present writer feels, lead to that conclusion. This should be regarded as yet another place where natural Israel in the Old Testament provides a basis for matters on a wider canvas in the New. The chapter itself suggests this, for the same chapter could hardly refer to the same city within 7 verses as both "the holy city" and "Sodom and Egypt", so that even if the latter is restricted to natural Jerusalem the former could hardly be so.

11.9: From among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth (-11.10)

The evidence is again that these are no ordinary Witnesses. The world hates them not only for the reason that it hated Jesus, because He testified that the works thereof were evil (John 7.7), but because they caused it to be tormented, something that Jesus never did. The death of the Witnesses brings upon them great indignities, and causes the world delirious excitement.

The length of the Witnesses' ministry is given as the same as that of their Lord (11.3), though the latter is a matter of inference rather than of plain statement. But they are sharply contrasted with their Lord in their death in that they are not buried, while by the special intercession of His friends the Lord "made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death" (Isaiah 53.9; John 19.38-42). This might signify that the saints at this hour of their trial have no friends left in the world, which is wholly in thralldom to the evil power which dominates it. But the saints lie dead, moreover, for 3½ days, while the Lord Jesus spent no more than three days in His tomb since "the third day he rose again" (Matthew 16.21). Reasons have already been given for rejecting the idea that this period might be symbolic of 105 years (see page 192), but it is not as easy to see what this short time period actually does signify. But the Lord Jesus' three day burial is associated with the prophecy that God "did not suffer His Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16.8-11; Acts 2.25-28, 31), while Lazarus, of whom Martha feared that "by this time he stinketh" (John 11.39) was four days in his grave. The exposure of the Witnesses is something between the two. Can it be that, just as men were beginning to feel that the Witnesses' cause was beyond hope, something happened to vindicate them, showing that God was with them after all?

11.11: After the three days and an half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell on them which beheld them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them (-11.12).

There are parallels with both Old and New Testaments here. The resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus are plainly the pattern, for did not He also experience, in the view of His disciples, being "taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1.9)? There is no doubt that the situation here concerns a symbolic rather than an actual ascension, for heaven is not the destination of the saints, but in the symbolism the parallel is there, none the less. As to the Old Testament there is a double parallel. Creation is represented by the "breath of life" which entered into the Witnesses (Genesis 2.7), while both this and their standing on their feet are reminiscent of Israel's dry bones in Ezekiel 37.5, 10.

Once again, though, it seems that an Old Testament prophecy which concerned, and still does, natural Israel, is being adapted to a wider application to the spiritual Israel of God. These are true Witnesses of the gospel, while natural Israel continues in its unbelief until the Lord comes, and "they shall look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12.10), and this point has not here been reached. The Witnesses are recently dead bodies and not disintegrated skeletons, and in the analogy with the Lord Jesus we seem to be too committed to His true saints to be concerned here with the physical nation of Israel.

It is not really surprising that it is difficult to be more specific. If we had been able to interpret in advance the apparently miraculous manifestations accompanying the testimony of the Two Witnesses (11.5-6), we might be better able to understand the nature of their 'resurrection' (11.11) and 'ascension' (11.12). All we can usefully do, in advance of clearer signs as to what the fulfilment is to be, is to note the parallels; and the ones so far given are exciting enough.

But these Witnesses "went up into heaven in a cloud" (11.12). Not only is this what the Lord did, but we are told elsewhere that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes-salonians 4.17). Once again the parallels are too close to be accidental. In both cases dead saints rise; in both they are caught up from the earth; in both they meet their Lord. May not this be the augury of what has been found already from other passages, that at some time before the final manifestation of the Lord on earth, saints will be caught away and transported to the judgement seat (Matthew 24.40-42; Luke 17.34-36)? For that same judgement seat follows immediately in the next few verses (11.18). The amazement of their enemies as the Witnesses are removed from the scene (11.12) would fit this parallel too; and it would be appropriate that at this point, when the people of God are removed from the scene, some at least of the world's population should observe the event and "give glory to God" (11.13). It is true that the repentance is also attributed to the great earthquake (11.13) which immediately followed the Witnesses' ascension. It was a similar combination which brought conviction to some at the time of the Lord Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27.50-54). We have already encountered earthquakes in the Sixth Seal (6.12), and in the prelude to the Seven Trumpets (8.5). After its appearance here in the Sixth Trumpet we find it yet again in 11.19 at the time of the announcement of the setting up of the kingdom of God; and, last of all, when the Seventh Vial is poured out on the earth and the last of the tribulations comes to its end (16.18). All the references to earthquakes in Revelation pertain to the last days, increasing in intensity until the last-named which, like the one before us, also affects "the great city". It might almost seem that the "earthquakes in divers places" of the Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24.7; Mark 13.8; Luke 21.11) may be concentrated particularly in this series of five in the last days of the Apocalypse. If, once again, we cannot be sure whether the signs when they arise will be literal, or will refer to some upheaval in human affairs hitherto unimagined, it is clear that when the sign actually comes to pass there will be no mistaking it.

11.13: In that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell: and there were killed in the earthquake 7000 persons: and the rest were affrighted and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The tenth part of the city fell. The city must be "the great city, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt", which is the last-day counterpart of Jerusalem. We have no really adequate "tenths" in the Old Testament to which this can be related, though there is in Isaiah 6.13 the phrase, "if there be yet a tenth in it" — the land and cities of Judah — "it shall again be eaten up" (R.V., where the idea is that the very tithes of the people's provisions would be experiencing the siege which should follow on the rejection of the prophet's message. The thoughts may be related: God will exact His tithe of the 'great city' to show that the whole belongs to Him, and so that those who survive will be warned. But we remain basically ignorant of the meaning both of the "tenth part" and of the "seven thousand" who are slain: it is true that the latter is the same as that of the prophets "who had not bowed the knee to Baal" in Elijah's day (1

Kings 19.18), and in view of the prominence of Elijah in this prophecy perhaps the coincidence is purposeful: as God spared 7000 who had not bowed to idolatry in Elijah's day, He will now punish an equivalent number who have given themselves to false gods, that the rest may fear, and repent?.

The rest gave glory to the God of heaven. If the great city is indeed natural Jerusalem, this might be the sign of that repentance of the nation, which is to culminate in, "They shall look on Me Whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12.10). The parallel with the Lord's resurrection and ascension comes into the picture again, for it was by this that He was vindicated as "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2.36), and those who were then convinced and convicted were "pricked in their hearts" and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (2.37). Might it not be the same with

some who see the very saints they have persecuted revived and caught away, and so, seeing the dreadful evil they have done, begin that repentance which will result in the reconciliation of their nation with God?

NOTE: GOD'S WITNESSES

H.A.W., pages 147ff, considers that the Witnesses are national Israel, using the familiar heading "THE JEWS, GOD'S WITNESSES" to introduce familiar passages like Isaiah 44.8 and 43.8-12 in support. But this is unsatisfactory. For in the first place the witnesses referred to in both these passages are unwilling witnesses who have fallen into idolotry (44.9-21), bearing witness through their privations rather than by their reach testimony to the work of God, and needing His mercy for their restoration. In both passages they are to be restored to their land by God, but in neither are they the declarers of His gospel/By contrast the Witnesses of Revelation 11 are given their message from God, they are prophets (11.11), and they die for their faith.) JovoL-

In the second place, though, we have a more direct identification of the nature of the Witnesses in the way this word is used in the New Testament. It is only necessary to examine Luke 24.48; Acts 1.8,22; 2.32; 3.13; 5.32; 10.39,41; 13.31; 22.15,20; 26.16; 1 Peter 5.1; Revelation 2.13; 17,6 (as to the noun), and Acts 23.11; 1 John 1.2; 4.14 (as to the corresponding verb) to see how the New Testament uses the word. The apostles and the preachers who follow them are the true Witnesses of God for these days. Nothing could correspond less with the spirit of Revelation than the statement that "The two Witnesses are the Jews of the Last Days of God's indignation against them when their newly-born State of Israel, fashioned and cemented with blood, toil, sweat and tears, is seen to crumble (H.A.W., page 150). It is true that the author recognizes that the Jews testify to God by their blindness and deafness: what is not true is that the Witnesses of Revelation 11 do anything of the kind.

Chapters 16,17 Revelation 11:14-12:12

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (11.14-19)

11.14: The second woe is past: behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever. The four and twenty elders which sit before God on their thrones, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give Thee thanks O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and didst-reign. And the nations were angry and Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their rewards to Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy them that destroy the earth (-11.18).

Of course, at the time when the words concerning the Third Woe are to be fulfilled, the kingdom of God will not yet have been set up: the words, "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" are spoken in confident prophecy of what is as good as accomplished, for we are now entering the last phase. It is like the Lord Jesus' "It is finished!" on the Cross (John 19.30), for nothing could now stand in the way of His triumph. There is little expressly about woe in the remaining verses of this chapter, which are almost entirely concerned with ends and not with means. The heavenly beings are already falling down in worship before God in readiness for the imminent victory, but the outline of the message of this Trumpet given here is evidently no more than a summary of what is to be given in more detail later. God has taken His power and assumed the kingdom, say the elders, but in fact this does not occur until the rout of the forces of the Beast in 19.19-20.4. The time for the dead to be judged has arrived, say the elders again, but no such judgement is described until 20.4. Those who destroy the earth are destroyed themselves, add the elders, but the picture of their destruction has to wait until the Seven Last Plagues are described in 15.8ff. We are led to conclude with near certainty that what is now to occur will occur very rapidly indeed, so near the end are we. The kingdom is just about to "break in pieces and consume all the kingdoms of men, that it may stand for ever" (Daniel 2.44). "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth are about to awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12.2). But the glorious event, so confidently spoken of here, is still round the corner.

11.19: There was opened the temple of God that is in heaven, and there was seen in the temple the ark of His covenant; and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The description of the pending woe is awaited, but the signs of it are already plain. The nations are angry, in fulfilment of the second Psalm, of which the first fulfilment was announced by Peter after Pentecost (Acts 4.24-28; Psalm 2.1-3), and the second is awaited. It is the angry nations who will make war with the Lamb in 17.13, and the Beast which leads them which is to be overcome in 19.19. God's wrath is come, again in fulfilment of Psalm 2.4, when God will "speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." All this leads to the "winepress of the wrath of God" (14.19), and the "finishing of the wrath of

God" in the Seven Vials (15.1), the "fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" which is to destroy the Beast (19.15).

God is about to "destroy them that destroy the earth". This is the inevitable sequel to the clash of the two 'wraths'. But the word rendered 'destroy' is unusual. It is *diaphtheiro*, a word used of the decay of fabrics brought about by moths (Luke 12.33), and of the corruption of human flesh in death (2 Corinthians 4.16), as is the corresponding noun, *diaphthora*, in Acts 2.27, 31; 13.34-37). It is used of spiritual corruption in 1 Timothy 6.5, and the only occasion apart from the present one where it is translated "destroy" is also in Revelation, for the "destruction of the third part of the ships" in 8.9; and even there the idea is that of corruption or corrosion as the decaying blood brings death to fish and rotting to ships. Though no doubt the destruction wrought here will be violent, the idea is of the disintegration and dissolution of the enemies of God. Current concern about environmental pollution, and the possibility that the earth could be rendered uninhabitable by nuclear accident or nuclear war has given a new dimension to the words "them which destroy the earth", but there is no purpose in singling out any one element in the corruption of the earth brought about by our race of "men of corrupt minds".

So then, as this chapter ends, we see dark forebodings of the evil which is to come on the earth (chapters 16 to 19), the resurrection and judgement which will follow (20), and the kingdom of God which will supersede that of man. The fact that none of these things is specifically referred to in 12-15 should prepare us for the possibility that we have here some recapitulation, which is indeed perfectly plain when we remember that the Beast of which we heard in 11.7 (and perhaps also as Apolluon of the abyss in 9.11) does not actually make its debut until 13.1. The opening of the temple of God in heaven with which the present chapter closes (11.19) is to be the signal for the emergence of the angels carrying the Seven Last Plagues (15.1; 16.1). The revelation of the Ark or the Covenant speaks anew of God's covented care for His own people during this dark period (15.2-3); and the lightnings, thunder, and earthquake adumbrate the identical phenomena in 16.17 which introduce the "battle of the great day of God Almighty".

Note: A LITTLE MORE ABOUT TIME PERIODS

It is evident that the Book of Daniel sets the pattern for the time periods of the Book of Revelation. The relevant passages in Daniel are:

4.23: Hew down the tree and destroy it; nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till 7 times pass over him.... Thou shalt be driven from men. . . . and 7 times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will (-4.25).

7.25: He (the little horn of the fourth beast) shall speak words against the Most High, and shall swear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time. But the judgement shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end (-7.26).

8.13: How long shall be the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, and the transgression that maketh desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden

underfoot"? And he said to me, To 2300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.

9.24: 70 weeks are determined on thy people and on thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Anointed One the Prince shall be 7 weeks, and 62 weeks.... and after the 62 weeks shall the Anointed One be cut off and shall have nothing. . . . and He shall make a firm covenant with many for 1 week; and for the $\frac{1}{2}$ of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. . . .

12.6: And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was above the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders'? And I heard the man clothed with linen, which was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for 3 'A times; and when have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished12.11: From the time that the continual burnt offering shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be 1290 days. Blessed is he that cometh to the 1335 days. But go thy way

until the end be: for thou shall rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days (-12.13).

Now careful comparison of these passages establishes something about the principles governing the interpretation of the time-periods. The following conclusions offer themselves:

1: The "seven times" of 4.23 are seven years, during which Nebuchadnezzar suffered from his madness. That a time is a year is not in dispute, and is in any case confirmed by the fact that $3\frac{1}{2}$ times, 42 months, and 1260 days appear to be corresponding intervals in the Apocalypse.

2: There is no hint in 4.23ff that Nebuchadnezzar's madness is typical of anything else, or that his 7 years would, if the type did exist, correspond to $7 \times 360 = 2520$ years. This chapter in no way suggests that the madness corresponds to the "times of the gentiles" (Luke 21.24); and it is hard to make any sense of the suggestion that the period when a Gentile prince has been driven out corresponds to one when the Gentiles are in control of Jerusalem; or that the time when the same prince is restored to his throne, prefigures Jerusalem's deliverance. If, nevertheless, we look at the postulated period, Jerusalem fell finally under Nebuchadnezzar's power in -587, and if we add 2520 years to that we get 1934, certainly not later, and nothing happened in that year which corresponds to the end of Gentile dominion. We have nothing here but literal years.

3: Taking this through into 12.6ff, $3\frac{1}{2}$ times there would be 1260 days, which corresponds well with the fact that 1290 and 1335 are both somewhat larger, but strictly comparable periods. Whatever are the events referred to, there is nothing in the language of the chapter which would make the days into anything else but days.

4: Then if this is accepted of chapter 12, it must also be accepted of chapter 7 of the period of the persecution and blasphemy by the "little horn" and (whatever the meaning may be) of the 2300 days of 8.13ff. While we may think that long periods have passed, and therefore long

periods must be invoked in all these places, there is nothing in the internal examination of the chapters which suggests this biblically.

5: There is, however a real long period in Daniel 9.24ff. Daniel had been praying, on the very eve of the due date, for the fulfilment of the promise of restoration after 70 years; but is told that God will accomplish an even greater deliverance in "seventy sevens" (9.24). The context is eloquent that here we are talking of seventy sevens of years, not because of any principle, but because Daniel is being instructed about events greater, and taking longer, than the one on which he had set his heart: Jews do not deserve the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Daniel 9.2; Jeremiah 25.12; Ezra 1.1). This would be fulfilled indeed, and Daniel doubtless saw it (6.28; 10.1), but the whole problem of sin in its very essence would be dealt with when Messiah came in broadly speaking seven times this period of 70 years. It is true that the word *shabhua* is always translated 'weeks', but it is the context here which decides that it is a term for weeks of years.

6: The recognition that Daniel 9 deals with a total period of 490 years also involves the fact that the time up to the coming of Messiah should be 69 of these weeks, or 483 of these years (9.25). Since the Lord Jesus began His public work around 26, this would mean that the period began around -457, which is believed to be the time when Ezra went from Persia to Jerusalem in the 7th year of Artaxerxes I Longimanus (Ezra 7.1-10), an exciting and convincing fulfilment of prophecy. The First seven sevens of this period would terminate in -457 $49 = -408$, which could well correspond to the period of rebuilding the city "in troublous times" (9.25). What is important is that the last or 70th 'week' has a special status. Messiah will be "cut off after the 62 weeks and shall have nothing" (9.26). He will "make a firm covenant with many for one week" (9.28), and "for the half of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease", while "on the wing of desolations a desolator shall come" and do his desolating work, suffering the wrath of God for doing so.

7: Though the pass has its difficulties, its importance in evaluating the time periods is that it divides the last 'week' into two halves, each therefore of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, which takes us back to the 3'X' times of 7.25 and on to those of 12.6, and then to the corresponding periods in Revelation, and once more asks for a brief rather than an expanded period. If the ministry of Jesus lasted for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (though this precise period is not stated in Scripture, but depends on enumerating the Passovers in John's Gospel, one of which is inferential), at the end of which He offered His "one sacrifice for sins for ever", this could answer to the first $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year period, but this would require that "after 62 weeks shall Messiah be cut off be understood as $3\frac{1}{2}$ years after the 62 weeks". If this is accepted it would leave one further period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years in which the "firm covenant" would be made with many. This would be completed around 30, which is a likely date for the death of Stephen, and the resulting transfer of emphasis in the preaching of the gospel away from Israel and towards the Gentile world (Acts 8.1-4; 11.19). This is acceptable chronologically, but it has no firm Scriptural basis. An alternative view puts either the second half, or the whole, of the 70th week in the same position as the gap in the Olivet prophecy, leaving either one or two $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year periods to be covered in the Book of Revelation in the last days.

8: That there is a real gap in the fulfilment of the 70 weeks prophecy is made likely by comparing its words in 9.26-27, which speaks of an indefinite period of desolations, with the words of the Lord that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled" (Luke 21.24).

This note is not, of course, intended to offer an exposition of Daniel's prophecies. It is designed only to show the effect of studying the time periods there given on our understanding of those in Revelation. And the evidence points clearly to the brevity of the periods of 3½ years, or the equivalent, in the latter book, and clearly against their interpretation as corresponding to 1260 years.

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER 12: THE WOMAN, THE MANCHILD, AND THE

DRAGON

12.1: A great sign was seen in heaven; a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And she was with child, and she cried out, travailing in birth and in pain to be delivered (-12.2).

Throughout all that has passed since 4.1, John has been in his heavenly vantage point, and he remains there still. Yet there are at least three levels at which the activities of this chapter take place. We know that John is close to the heavenly throne (4.2, etc.); yet the woman with her yet unborn Child, though described as being in heaven (12.1) cannot be in the most exalted heights, since the Child when He is born is "caught up to God and to His throne" (12.5). The dragon which menaces the child (12.3) is in heaven too (12.7), and is subsequently cast down to the earth (12.8). Evidently, therefore, the heaven which houses the woman and the dragon is some theatre in which are enacted scenes which actually occur on our earth; and, no less evidently, the place called "God and His throne" to which the Child is elevated is the highest position to which He could attain: a fact which should already prepare us for rejecting any interpretation which finds in this Child a mortal and sinful man, however exalted such a man may be.

The woman here depicted is adorned with sun, moon, and twelve stars, and the only place in Scripture where these precise symbols are combined is in Joseph's Dream (Genesis 37.9-11), where the sun is Jacob, the moon Leah, and the twelve stars are Jacob and his brothers. The woman is therefore the ideal Israel, at this stage — despite aspersions sometimes gratuitously cast on her character by those who wish to present her as a harlot community giving birth to an apostate quasi- Christian ruler, — glorious in appearance and about to give birth to a glorious Child. Though we have doubted earlier whether the sun, moon, and stars need on every occasion refer to Israel, the number 12 of the stars, associated with the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, removes that doubt in the present context, as does what follows.

The woman was with child. While we must reject any personal identification of her with the Virgin Mary (which is made in some Roman Catholic interpretations of this passage), the parallel between this verse and the prophecy, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Isaiah 7.17; Matthew 1.23) is not to be

despised. In neither the prophecy nor this passage is the father of the Child named, which is so very remarkable that we are led a little further on the road of identification. The thought is at least provoked: is "that which is conceived in her of the Holy Spirit"? (Matthew 1.20).

Neither, though, do the birth narratives make any reference to the travail. The Annunciation is received with humility, and the Birth proclaimed with joy. (Luke 1.38, 2.8-14); we know

that at the time of the census Mary was great with child." (Luke 2.5), which bears some parallel to Revelation 12.2, but of the birth-pangs themselves we learn, and would expect to learn, nothing. Why then is the point emphasized here that this woman was "traveling in birth, and in pain to be delivered"? It is a fitting picture of the long travail of the chosen people, waiting for Messiah to be brought to the birth: of the times of exile, the afflictions, the bondages, and the many sufferings which must be endured before the Redeemer could be born. It is true that much of this was brought on the people by its own perversity, but, for whatever reason, the whole creation had since the Fall "groaned and travailed in pain" (Romans 8.22). In that sense the woman of this chapter is older than Mary, older than Israel, and finds her being in Eve; especially because of what follows, we hear here the primeval voice saying, "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" (Genesis 3.15, 16). How remarkable it is that the Serpent stands before this woman, ready to devour her Seed as soon as it is born!

12.3: There was seen another sign in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was about to be delivered, that when she was delivered he might devour her child (- 12.4).

We are shortly to meet again a wild animal which, like the dragon, has seven heads and ten horns (13.1; 17.3), and this Beast also is scarlet (17.3), (though the *kokkinos* of the Beast is not the same as the fiery red purpurs of the Dragon); and so it might be tempting to identify the one with the other, were it not completely ruled out by the Book itself, which distinguishes sharply between the two in 13.2,4; 16.13; 19.20; 20.2,10. The Dragon is plainly marked out as the superior power giving its power and authority to the subordinate Beast. If we find it necessary to identify the Beast with some vast world power which will marshal the nations against the Lord when He comes and so be overcome (17.13-14; 19.19-21), then the Dragon must be some even higher power,

transcending earthly political authority.

We are given further characteristics of this Dragon to help us in the identification. It is "the accuser of our brethren, which accuseth them before our God day and night" (12.10), and it is "the old serpent, he that is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (12.9). The compilers of our marginal references could hardly have avoided referring us to Job 1.9; 2.5 (where Job is accused before God by The Satan), and Zechariah 3.1 (where Joshua ben Josedech is similarly accused by The Satan). What the Satan of Job and Zechariah did in specific cases, is done by the Satan of Revelation 12 to all the brethren until he is "cast down" (12.7). The power in question represents universal hostility to godly people, and if in this chapter his special hostility is directed against the Son of this woman, we are given increasing certainty as to Who this Manchild will turn out to be.

As to "the third part of the stars of heaven" (12.4) which this dragon casts down, we have met "the third part" so often in the Trumpets (8.7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 11, 12, 12, 12; 9.15, 18) as to feel familiar with it. It is a large proportion, but less than half, very significant, but not preponderant: it is the greatest simple fraction one could think of which still represents a minority. So this Dragon is a significant power in the world, comparable in its influence among men with the Almighty Himself (for does not "the whole world lie in the evil one" (1

John 5.19)?), though even so less powerful than He. But the figure is plainly drawn from Daniel 8.10 in which, after the he-goat of Alexander's Macedonian Greece (8.5,21) has conquered the ram of the Medo-Persian Empire (8.3,10), there arises from one of the quarters of the divided Greek Empire a "little horn", which "grew great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the stars of heaven it cast down to the ground and trampled on them". Here the reference is obviously to the persecution of the people of God (8.24 and though a first application to the evil done by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. is plain enough, the ultimate destruction of the persecuting power "by no human hand" (8.25, R.S.V.) points to the likelihood that the vision there, which "pertains to many days hence", has a latter-day import as well. This factor may help with some difficulties to come, for if Daniel's prophecy can bridge the period from -150 to our own day with a laconic "many days hence", it is reasonable to suppose that the Apocalypse may do the same, as we have already seen in Chapter 6. We see then that the Dragon is a persecuting power, even though in its capacity as "the Old Serpent" it represents the sum total of human sinfulness, for that evil may well express itself through the actions of human authorities. The Dragon gives authority to the Beast (13.2), which is a similar thought to that which earlier led the centres of authority of persecuting powers to be described as "Satan's seat" (2.13), and Jewish persecutors as "the synagogue of Satan" (2.9; 3.9). The fact that the Dragon operates through human powers provides a good reason why it should be depicted in the shape of the latest and last of these, with heads and horns like those of the Beast it empowers. This "old Serpent" has, then, already wrought great evil among the people of God before the time in this chapter when it seeks to "devour her Child when she is delivered".

12.5; She was delivered of a Son, a man Child, Who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her Child was caught up to God and to His throne.

In addition to the indications we have already had, the "rod of iron" well-nigh identifies positively this Manchild with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the light of Psalm 2.9; 110.2; Isaiah 11.1,4. It is true that the Lord promises similar authority to His saints (2.27), but this is to be in the Kingdom where He will exercise the same authority as their Leader (19.15). This last reference, in fact, makes the identification even more certain, for the Manchild is caught up to God's throne, and it is from heaven that the Conqueror will emerge.

We have previously had occasion to stress the importance of accepting the clues of interpretation which the Apocalypse itself provides: and there is never to be a clearer instance than this of how important that principle is. It is to this writer inconceivable that any interpretation could ever have gained credence which applies the terms of this verse to a mere human ruler.

The attempts of the Dragon to devour the Manchild (12.4) certainly began as soon as His birth was known, for Herod was prepared to massacre the innocents of Bethlehem rather than tolerate competition from Him "that was born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2.1-16). But physical attempts on the life of Jesus, whether in His infancy or in His manhood (John 5.18; 7.1, 10, etc.) were only a minor part of the Dragon's assault, and it was in fact when the power of evil had apparently succeeded in eliminating Jesus from the scene, at the crucifixion, that it suffered its greatest setback and became certain of ultimate defeat. After being "tempted of the devil" in the wilderness (Matthew 4.1-11) and subsequently during a life of spotless sinlessness, the Lord Jesus "cast out the prince of this world" (John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11). It was when Jesus was "lifted up", like the serpent in the wilderness by Moses, that He brought to nought "him that hath

the power of death, that is the devil" (John 3.14; Numbers 21.9; Hebrews 2.14). Even though the power of sin is still strong in the world (1 John 5.19), its ultimate destruction is now certain, and finally the Dragon influence, the old source of temptation which found its origin in Eden, will be "the devil that deceived them which will be cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20.10; Matthew 25.41; 1 Corinthians 15.26-28).

From His birth to His crucifixion, then, the Lord was subjected to the assaults of the Dragon, and His ascension marked His final triumph. He has already been caught up to God and His throne (3.21), and it is only a matter of time before He will exercise to the full the "power which is given Him in heaven and earth", and rule all nations indeed.

12.6: The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared by God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

The movements from now on of this woman are not without considerable difficulties of interpretation. Her flight into the wilderness seems to have occurred in stages: first it involved persecution by the Dragon which had failed to devour her child (12.13), and continued with her flight into the wilderness (12.6, 14) by means of the two wings of the great eagle (12.14), to a place prepared by God (12.6), but with the help of the earth, which swallowed the flood with which the Dragon thought to overwhelm her (12.16). When she is safely in the wilderness, the Dragon turns its attentions to the persecution of "her seed, which keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus" (12.17), which might suggest that she herself no longer kept these commandments.

Omitting the time periods (1260 days, or 3.5 times, (12.6,14), it is easy to fit some of these events into history. When all assaults against the Manchild Jesus had failed, and He had ascended to the throne of God (12.5), the nation of Israel from whose womb He was born was subjected to grievous oppression by the Romans, and with the desolation of Palestine from 70 onwards was indeed exiled into the wilderness (12.6,14), where, in spite of all the nation's tribulations, it was preserved by God from extinction (12.6), in fulfilment of the promise that God would not "make a full end of the nation" (Jeremiah 30.11; 46.26). That same protection has persisted through the centuries, and even the worst pogroms have failed either to extinguish or to absorb the nation.

The term "wilderness" is particularly appropriate for a people in their period of disgrace before God. "Sharon is like a wilderness" (Isaiah 33.9) when the Lord rejects the people of Zion. Both literally and spiritually it was in the wilderness that John the Baptist preached, and in the desert that he made straight the highway for the Son of God (Isaiah 40.3; Matthew 3.1-3). Both in Babylonian and in Roman times "thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation" (Isaiah 64.10). It was in the wilderness that Israel remained for 40 years when it refused the message of the faithful spies (Exodus 20.10-36). These are but a few passages among many. For the sins of Israel, the prophet said, "I will bring her into the wilderness, and will speak comfortably to her, and will give her her vineyards from thence, and speak comfortably to her" (Hosea 2.14-15), a passage which speaks hopefully of ultimate restoration.

12.7: There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels. 12.8: and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. 12.9: And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that

is called the devil, and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world: he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.

The clue to the meaning of this event is found in the vivid words of the Lord Jesus Himself to His disciples, when they returned from their successful preaching errand: "Even the demons are subject to us through Thy name," they said, to which the Lord replied: I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10.17-18); which may be linked with His words just before the crucifixion, "Now is the judgement of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12.31). The record of Genesis, too, which is certainly in mind in this chapter, has its own picture of the destruction of the power of sin in 3.15, where the Seed of the woman wounds the serpent in the head. Even the language used of the downfall of the power of Babylon in Isaiah 14.12, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning . . . Thou saidst in thine heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ... yet thou shalt be brought down to oh: Swl" must have made its contribution to the language used. The ascent of the Lord to heaven after His crucifixion effectively brought the power of sin to an end. Hitherto sin had reigned unto death, but now all who profit from the work of the Lord Jesus may be delivered from it.

12.10: They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even to death.

12.12: Therefore rejoice O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe

for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.

The power of sin to hinder access to God has been frustrated by the victory of the Lord Jesus and by His heavenly mediation: we have access with boldness before the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and grace to help in time of need. It is in the heavenly places now that the saints wage their war against the rulers of the darkness of this world (Hebrews 2.14-18; 4.14-16; Ephesians 6.12). Only on earth, that is, only on the physical lives of the saints, does the power of sin any longer rule. For those who trust in the Lord and maintain that trust after their obedient baptism, "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus . . . Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth. It is Christ Jesus that died, yea, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?. . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8.1, 33-39).

The "short time" presents the same problems as before. The matter is neither more nor less difficult to resolve because it reappears here. It is inescapable that the New Testament deliberately foreshortens the interval between the first and second comings of the Lord.

It should be noted that the saint and the dragon are never represented as coming into face-to-face conflict. The dragon wages its war through its agents, the Beast and the False Prophet of whom we are shortly to read. This serpent, this devil, this Satan, only takes shape in sinful people and sin-dominated organizations. Even when the Lord Jesus consigns it to the abyss, He is not pictured as waging war against it, but only against the Beasts (20.2; 19.20), and when it finally deceives the nations and brings them to the battle which destroys the power of

sin, it is against them, and not physically against it, that the battle is fought (20.9). This devil is as intangible as the hades to which sinners go when they die, and the death they die too, both of which are cast with it into the Lake of Fire when all the nonconcrete but terrible manifestations of the fruits of sin are abolished.

Revelation 12.14: There were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place (prepared by God, 12.6), where she is nourished 3 1/2 times from the face of the serpent.

The woman was given two wings, by means of which to flee into her wilderness (12.14), and it is quite plain that the imagery is once more drawn from the Old Testament:

Zechariah 5.7: This is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah . . . Behold there came forth two women . . . (who) had wings like those of a stork. . . Whither do these bear the ephah ?... To build an house in the land of Shinar: and when it is prepared she shall be set there in her own place.

In both cases we have a woman originating in Israel. In both she is borne away with wings. In Revelation she is taken to the wilderness, and in Zechariah to Shinar (5.10), and there is no doubt what Shinar means: It is the land where they built the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11.2), the territory of Nimrod (10.9-10), the seat of that Amraphel whom some have identified with Hamurabi (14.1). It is one of the places to which Israel was taken captive, and from which it was to return (Isaiah 11.11). It was the place to which Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels of the house of God (Daniel 1.2). In short, it is a synonym for Babylon. And if we ask in what sense a symbolic woman, in the days of the restoration from Persian captivity (for that is the time of Zechariah's prophecy) could be said to be about to fly to Babylon, the answer can only be apostacy. And if there could be any doubt it is set at rest by the description of the woman in Zechariah: "This is wickedness: and he cast her down into the midst of the ephah, and he cast the weight of lead on the mouth thereof (5.8).

The interpretation has to be pieced carefully together. We denied that there was anything wicked about the woman of the Apocalypse when we met her in 12.1, where she was about to give birth to the Son of God. But it has already been hinted that all did not remain well with her: when persecuted by the dragon she received and accepted the help of the earth (12.16); and although this preserved her from its vengeance, it seems that it also caused her to leave to "the remnant of her seed" the duty of continuing to keep the commands of God and the testimony of Jesus (12.17). She did not first appear as an apostate, but it seems that she became so before the story ends.

Though she is preserved by God from destruction (12.6,14), she is established in a position where her apostacy can take root and flourish. If we combine together the description of her as 'Wickedness' in Zechariah, and the fact that her sojourn in the wilderness is limited to a period (called here 1260 days and 3 1/2 times), it appears that we are to expect two things: one is her emergence from the wilderness when this time has expired, and the other is that she will be seen in her new, true character, fully

justifying the name of Wickedness given her by the prophet.

At this point we have to take a leap to chapter 17 to continue her history. In the intervening chapters John describes the uprise of the Beast (13.1) to be destroyed by the Lord Jesus when

He returns (17.14; 19.20), and details the absolute power it will assume over all unregenerate mankind (13.16), and the persecutions it will promote against those who do not accept its yoke (13.7, 17). The saints are assured that God will be with them in their trials (14.1-5), and that during this period a last, urgent call will be made to obey the gospel, before the final judgements of God are poured out on the world (14.6-7). From these judgements when they are poured out no one who has not now accepted the gospel will be able to claim relief (15.1-8), and the earth must endure the pains which come to it when it is ripe for the reaping of God's harvest (16.1-21).

It is in chapters 17-19 that one particular aspect of these judgements is elaborated, described in terms of the fall and destruction of "Babylon the great" (17.5; 18.2, 10), already adumbrated in 14.8. Who or what, then, is this Babylon the great? And what connection can she have with the woman clothed with the sun whom we are considering in chapter 12? The answer is provided in 17.1:

17.1: There came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spoke with me, saying: Come hither. I will show thee the judgement of the great harlot that sitteth on many waters.

17.3: He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet coloured Beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stone, and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, and on her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (-17.5).

At first sight there is nothing to connect a glorious personage such as the woman of 12.1 with the abomination disclosed in 17.3. That woman was clothed with the sun: this one is arrayed in purple and scarlet; that one used the moon as her footstool: this one is seated on a scarlet Beast, the persecutor of the saints of God (11.7; 13.1). That one gave birth to Messiah, Who is to rule all nations with His iron rod: this one makes the nations drunk from the golden cup of her fornications (17.2, 4). Yet the two chapters themselves provide the link: that woman was carried into a wilderness for a period of time, and would therefore be expected

to return; this one is found in a wilderness, in the only other place in the Apocalypse where such a thing is referred to at all. Couple that with the fact that the place of sojourn of the woman in Zechariah 5.11 is identified as Shinar or Babylon, the name which this woman now bears, and it becomes nearly impossible to dismiss the parallels as accidental.

If we are not absolutely compelled to identify the two figures as belonging to different stages of development of a single entity, it is hard to see a reasonable alternative. We repeat: if the woman of 12.14 is to remain in the wilderness for a finite period, whatever its length may be, must we not expect her to emerge at the end of it, and where else is her emergence spoken of if it be not here?

Isaiah 1.21: How is the faithful city become an harlot, she that was full of judgement; righteousness lodged in her, but now murders.

If it is still not easy to accept the identification of two such contrasted characters, we have to remember that a harlot is by definition a once-pure woman who has fallen from her purity. There is a passage in Isaiah which seems to describe the very process we are considering. The woman of 12.1, 17.17 suffered persecution by the power of evil: she of 17.1 has embraced evil, leaving to the remnant of her seed the keeping of God's commandments (12.17), and has become the persecutor of that very seed (17.6). This view is strengthened by the fact that the term 'harlot' is frequently used in the Old Testament of the apostasy of the people of the Old Covenant: Israel after the flesh.

We have already referred to the use of the term for Jerusalem in Isaiah 1.21. It is used of Tyre in 23.15, 16; of Jerusalem again in Ezekiel 16.31,35; of Samaria in Micah 1.7. The same Hebrew word, *zanah*, translated in various ways, is also used of the chosen people in Exodus 34.15,16; Deuteronomy 31.16; Judges 2.17; Jeremiah 3.1; Ezekiel 23.3, 19; Hosea 2.5; 9.1, and other places. It is rarely used in any other sense. This leaves no reasonable doubt that the term is used to describe the apostasy of a chosen people.

But this does not fully resolve the problem. In the Old Testament there is only one chosen race, the natural seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but in the New Testament there is another, for to the natural race the Lord Jesus had said, "The kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matthew 21.43). This new chosen people is the spiritual seed of Abraham, drawn from all nations, "which aforetime were not a people, but are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2.10); and if it was possible for natural Israel to stray from the true way, it is no less possible for their

successors. Against such apostasy they are repeatedly warned, as by Paul in Acts 20.28-30; and many times the faithful in the New Testament are bidden take warning from those who fell and were punished before (1 Corinthians 10.1-13; 1 Timothy 4.1; 2 Timothy 3.1-8).

The same figure is used of this apostasy against the new covenant as was used of the old. We are not to "take the

members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot" (1 Corinthians 6.15, 16), and if this is the only occasion when the actual Greek noun *porneia*, is so used, the use of the related word *porneia*, fornication or apostasy within the church in Revelation 2.21 (and of the world which rejects the gospel in 9.21), is adequate preparation for the possibility that the harlot of 17.3, and her fornication of 17.2,4; 18.3; 19.2, could refer to an apostate, once Christian, community. Neither the possibility that natural Israel is still intended, nor the possibility that an apostate degeneration of Christian, spiritual Israel, is meant, is automatically excluded by the figure employed.

It would be possible to understand Revelation 12 and 17 as saying that it was from the natural Israel that the Lord Jesus took His birth, and this Israel suffered in part grievous persecution afterwards, but was nevertheless also befriended by the world and afforded refuge (as has intermittently occurred throughout history). Under these conditions the nation apostatized and so (it could be said) became a spiritual Babylon. In this event it would be the same nation which emerges in chapter 17 as restored to power, once again persecuting the saints of God as it did throughout the apostolic period during a period of authority over the nations, only to find itself ruined by those same nations in a disaster from which only the Lord Jesus Christ will be able to deliver it (so linking together 17.16 and such passages as Zechariah 12.6 and 14.1-4).

But it would also be possible to understand the same passage as saying that it is the faithful in Israel which gave spiritual birth to the Lord Jesus Christ; that it is the community which He founded on the rock of His own resurrection which then bears His name; that this community endured grievous persecution from the pagan world until it was befriended by Christendom and became corrupted; and that it is this apostate Christianity which rises to the seat of power over the nations, resumes persecution of the saints, is destroyed by the nations it rides, and is thus betrayed and overcome.

At the present time there are difficulties in accepting either alternative. To take the idea of apostate Christendom first, at the time when these words are written and revised, the world's most

powerful church and its sister-churches are apparently in no persecuting mood. Compromise and toleration are in the air, and the ecumenical movement does not seem, on the surface, likely to lead to the intolerance and cruelty which characterized the churches of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. But this is not decisive. If all churches were to come together in a mutual compromise which left the true teaching of the Scriptures to be maintained by an unco-operative minority (which would be the inevitable result of such a union), who can say what fury might be directed against those who declined to participate in this betrayal of the gospel? And if this unity should also carry with it apparent influence in the monolithic international secular power of which Revelation seems to speak, would not a revived persecution of the saints, of which this chapter speaks, become perilously possible?

The possibility that literal, restored natural Israel might be involved in this harlot figure is more difficult to assess. During preparation and revision of this work Israel, the nation founded so precariously in 1948, remains a nation rich in military successes, but still under enormous pressure from her near Arab neighbours and more distant Russian one. The western thirst for Arab oil makes Israel's friends reluctant to commit themselves to her in a way which might provoke economic reprisal, and the fact that at the time of this revision Egypt has formed a precarious affinity with Israel and is looking to the west for its friends has not significantly improved the western position. To see this beleaguered Israel, therefore, in the potential role of a possible rider of the international Beast and persecutor of the saints would seem to surpass all reasonable expectations.

This may prove to be the case, and it is no part of the purpose of this work to advocate this possibility as the more likely. Yet the political situation outlined in the last paragraph certainly does not represent the whole truth of the present position. For one thing Israel's victories since 1948 may not yet be exhausted should there come another conflict: there is as yet no evidence that the Arab nations alone could do much to reverse the trend. Israel's strength might yet increase still further. For another, we know enough of international finance to know that it can powerfully influence the course of world affairs, and even the conduct of its wars. Currently we hear much of Arab financial dominance as a result of the enormous increase in the revenues from oil; we hear currently very little of the vast financial resources of the Catholic Church, or of the strings which might be manipulated by Jewish-controlled banking houses. Evidence is not easily available to the lay person, so the possibility, say, that Jewish financial pressure and Israel's military potential might create a situation of Israeli world dominance can only be named, without evaluating its likelihood. What is certain, though, is that the downfall of "Babylon the great", spoken of here, is elaborated in great detail in chapter 18, where a nation once bereaved of its possessions comes back into its own, and thinks of itself as in possession of all riches until it is destroyed, after which the nations

mourn because the financial and commercial world has collapsed because of her fall (18.10-20). Finally, that Israel might be involved in this harlot figure is left within the bounds of possibility from the fact that the Biblical persecuter of the faithful was always primarily Israel. True, there was no apostate church in Bible times to take on the role, yet the fact that, throughout the Acts and Epistles, and in the early part of Revelation itself, the prime enemies of the gospel were found within the nation which engineered the crucifixion of the Lord, should not be treated as unimportant. We have already noted that the Two Witnesses of chapter 11 are left lying dead in the city "where also our Lord was crucified" (11.8).

18.7: How much soever she glorified herself and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning.

If one were obliged to choose in advance whether natural Israel, or apostate Christianity, best fitted all the facts of Revelation 12-17, the choice would, so it is felt here, have to fall on apostate Christianity. This is for the following reasons: (i) the persecution of the woman by the dragon in 12.6,13 appears in the first instance to be the affliction of a faithful people, who only later become apostate. But Israel was an unfaithful nation throughout the entire period at issue; (ii) the picture of Babylon the great formed from the Old Testament is that of an international system, with many nations taking their shelter beneath its shade (Daniel 4.10-12; Jeremiah 25.14), which is better represented by an international apostate Christendom than by an isolated and isolationist Israel assuming the suggested power over the nations.

But surprising things have already happened in current developments, for which students of prophecy were quite unprepared. There is no reason to think that we are at the end of the surprises. One has only to think of the possibility that there could come about some sort of rapprochement between Judaism and apostate Christianity to see that a great religious brotherhood could be in the making, which would prepare for its apparent takeover for a brief moment of power of the realm of Big Brother himself, followed quickly by its demolition by that same realm. It is wise to keep all possibilities in mind and hold our minds open to evaluate them as events unfold. We are not telling God what His revelation means. We are waiting humbly to find out.

One thing is necessary to put this subject in perspective. Whatever may prove to be the composition of the harlot-power in the events to come, she is but one — and that a temporary — aspect of the forces to be arrayed against the Lord Jesus, and as a persecuter of His saints, as the time of the Second Advent approaches. We have already seen a power called the Dragon in effective control of the rebellious operations (12.3-5); we have briefly met, and shall meet again, a Beast modelled on all the four world empires of Daniel 7; we find in chapter 17 a group of subordinate powers called "ten kings" (17.12), who associate themselves with the Beast in the destruction of the harlot and the war against the Lamb; and the Beast (in chapter 13 which we have temporarily by-passed) is aided by a second Beast arising from the earth, later to be called the False Prophet (13.11-17; 16.13; 19.20). In this vast and complex array of powers the Harlot plays a part which for one brief moment appears to be dominant, but she is gone before the Lamb takes control. There is no harlot in command when the Lord Jesus finally overcomes the Beast (19.19-21).

APOSTACY AND PERSECUTION IN NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

It may help to lay the foundation for some later discussion on the identity of the powers opposing the Lord and His followers at this late stage of the world's history, if some general points are made on the predictions in the New Testament of apostasy, which is spiritual harlotry, and on the sources and periods for the persecution of the people of God. We do this under the following heads:

1. THE APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH IS PLAINLY FORETOLD

See Acts 20.29-32; 2 Peter 2.1-22; Jude 4-16; 1 Timothy 4.1-5; 2 Timothy 3.1-9; 4.3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12, and other places. These passages, though (not all of which apply to the very last days) speak in the main of falling away from the faith only. Most of them contain no suggestion that those who fall away will persecute those who do not. The exception is 2 Thessalonians 2, which does couple the "falling away" with the uprise of a "man of sin", whose characteristics are closely paralleled in the present section of Revelation, and whose persecuting activities are at least implied in the fact that "he opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped" (2.4). The "falling away" of 2.3, actually uses the Greek original of our word 'apostasy', apostasia; even if it has to be said that the word conveys rather a different meaning from that we commonly understand as apostasy, being rather revolting or defecting than holding false

teaching (as in Acts 21.21, the only other occurrence, where Paul is accused of teaching the Jews to forsake Moses), it does imply plainly that the Man of Sin arises as a result of a defection from the true church of God. Some will depart from the faith, and as a result a Man of Sin will arise: this would appear to indicate that whoever is intended finds his historical origin in the body of the church.

2. OPPOSITION OF JEWS TO THE FAITH, FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN, IS PLAINLY FORETOLD

This is not merely a matter of prophecy. It was a living reality at the time the New Testament was written. The Letter to the Galatians was written to meet opposition to the faith by Judaizers insisting on circumcision. Acts 15 meets the same challenge in the Council at Jerusalem. The Letter to the Hebrews meets it at a different level, showing the vanity of present insistence on an outmoded Mosaic system, so defending believing Jews in Judaea against pressures to return to Temple worship. The persecution met by Paul was usually either directly from the Jews, or by Gentiles at Jewish instigation (Acts 13.44-51; 14.2-7, 19; 17.5-9, 13; 18.6, 12-17; 19.9; 21.11, 27ff). Such persecutions and afflictions are also referred to in the Epistles (1 Thessalonians 2.14-16, linked with the fulfilment of the Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 23.32; 2 Corinthians 11.24-33). It is remarkable, and a point in favour of Israeli involvement in the harlot of Revelation 17, that the shedding of the blood of the prophets in the Thessalonians passage should also be the charge against the Babylon of the Apocalypse (Revelation 18.24). There is no doubt about the strong scriptural emphasis on the persecution of the spiritual seer, of Abraham by the natural (Galatians 4.29). It is primarily Israel's changed position politically, and the fact that for long ages it has been the victim, rather than the agent, of persecution, that makes a fulfilment of this kind seem in our day unlikely. We need to ask whether, though, if the political situation were to change temporarily in Israel's favour, its attitude to the Lord Jesus and His followers would be kinder than before. And there is little to suggest that modern Jewry is as yet prepared or preparing to submit to the claims of its crucified Christ.

3. OPPOSITION BY GENTILE AUTHORITIES IS ALSO FOUND AND PREDICTED

Though the Romans were sometimes egged on against the Christians by reprobate Jews, as we have seen, there is no doubt that purely secular persecutions of the early church also occurred. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake," the Lord had said (Matthew 24.9). "Your adversary the devil" (1 Peter 5.8) was apparently Nero's Rome. Revelation itself, without

mitigating its attack on "those who say they are Jews but are not" (2.9; 3.9), also speaks of Gentile attacks on the faithful, as in Pergamon "where Satan's throne is" (2.13), and the nations of the world are plainly incriminated in the sufferings referred to in 11.9-10, 13.7-18, and elsewhere.

What we have learned from this study of the woman of chapters 12 and 17 is that there is in this Book and elsewhere in Scripture plain evidence that corruption of the faith will take place from within, that the Jewish nation is regarded as being in unrelieved opposition to the faith, and that the world as a whole will also prove hostile to the gospel. But the identification of the harlot is not as unequivocally related to the apostate church of Christendom as we might have been disposed to think. We need to keep a watchful eye both on Christendom and on Jewry in relation to the developing alignment of the nations. There are, of course, other factors in Revelation 17 when we resume its study in the proper sequence of this Book, and these may influence the way we look on the revolting apostacy there described.

THE CONTINUOUS-HISTORIC INTERPRETATION OF CHAPTER 12

In this interpretation the woman is taken to be the Christian Church, now basking in the sun of royal recognition and favour, the now-subject pagan priesthood being represented by the moon, and the twelve stars standing for the twelve Caesars between Augustus and Domitian. R.R. writes of these twelve, but in fact there were only eleven. J.T. and C.C.W. amend the list by including Nerva, successor of Domitian. But since John received the Revelation in the reign of either Domitian or Nero (depending which view one holds of its dating), and since the vision is supposed to concern a period more than 200 years later, it is hard to see why such a list should be presupposed in any case. By the time of Constantine there had been nearly 40 Caesars. The identification of the moon as the prostrate pagan priesthood is also unacceptable, for paganism still continued, and its priests were in no way under the control of the church at this time: they were simply not allowed to persecute their Christian rivals.

As for the identification of the sun as the possession of political power by the church, this might have been more reasonable were it the fact. But it is not. Persecution ceased, and bishops had certain generaljudicial powers. Christians were exempted from attending pagan festivals, and property confiscated during the persecutions under Diocletian and Licinius was restored, while in the later part of Constantine's reign many pagan festivals were suppressed. But the figure under the interpretation considered is far too strong to fit the circumstances of the Church at this time. Moreover, the woman is pictured as clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, before giving birth to Constantine (sic), when her circumstances would not have corresponded to this picture at all,

for never was the situation worse than under the terrible persecutions under Diocletian before 303.

The 280-day period of human gestation is held to represent the time from the beginning of the Christian church (32) to Con-stantine (312). But Pentecost was two or three years earlier than the former, and Constantine became Caesar in 306. By 312 only one of his rivals had been eliminated; another was swept aside in 313, and Licinius eliminated in 324. The correspondence is at best approximate, even if the chapter made any use of the period of pregnancy, which it does not.

The picture of Constantine as ruling all nations with a rod of iron is not a good one. It is true that he was sole Emperor for the last 13 years, and powerful too, but his relationship was not of the "rod of iron" type. In any case he did not rule all nations, for his eastern border extended only to Armenia and Mesopotamia, and his Empire was nothing like as extensive as Alexander's had been. He did not rule over the powerful Persian kingdom; in Africa his kingdom covered only the north coast and in Egypt, while his northern frontier was limited by the Rhine and the Danube, while Ireland and most of Scotland were not under Roman rule. To speak of Constantine as being "caught up to God and His throne" as though it meant "ordained by God" is a poor understanding of the symbolism. To interpret 12.6 as meaning the exile of the woman in the wilderness from 312 to 1572, 1260 years later, yields a beginning which is inconsistent with her glory in 12.1 at the same time, while the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day at the end is hardly a deliverance from exile.

Chapter 18 The beast from the sea (Rev. 13)

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER 13: THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

13.1: He stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and on his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like to a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a . bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority (-13.2).

Recapitulation is needed here, for we met this Beast before in 11.7 as the persecutor of the Two Witnesses. The word for beast is therion, and it is used of literal beasts in Acts 28.5; Hebrews 12.20; James 3.7; Mark 1.13; in Acts 10.12; 11.6 it is used of really existent creatures, though seen in vision; and in Titus 1.12 it is a contemptuous description of Cretan people. It is not used symbolically in the New Testament outside Revelation, while of its 38 occurrences in this Book only one (6.8) could conceivably be literal. The word is found over 100 times in LXX, quite often of literal animals, but it is also used symbolically, including numerous occasions in Daniel 7 in contexts closely related to the present chapter. The parallels between the two chapters are compelling:

Daniel

Revelation

7.2

The four winds broke forth

7.1 7.3

Four angels holding the four winds

till we have sealed the servants of God

7.2

broke forth on the great sea

13.1

He (R.V. The dragon?) stood on the sand of the sea

7.3

Four great beasts came up from the sea

13.1

A beast coming up out of the sea

7.4

The first was like a lion

13.2

His mouth as the mouth of a lion

.7.5

A second like to a bear

13.2

His feet were as the feet of a bear

7.6

Another, like a leopard

13.2

The beast was like to a leopard

7.7

A fourth beast had ten horns

13.1

Having ten horns

7.1-7.7

(A total of seven heads: 1 1

4 1)

13.1

Having seven heads

7.8

A little horn speaking great things

13.5

Speaking great things and blasphemies

7.11

The beast was slain and his body destroyed, and he was given to be burned with fire

19.20

The beast was taken and cast alive into the lake of fire

7.21

The same horn made war with the saints and prevailed against them

13.7

It was given him to make war with the saints and overcome them

7.24

Out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise

13.1

Having ten horns . . . The ten horns are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet

7.24

Another shall arise after them

and put down three kings

17.10

The other is not yet come

7.25

The saints shall be given into his hand until a time, times, and half a time

13.5

To continue forty two months

These parallels are so detailed that a common interpretation must obviously be sought. There are differences, of course: four beasts in Daniel, only one in Revelation; a horn engaged in the blasphemies in Daniel, a head in Revelation. But the Beast of Revelation has characteristics of all the beasts of Daniel, even to summing up their heads in itself, and this is plainly deliberate. It is impossible to suppose that the Spirit which inspired Daniel and the angel which guided John were not leading us to look at the two prophecies together.

The picture is vivid. The dragon has been cast from heaven to earth (12.13) and stands by the seashore awaiting the Beast (13.1). When the Beast emerges the dragon conveys its power to it, and causes it to be enthroned with great authority (13.2). It is as though it seeks to compensate for the power it has lost "in heaven" (12.10) by taking steps to pursue its evil designs on earth. While reminding ourselves that the dragon, like the other symbols of this Book, is not to be construed as a literal creature, yet the story is told with great verisimilitude, so that we can picture it as such a story before we begin to think of it as a vision. Note how well the account hangs together:

Once there was a woman in heaven about to give birth, and an evil dragon stood in front of her, intending to devour the newborn child (12.1-3). It had already done great damage in throwing down a third part of the stars (12.4), but when the baby boy was born he was snatched away from the dragon to the safety of God's throne (12.5), while the woman, too, ran away to a safe hiding place in the wilderness (12.6). The wicked dragon was beaten in a war with Michael and his angels and, with its own angels, was thrown out of heaven to the earth (12.7-9). The heavens rejoiced that the dragon had been expelled (12.10-12a), but things looked bad for the earth, for the dragon meant to continue doing evil during the short time left to it (12.12b). First it pursued the woman, but she fled out of its way to her refuge (12.13-14), and even the flood it sent after her failed to overwhelm her, because the earth itself came to her aid by swallowing up the flood (12.15-16). There were still some of her

children left, though, remaining faithful to their God and Lord, so the dragon decided to make life hard for them (12.17). What it did was to stand by the seashore and conjure up out of the sea a dreadful beast to which it gave worldwide authority (13.1-2) and also healed it when it looked as though it was wounded to death (13.3); so that the earth fell down and worshipped before the dragon, and before the beast which took over its power (13.4). From the wings of the stage the dragon still caused its voice to be heard through another beast, from the earth (13.11), and helped both beasts to gather the nations together to war against God Almighty (16.13). But its designs failed, for when the beast and the false prophet (the second beast) were beaten by the Lamb it was placed under restraint in the abyss (20.2) and not allowed out for 1000 years, at the end of which it was released, and gathered the nations together against the saints (20.7). The nations were overcome, however, by fire from heaven, and the dragon was finally removed from the scene by being destroyed in the lake of fire where its helpers, the beast and the false prophet, had been cast (20.10).

There is a purpose in telling the story in that way. It is obviously the same dragon throughout the Book from chapter 12 to chapter 20. No interpretation can be accepted which makes it mean basically different things in different parts of Revelation. Yet this is in fact what at least one version of the Continuous Historic interpretation does. The following quotations illustrate the point:

"The diadem of twelve stars (on the woman) is the symbol of the pagan Caesars. . . Constantine . . . was the woman's child — political offspring of the church . . . Another power in the east was waiting to devour (him). This power is symbolized by 'a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads'. The identification of this power with pagan Rome is not only easy, but inevitable. . . When Constantine (the sun with which the woman had just become clothed). . . The woman in the case is the Christian community . . . While the woman . . . continued in the sun-invested position in the heaven to which events had elevated her, the woman in another sense fled the position and became the object of persecution of the new and professedly Christian government . . . The Catholic sun-invested woman . . . In these verses (the war in heaven in which the dragon is defeated and expelled) we have a symbolic representation of the struggle that elevated Constantine . . . to the position of sole emperorship. It was a struggle in which the testimony for Christ . . . obtained final victory over Paganism and banished it from the system of the civilized world . . . Michael was the symbolic name of Constantine . . . Pagan imperialism was the political incorporation of the original diabolism of human nature . . . When Licinius . . . conceived hostile intentions against Constantine . . . the devil was filled with great wrath', knowing his time was short. . . After the overthrow of the pagan dragon, the actual persecutor in the case was the government of Constantine... It is staggering at first sight to find the dragon stand for paganism, and then for the Christian government of Constantine, who overthrew Paganism . . . When Constantine occupied the dragon capital — Byzantium, afterwards called Constantinople — his government became transformed into the political serpent and dragon ... A recognition of this is necessary to enable us to understand the statement that 'the dragon gave (to the beast of the sea) his power, and seat, and great authority'. It was from the emperor reigning in Constantinople that the Papacy in the west received its constitution and recognition. . . The political sequel (to the return of the Lord Jesus) is the suppression of human government and the establishment of the kingdom of God in all the earth. This is shown in the symbolism of 20.1-6. . . "He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. . . The dragon... or human nature in organized opposition to God, and here represented by the symbol of the eastern section of the Roman Empire (the dragon), because that is the part of the earth (Turkey occupied by

Russia) in which the closing opposition is offered. . . The dragon we have indisputably identified as the heraldic symbol of human opposition to God, officially incorporated in the kings and governments in which it is headed up. . ." (R.R., pages 99-109, 166, 174).

So, we are told, the sun which clothes the travailing woman is not donned until after the child is born; her child casts the dragon out of heaven and then becomes the dragon himself; the dragon is persecuting paganism and then persecuting Christendom, and then the symbol for Russian-occupied Turkey, and (having been "inevitably" identified with pagan Rome it is then "indisputably identified as the heraldic symbol of human opposition to God, officially incorporated in kings and governments in which it is headed up". This simply will not do: it is one thing to see a woman who changes her raiment and her behaviour as two different phases of the same organization, as we have tentatively done; but it is quite another to take a symbol whose appearance is given to us once and for all, and which is at beginning and end "that great serpent called the devil and Satan", and make it pass through these mutually inconsistent evolutions. The last definition of all in the quotation can be accepted but, if this is "indisputable", enormous doubt must hang over the previous identifications. The historical survey to follow will not make the interpretations given in this quotation any more acceptable.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORIC VIEW OF REVELATION 13

This view, in brief, understands the Beast of the Sea to be papal Rome in the Dark and Middle ages; the Dragon which gave the Beast its authority to be the Eastern Roman Emperors with their capital at Constantinople; the head which was fatally injured to be the Western Roman Empire which 'died' in 476; the healed head to be a revival of the old Empire in the shape of the Holy Roman Empire (800 onwards), the Beast of the Earth to be the Germanic Empire (4-936 onwards); the image of the Beast to be the Papacy; and its number to denote lateinos. The seven heads and ten horns of 13.1 are used as identification marks of the Roman ,

Empire, while the fact that the crowns are upon the horns and not the heads (by contrast with the dragon in 12.3) is said to refer to a state of affairs long after the time of Constantine, when ten kingdoms had made their appearance, said to concern the barbarian kingdoms of the Dark Ages. The names of blasphemy advert to the Papacy, and so the Beast has to do with papal times.

The barbarian kingdoms are said to be those which arose consequent on the fall of the Western Empire, and their names are given (J.T.) as the kings of the Huns, Vandals, Visigoths, Burgundians, Gepidae, Lombards, Franks, Suevi, Alans, and Bavarians, though other lists have also been suggested. The seven heads are supposed to denote seven successive systems of government in the Roman Empire, namely: (i) Regal; (ii) Consular; (iii) Dictatorial; (iv) De-cemviral; (V) Tribunitial; (vi) Imperial; (vii) Gothic kingly (C.C.W. page 34).

It seems most unlikely that John would see a Beast complete with ten horns representing barbarian kingdoms which were not a part of the Roman system until 300 or more years after his time, since such kingdoms already existed in his day, without forming part of the Roman Empire. He sees the Beast complete with horns, and there is no indication that it had ever been without them. Moreover since the same Beast has ten horns in 17.3,12, at a time shortly

before it is destroyed by the Lamb, it is necessary to give a quite different interpretation to the horns in chapter 17 from one which applies to the Dark Ages in chapter 13.

The barbarians had originated in Scandinavia, wandering approximately in two different directions, one eventually reaching the Rhine, and the more easterly group reaching the Danube and the Black Sea. From the first century B.C. they troubled the Empire, but were either conquered or repelled by such commanders as Julius Caesar, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and the great Illyrian emperors of the later third century. Towards the end of the fourth century the Huns emerged from Central Asia and, penetrating into Europe, routed those barbarians who had settled down in central and eastern Europe, pushing them into Roman Gaul, Spain, Italy, and the Balkans, finally bringing the Western Empire to an end. The menace of the Huns disappeared quickly, and the other barbarians resumed their internecine warfare. It would not seem that the ten horns were in fact constantly pushing at one another.

Identification of the Beast with papal affairs on account of its names of blasphemy — R.R., page 123 — would not have occurred to the earliest readers, who could reasonably have seen in this the blasphemous emperor-worship of their own days. "Papal times" is in any case a vague expression covering around 1 Vz millennia; nor is there much justification for thinking of these as times when the Popes exercised temporal power, for the influence of papal Rome was often extremely strong when it had little or no temporal power. The pontificate of Leo I (440-461), for example, set papal primacy on an almost impregnable basis, while Gelasius I (492-496) asserted final jurisdiction in a manner which was highly influential for centuries. In our own day Popes John XXIII and

John Paul II have greatly enhanced the reputation of their office. Moreover, papal temporal power did not, as often affirmed in seeking for a starting point for the supposed 1260 years, commence anywhere near the time of Phocas (607). It really began with the grant of certain lands in Italy by the Frankish king Pepin ("The Donations of Pepin", ca. 754-756), when for the first time the reigning Pope Stephen II was regarded as a sovereign prince. Phocas' decree merely declared Rome to be the head of all the churches, which it had been for some time in any case, and temporal power was not in question. This disposes of the idea that the papal temporal power lasted "42 months" (13.5), and there is nothing to be said for the alternative which dates the period from Justinian (535) to the virtually meaningless closing years of the 18th century. The short-lived takeover of the Papal States by Napoleon occurred a little too late, in 1808. Moreover, the temporal power of the Popes was revived in 1929 when the Lateran Treaty made Vatican City a sovereign state.

The persecution of spiritual Zion has continued down the ages, and readers of 13.1-10 in varying periods might have thought of persecution by pagan Emperors, governors and mobs; or in mediaeval times by the papal Inquisition; or at other times by various European governments including those of Britain, France, Poland, Austria, and Spain; and quite recently by Nazi Germany or the countries of the 'iron curtain'.

In 13.2,4 we are told that the dragon gave power to the Beast. Two errors are found in the curious idea that the dragon represents the Eastern Roman Empire, and the unhistorical notion that the rulers of that Empire gave the Papacy its power. The dragon of Revelation is the power of sin (12.9; 20.2) underlying kingdoms and men, and is not to be localized in this way; while the Eastern Roman Emperors were more often than not suspicious, even actively hostile, as regards the Papacy. Obsession with political events is a basic flaw in the historical system of interpretation.

It is suggested that the conflict between the hosts of Michael and of the dragon (12.7-12) represents the 11-year rivalry between Constantine and the pagan Licinius, ending with the triumph of Constantine in 324. But for nearly all this period the two men were not in conflict, for a single campaign in 314 and a few months' fighting in 324 comprized all the conflict there was, which is hardly on the scale of 12.7-8, especially since the conflict was mainly political. Constantine was a sun-worshipper until 312, when he became convinced that the God of the Christians was on his side. The edict of Milan in 313 gave freedom of worship to all Roman subjects, Christian and pagan alike. Between 320 and 323 further laws were enacted which favoured the church, but old pagan institutions were allowed to continue, and the emperor retained the heathen priestly title of Pontifex Maximus. Later in the reign of Constantine paganism was further discouraged but not persecuted. Constantine haled schism, and assisted in crushing Donatist 'heretics', and compelling the Council of Nicaea to adopt the unscriptural view that God and His Son were of one substance, thereby establishing the trinitarian teaching on a basis which has lasted to the present day. He was baptized only on his death-bed. Famous and important though he was, Constantine can hardly have been depicted by Michael and his angels; the very idea may be thought derogatory to these heavenly powers.

But because Constantine, after triumphing over Licinius, took over his seat of government at Byzantium, completing the new city of Constantinople in 330 and making it his imperial capital in 331, the view is now advanced that he and his eastern successors (all of whom with one brief exception professed Christianity) became the dragon because they occupied the same capital, ruled the same territory, and showed the same hostility to God's true people. But the same Book would hardly represent the same man as Michael and (with his successors) as the dragon, particularly since Constantine's opposition to paganism was greater rather than less from this point on.

His successor Constantius (337-361) was a strong opponent of orthodox trinitarianism, and later successors strongly opposed the worship of images and relics, and evidence of the persecution of true Christians from Constantinople is not offered in J.T.III or related works: certainly persecution was more severe, more widespread and more enduring in the West, which means that it is wrong to stress the persecuting role of Constantinople and the East.

Now the claim must be examined as to whether it was really from the Eastern Empire that the Papacy received its "constitution and recognition, or its power and seat and great authority" (R.R. page 124). The decree of Justinian is of so little import that it is not even mentioned in Gibbon, or in the long article on Justinian in E.B., 11th edition. In C.M.H.I V we find that in 535 it was decreed that "Old Rome enjoys the honour of being the mother of law, and none will doubt that she is the head of the supreme pontificate", while in 545 it is declared that "the Pope of Rome is the first of all priests, and the blessed archbishop of Constantinople is second after the holy apostolic see of Rome". Thus Justinian confirmed the primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the church, but the Emperor remained "the supreme master, the representative of God upon earth, taking care of the material and spiritual needs of his subjects; only in purely doctrinal matters did he leave the last word to the Bishop of Rome" (C.M.H. XIV, 437). But he treated the Popes, especially Vigilius, in peremptory fashion, reducing their power to a minimum. Their election was to be subject to his confirmation, for which he was to be paid a fee. "The reign of Justinian proved throughout a period of deep humiliation for the Papacy. Two Popes had suffered indignity, and Vigilius' next two successors were elected under imperial pressure, and were forced to continue the humble servants of the emperor. The church of Ravenna, the capital of reconquered Italy, was

deliberately exalted at the expense of Rome. The subjection of the patriarch of Old Rome to the emperor" seemed likely to continue as absolute as that of New Rome, and his prestige suffered during the reign far more than his colleague's. The Byzantine system of the imperial patronage and complete dominance of the church had seen its most splendid phase" (Margaret Deanesly, History of the Medieval Church, page 12).

Proceeding to the decree of the brutal ruffian Phocas (607), we must first say that the real reasons for the growth in papal authority owed little or nothing to Eastern Emperors, but are to be found in the conservatism of the Roman church in the first four centuries, the link of Peter and Paul with Rome, and the fact of its being the church of the imperial capital. The sack of Rome by the Goths in 410, the withdrawal of the Western Emperor Honorius to Ravenna, and the departure or slaughter of many leading citizens, left the Pope, at that time Innocent I (402-417) as the greatest man in the capital. Under Leo I (440-461) the primacy of Rome was finally established: it was he who provided it with a dogmatic basis which was to be upheld for centuries. He interpreted Matthew 16.18-19 to mean that Jesus bestowed supreme authority on Peter; he held Peter to have been the first bishop of Rome; he claimed that Peter's authority had been perpetuated in his successors, enhanced by a mystical presence of Peter in the Roman see; the authority of all other bishops is limited to their own dioceses, whereas the Pope possessed fulness of power over the whole church. These claims were never accepted in the East, but were readily accepted in the West in exchange for papal assistance. (Condensed from J.G.Davies, The Early Christian Church, page 250).

The sixth century saw "the gathering gloom of Byzantine tyranny over the church" (T.J.Jalland, The Church and the Papacy, page 342). The Eastern Roman Emperor Phocas did issue an edict in 607, acknowledging that Rome was the head of all the churches, but this would have afforded little satisfaction to the recently dead great Pope Gregory I (590-604) or to the then-Pope Boniface III, for in the same edict Phocas described the church of Constantinople as the first of all the churches, which simply added to the bitterness between Rome and Constantinople which had existed for some years. Gregory needed no acknowledgement of his primacy from such an Emperor, nor did his successor, for Gregory's own character, capacity, and charity increased the prestige of the papacy more than any Pope had since Leo I. Moreover, temporal power was neither sought by these Popes nor conceded by any Eastern Emperor. The relationship between Popes and Emperors was always uneasy, and sometimes stormy. Thus, when Pope Martin I (649-655) protested against the interference of Constantinople in doctrinal matters, the Emperor had him arrested and brought to Constantinople, where he was condemned as a traitor, and died in exile. Bad relations continued during the late seventh century and most of the eighth. The idea that the dragon, supposed to be Eastern Rome at Constantinople, gave the Beast, supposed to be the Roman Church, its power and authority is a myth.

The Second Best of Revelation 13

13:3: I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten to death;

and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after

the beast; and they worshipped the dragon because he gave his

authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is

like the beast, and who is able to war with him ? There was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty two months. 13.6: He opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, even them that dwell in the heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world. If any man hath an ear, let him hear. If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth; if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. 13.11:1 saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.

All the symbolic passages using the word therion, beast in Revelation, refer to the Beast of the Sea (13.1), except 13.11, where "another beast coming up out of the earth" is referred to. This latter beast we shall find occasion to equate with "the False Prophet" of 16.13; 19.20; 20.10 using the term, pseudoprophetes already familiar from Matthew 7.15; 24.11,24; Mark 13.22; Luke 6.26; 2 Peter 2.1; 1 John 4.1); and it may be useful to list the remaining passages for ready reference. They are: 13.1,2, 3, 3,3, 12, 12, 14, 14, 14, 14, 14, 17, 18; 14.9, 11; 15.2; 16.2, 10, 13; 17.3, 7, 7, 8, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17; 19.19, 20, 20; 20.4, 10 and, of course,

11.7, to which previous reference has been made. Taking all these passages together, we discover that the Beast of Revelation has the following characteristics:

1 It comes from the sea, or the abyss (13.1; 11.7; Daniel 7.3; compare Luke 8.31 and 33, where "deep" = abussos = abyss);

2 It persecutes saints (11.7; 13.7,15-17; 15.2; Daniel 7.21,25);

3 It has ten horns (13.1; 17.3; Daniel 7.7; compare Revelation 12.7 of the dragon);

4 It has seven heads (13.1; 17.3; the total of the heads in Daniel 7.4,5,6,7);

5 It has qualities of leopard, bear, and lion (13.2; Daniel 7.4, 5,6);

6 It owes its power to the dragon, "that old serpent called the devil and Satan" (13.2; 12.3, 9; 20.2);

7 It suffers a deadly sword-wound in one of its heads and is healed (13.3, 12, 14);

8 It blasphemes against God (13.5; Daniel 7.8);

9 Its blasphemies and persecutions continue for 3½ times or 42 months (13.5; 11.2,3,7; Daniel 7.25; 12.7);

10 It acquires power over all the earth (13.8,14; 17.12,13; Daniel 7.23);

11 It is served by the beast of the earth, or false prophet, which works great signs in its name (13.11-17; 16.13; 19.20; 20.10);

12 Men are required to wear its name, or its number 666, if they would be immune from severe penalties (13.17-18; 14.9,11; 15.2; 16.2);

13 Those who do receive its mark or number will be punished by God (16.2,10; 19.21);

14 It will be dominated for a time by the great harlot, and exercise the power of the ten kings (17.3-18);

15 It will wage war against the Lamb, and be overcome and cast into the lake of fire together with the false prophet (17.4; 19.19-20; 20.10);

16 It "was, and is not, and is about to come out of the abyss" (11.7; 17.8);

17 Its seven heads denote seven mountains on which the harlot sits (17.9);

18 They also denote seven kings, of which five are fallen, one existent, and the last yet to come and survive for a short period (17.10);

19 The beast itself denotes an eighth king, who will go into perdition (17.8,11);

20 The ten horns denote ten kings, not yet reigning, but about to reign under the leadership of the beast (17.12-14,18);

21 These ten horns will destroy the harlot who is seated on the beast (17.16);

22 The harlot herself is the great city which rules over the kings of the earth (17.16);

23 The Victor over the beast is the Lamb (17.14), the Word of God, Who is to rule over the nations with a rod of iron, King of kings and Lord of lords (19.11-16);

24 The harlot seated on the beast is also said to be seated on many waters, which denote "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (17.1,15).

From these complex characteristics the following points emerge clearly:

A. The activities of the Beast and its associates in these chapters

are certainly latter-day ones, because:

a. The Beast persecutes the Two Witnesses, who are concerned with preaching the gospel very shortly before the Lord's return;

b. It is consigned to perdition, or the lake of fire, as a result of its defeat by the Lamb, and immediately before the Judgement;

c. It exercises the authority of the ten kings for "one hour" (17.12).

B. Nevertheless, the Beast is firmly rooted in Bible history and Old Testament prophecy, having characteristics of all four beasts of Daniel 7.4-7, and therefore in some way reflecting the dominions of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. It embodies in itself, that is to say, the characteristics of all the world empires with which Daniel deals, and so represents the entire image of Daniel 2. For although that chapter pictures successive empires under the symbols of gold, silver, copper, and iron (2.32-33; 37-43); when the kingdom of God is set up, all these metals are said to be ground to powder together by the Stone cut out without hands (2.34-35,44). All horns and heads and crowns and beasts and metals which ever represented the rebellious powers of men will be demolished at a stroke and given to the flames.

At the time dealt with in Revelation 13, 17, and 19, then, a mammoth power will arise which will utterly dominate the earth. It will control the lives of its subjects so completely that they will bear its brand as the token of their subjection, and the very means of normal life and sustenance will be denied to those who do not accept the brand. It will persecute the servants of God who seek to bear witness to their faith and to the coming retribution of God on wicked nations. It will assume authority over hitherto independent kingdoms, and will for a time be dominated by an apostate religious system called the harlot.

This unnatural concordat between a materialist power and a traitor religion will be betrayed by the kingdoms which share power with the Beast, with the result that the religious power will be totally destroyed, but the Beast will provide itself with a substitute in the shape of the religion of the false prophet, which will work mighty signs, and enslave all men save the faithful disciples to the allegiance of the Beast. It will be this combination of evil politics and evil religion which will, guided by the overriding

force of human evil (the dragon, that old serpent called the devil and Satan), confront the Lord Jesus when He returns, and by Him be defeated and destroyed.

It is evident that this Beast closely resembles the "Man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12:

2

Thessalonians 2

Revelation

3

The falling away must come first

17.13

A harlot will be seated on the Beast

The man of sin is the son of perdition

17.11

The Beast goes into perdition

4

He exalts himself against God

13.4

The world worships the Beast

13.5

It speaks blasphemies

13.8

All that dwell on (he earth except the faithful shall worship it

13.12

The false prophet ensures that all the world shall worship the Beast

4

He sits in the temple of God claiming to be God, opposing himself to all that is called God or worshipped

13.6

It blasphemes God's name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven

7

The mystery of iniquity is already at work

17.5

The harlot is called mystery, the mother of the abominations of the earth

8

The Lord Jesus shall destroy him with the breath of His mouth, and bring him to naught by the manifestation of His coming

17.14

The Lamb shall overcome the Beast with the ten
kings

19.15

Out of this mouth proceeds a sharp sword

9

His coming is according to the working of Satan, with all powers and signs and lying wonders

13.13

He doeth great signs, that he should even make fire come down from heaven; it was given to him to give breath to the image of the Beast, that it should speak

10

With all deceit of unrighteousness in them that are perishing, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. For this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie

13.14

He deceives them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs —

13.8

Everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life

Some of the references in the Revelation column relate to the actions of the false prophet, but since these are performed on the Beast's account they are included in the characteristics of the Beast itself.

This comparison leaves no doubt that the Man of sin and the Beast refer to the same power, and since the Man of sin is evidently to arise in anticipation of the Lord's return, and to be destroyed by Him, this is yet further evidence that the significance of the Beast in Revelation concerns primarily the last days before the Lord comes back.

17.8: The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition . . . 17.11: The beast that was and is not is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven,

' A different, and in some particulars more detailed tabulation of the common characteristics in Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 11, 13 and 17 is to be found in P.W., page 66.

and he goeth into perdition.

The characteristics listed are also those of the "little horn" which arises on the head of the fourth beast in Daniel 7.24-27; and this, since it comes up last (7.8), represents a late phase in the life of this Beast, and in that respect corresponds to the same phase of the Beast of

Revelation 17.8. That is, the power referred to could at one time have been seen reigning before, but had disappeared into "the abyss", from reigning before, but had disappeared into "the abyss", from which it should revive, and come again to do its evil work before the Lord's return, when it would be consigned to perdition.

At this point the image-prophecy of Daniel 2 comes to our aid, for the fourth phase of that image, the iron empire of Rome, was to degenerate into detached kingdoms, some strong and some weak, before the entire image-structure would be destroyed by the Lord at His second advent. A world-dominion which seemed to have passed away for ever would rearise: It "was, and is not, and will emerge from the abyss".

The identity of the Beast

The characters requiring identification in the story of the Beast are the Beast itself, the Dragon which awaits it by the sea shore, the False Prophet or Beast from the earth, and the woman mounted on the Beast. We have so far identified the Woman as a system apostate from the true faith, but left unsettled whether she is apostate Jewry or apostate Christianity, or both, but with a bias to the view that if she is to be identified with one only of these, then it would have to be apostate Christianity, since the Book of Revelation is concerned primarily with this world-wide counterpart of the Israel of the Old Testament.

The Beast we have found to be a composite of all the beasts of Daniel 7, and therefore a fitting symbol for a power whose destruction will bring the total downfall of the kingdom of men, in the day when it is defeated and destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Dragon, though manifested in political powers, is to be understood much more widely, since it is "the old serpent, called the devil and Satan", and so is human sin in all its forms, operating through the powers of wicked human systems in a world which is wholly "in the evil one" (1 John 5.19.)

The Beast, then, is international and imperial, specially since the "ten kings" agree to allocate their power to it (17.12). It is this confederacy of ten kingdoms with the Beast which brings to an end the power of the harlot Woman, and which then, with the support of its own False Prophet, engages on subjugation of men

to its rule, persecuting those who will not yield, and goes on to oppose the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, and suffer final and total defeat.

17.9: Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth; and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and • when he cometh he must continue a little while.

The link between the seven mountains and Rome is universally admitted to be obvious. Yet we know already that this cannot be 'spiritual Rome', for that is the Woman and not the Beast: she and not he is "the great city which ruleth over the kings of the earth" (17.18). She and not he is Babylon (17.5; 18.2, 10, 21). If it is Rome, then, it is in a political sense, as though the prophet was being told, "Rome is the ruler of the world now; there will arise from it near the time of the end of a Power which will control the world again. It will be controlled for a while by a harlot apostate power, the Woman, but then it will break loose from her and destroy her, and for a short time rule the world alone." It is thus a political system derived from Rome, but not in any way to be identified with apostate Christianity or Judaism.

Yet the identification with a Roman system on the basis of the seven heads, interpreted to mean seven mountains, is not quite as convincing as is sometimes supposed. It is true that Rome was known as 'the seven-hilled city', with its annual national festival of the Septimontium. But it is also true that this is the only time in this Book where such a description is used, and if Rome were as constantly in mind as has jbbmetimes been suggested ("Zion versus Rome"!), we might have expected the description to be more ubiquitous. And we have met so many sevens already in this Book as betokening fulness or completeness, that its meaning may be by no means exhausted by counting the hills around physical Rome (Coleius, Viminal, Aventine, Esquiline, Quirinal, Capitoline, and Palatine). Early readers of the Book would no doubt have thought of the Rome they knew as they saw this prophecy; it is already clear that what they thought, helpful though it would be to them, will in its actual realization turn out differently from their expectations.

It has to be remembered that Jerusalem, too, was famous for its mountains, amongst which it is sung as being situated (Psalm 125.2; Isaiah 2.2). It could well be that the same ambiguity which we found in connection with the harlot Woman might arise with regard to the Beast too: why should not the Spirit use terms which would be full of meaning to contemporary readers in terms of the Roman empire as they knew it, but whose fulfilment would include a parody of the "great city" of the New Jerusalem which is yet to be? (11.8; 21.10).

The wounded head

13.3:7 saw one of its heads as though it had been wounded to death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast. . . 13.14: And (the beast from the earth) says to them that dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the beast, who hath the stroke of the sword and lived.

The wounding is evidently to occur subsequent to the giving of the Apocalypse, for it is part of the wonder in which men regard this Beast as it assumes sovereign power over the earth while recovering from this wound (13.1, 12, 14). The False Prophet, or Beast from the earth, which arises to promote the worship of the Beast, emphasizes this apparently miraculous recovery as evidence for the divinity of its master. The disaster and the recovery from it both appear, therefore, to be phenomena of late development, the time around that in which the Two Witnesses prophesy and the saints are undergoing their last persecution. Accepting this timing, this must be another occasion when we have to say: We must wait and see. We must await a time when a political power which seems destined to extinction suddenly and amazingly recovers, and in its recovery assumes dominance over the kingdom of men before it is itself destroyed in the setting up of the kingdom of God.

If it is disappointing not to be able to be more precise than this, we need to remember that the classical alternatives have little probability of their own. To say that political Rome 'died' under pagan attacks in the 5th and 6th centuries, while papal Rome restored its power in the 8-9th by crowning Charlemagne (C.C.W., page 38) is to impart an air of drama to long-drawn out events (250 years or more) which would certainly not have been felt by the people of that long period, which is quite out of keeping with the amazement, wonder and worship which characterize this passage. And in any case this kind of exposition is involved in hopeless complexity in trying to decide which of the symbols really is to be applied to the papacy, fluctuating among the Beast, its mouth, the False Prophet, and the Woman, all of which are mooted and accepted at different points within the same covers. It is, of course, no witness in favour of a view which postpones the detailed interpretation to call attention to the faults in

other opinions, but the fact that such serious faults are to be found should help is to keep our minds open and alert.

Chapters 19,20 The identity and mark of the beast

CHAPTER XIX

AN ISRAELI BEAST?

However, a bold attempt has recently been made to provide identifications for the entire set of symbols contained in chapters 11 to 19 of the Apocalypse, and though it is impossible in a short compass to expound and examine everything in Peter Watkins' "EXPLORING THE APOCALYPSE AND THE FUTURE" with the detail it deserves, it would be unseemly to pass it by.

THE VIEW STATED

A large part of this book is devoted to a detailed identification of the Beasts of Sea and Earth, the Dragon, the Woman giving birth to the Manchild, and the Woman mounted on the Beast, and the heads and horns of the Beast, and what follows is a mere summary of what is advanced.

The Beast from the sea of Chapter 13, who is the same as the Beast from the Abyss of chapters 11 and 17, arises, says P.W., from being overwhelmed in the sea of nations to a new and unexpected lease of life. This Beast has seven heads, of which five have passed, the sixth exists at the time of writing the Apocalypse, the seventh is yet to come, and the revival of one of these in the future will represent an eighth power who will control the Beast at the time when the Lord Jesus returns.

This book was published in 1980, shortly after the death of its author. He had thought long and hard as to whether he would issue such a possibly controversial work, and had only decided to publish it because his conscience led him to feel that it would be wrong not to alert true believers to the dangers which the situation as he saw it would bring before them shortly before the return of the Lord Jesus. There is so much that is good in his book, and so sadly no opportunity now to discuss with its author points of difference, that one is tempted to leave readers to form their own judgement without making comments of any kind. But long thought has made this author convinced that this, too, would be a wrong course of action, and one which Peter Watkins would not himself have asked for. The analysis we offer, therefore, will be as frank as he would have wished, and this note is inserted to assure the readers, many of whom counted Peter a dear friend and brother in the Lord, that this writer too shares that esteem. He is grateful for the rich use of Scripture by Peter even when he dissents from the conclusions drawn, and is glad of the provocation to further study which the book has provided.

The five heads must be counted from the time of the first beast of Daniel, and therefore include one for Babylon, one for Medo-Persia, and three out of the four heads which designate the Greek empire (Daniel 7.6). It is therefore from the fourth of these that the power will arise which will challenge the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in fact, we are told, Israel emerged from the power of one of the four subdivisions of Alexander's empire, that of the Seleucids of Syria, and it was Israel which opposed the Lord Jesus when He came the first time, speaking great words against this Prince of the Host (Daniel 8.11). Israel is therefore the "little horn" which sprang out of that fourth part of the Greek empire (8.9), and consistency of

symbols demands that it shall also be identified with the little horn of Daniel 7.8. If it is surprising that in Daniel 7 the horn is said to spring from the fourth beast, which is Rome, while in Daniel 8 it springs from Greece, both are true. Israel inherited its independence from the Seleucids, but its actual political power was exercised under the Romans in the time when Jesus first came.

/When Israel had put Christ to death, it quickly lost its power when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70, so that this Roman power became the seventh head of the Beast. However, and surprisingly, when the Roman empire had been broken up, and in the latter days ten kingdoms had arisen, Israel would make its appearance again, as it has so dramatically done during the past half century. This is the Beast arising from the sea, and this is the healing of the deadly wound (13.3) from which it had seemed that the nation could never recover. If Israel then arises as the eighth head in Revelation 17.11, this is to be equated with the latter-day fulfilment of the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8; and the casting down of three horns before it (Daniel 7.8) is to be the destruction of three of the ten surrounding Arab kingdoms when they try to destroy Israel. The result of this will be that Israel will be recognized by the surviving Arab kingdoms as their overlord, so that Israel will become in effect the Beast itself. As such it will raise up for itself a False Prophet, who will perhaps combine the false pretensions of Islam and of Judaism, and will represent a power which will first dethrone and destroy apostate Christianity (the harlot of Revelation 17), and then engage in persecution of the true saints of God.

It will be at this stage that the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11.3) will prophesy, primarily though not exclusively to Israel. They will have some success, and those whom they win to repentance will be those who will greet the Lord Jesus in humility when He returns (Zechariah 12.10). However, in the main their work will be unrewarded, and at the end of their appointed preaching time

the Beast, which is the power of the eighth head and the little horn, will put them to death, and cause their dead bodies (no doubt symbolically) to lie in Jerusalem (11.8). From this state they will be rescued by being taken up into the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, and He will himself come and destroy the Israeli Beast. This means that He will take away power from the unrepentant Jews, and give it to His true servants who have repented at the preaching of the Witnesses. , ' ,

The victory of the Jews over the Arabs will be so striking that unwary believers will be in danger of concluding that the Christ has appeared at this point, and so will be fatally deceived. Hence the need to warn them against this seductive teaching, and to tell them to await the time when the Lord will destroy this Beast.

The believers From among natural Israel are the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and it is they whose resurrection is pictured in Revelation 15.2-4. When the Lord Jesus has destroyed the Beast He will reign locally in Jerusalem until a power from the north (Ezekiel 38 & 39) arises, and when this is totally destroyed the kingdom of God can be set up over all the earth.

The resemblance of the Dragon of 12.3 to the Beast of 17.3 is so great that the dragon, too, represents a Jewish power opposing " God, particularly having regard to its casting down stars from heaven, which was also a characteristic of the Little Horn of Daniel 8.10, though it represents quite a different enemy when it reappears in Revelation 20.7. The identification of the ten kings with Arab nations is supported by a reference to Psalm 83, where ten nations,

most of them descended from or related to, Abraham are depicted as seeking the destruction of Israel, and being overcome.

Israel is understood in two lights, perhaps three, during this phase of her warfare. She is a disobedient people being punished by the nations. She is God's hammer whereby the nations are themselves punished for waging war against her. And she is the people who survive when the Beast has been destroyed, now as the penitent people of God inheriting His blessings in the promised land. The nations as a whole appear in the picture (at least prior to the defeat of Gog) only in so far as they support the Arab cause, perhaps to secure their supplies of oil, and are therefore involved in the Arab defeat as Israel assumes its temporary power over the nations.

Much of the background of this point of view, here briefly summarized, arises from the author's often-repeated statement that the Bible as a whole has an Israelite background, and that expositors of the Apocalypse have erred in not taking this into account in arriving at their understanding of that Book.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE 'ISRAELI BEAST'

Thoroughly though this point of view is worked out, it seems to the present writer that it suffers from notable defects:

1. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 15 do not represent exclusively Jewish saints. 1-\ ' -.--.' •- •;'.•

2. The sea from which the Beast of 13.1 arises is surely the same sea as that from which all four beasts arise in Daniel 7.2, which is a symbolic application of the Mediterranean Sea around which the empires of the Old Testament were clustered, and so is not the sea of oblivion and submergence in defeat.

3. There is confusion as to whether or not the message of the Two Witnesses is to Israel primarily, or to the nations equally. P.W. obviously favours the view that Israel is the primary target of their preaching, but, being unable to resist the message of 10.11 and 11.9, allows of their also preaching to other nations, though he quite fails to give any real significance to this.

4. Israel is given too many roles. In particular, it is hard to see how a dragon Israel could give power and authority to a Beast which, at least from the time when its eighth head arises, is also Israel.

5. Again, if Israel is in all essentials the Beast in its last phase before the Lord returns, it is hard to see that Israel survives under a different guise to be reconverted and repenting people who will greet the Lord with tears when He comes, especially since this repentant Israel is nowhere to be found in Revelation 11-19, but has to be imported from Ezekiel 37.

6. While P.W. rightly says that the term "harlot" is to be used of an apostate community and, perhaps rightly, prefers apostate Christianity for the identification of the harlot of Revelation 17, it is odd that the Beast in its eighth head phase and in all its other phases, as well as the little horns of Daniel 7 and 8, and the evil person of Daniel 11.36, should have no trace of the harlot-outlook in their behaviour as described, when that term is so common for apostate Jewry, as we have shown, in the Old Testament.

. 8. Of the nations of Psalm 83 Moab, Gebal, Ammon, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria either are not, or cannot be shown to be, descended from Abraham.

The underlying defect is, though, to be found in the basic assumption. It is entirely true that the prophets of the Old Testa-

ment concentrated on the nation of Israel and the promised Land. It is not at all true that one would expect Revelation to do the same. Here we have a Book where seven separate lampstands have replaced the seven-branched lampstand. Here nations and peoples and tongues are the dominant theme. Here the tempi of God is in heaven, not in Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem on which Revelation concentrates is in heaven, and when it comes down will enshrine the salvation of all saints from all nations, and its only temple will be God and the Lamb.

In short, the canvas of Revelation is too large for a merely Israelite significance to be given to its symbols. The "gathering of the kings of the whole world together to the war of the great day of God Almighty" (16.4) is too big a thing to be merely an incident in a conflict between Israel and the Arabs; and the subjugation of the Beast in 17.14 and 19.19 is too global and too bloody for its central event to be regarded as the humiliation and conversion of natural Israel.

It is no doubt true at the present time that every suggested solution of the problem as to what exactly will occur to Israel and the nations when the Lord returns can be confronted with apparently insurmountable objections. Anyone who attempts, as P.W. has done, to give detailed programmes in advance, may do us a service in bringing to our notice evidence so far neglected; but in his turn he may have found it necessary to offer solutions of his own, not because they are obviously right in themselves, but because certain presuppositions seem to require them. Meanwhile we remain in the position we were in, before: we must wait and see.

CHAPTER XX

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

13.16: He causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand or on their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom: He that hath • understanding, let him count the number of the Beast; for it is the number of a man: and its number is six hundred and sixty and six.

14.9: If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God ... 14.11: They have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name.

15.2:7 saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire; and them that had come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the glassy sea, having harps of God.

16.2: The first (angel) went and poured out his bowl into the earth, and it became a noisome and grievous sore on the men which had the mark of the beast, and which worshipped his image.

19.20: The Beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image.

20.4:7 saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast nor his image, and received not the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

We meet the mark of the Beast for the first time in 13.16, but it is to become a characteristic and sinister feature of its activities from now on, as the quotations above show. This mark identifies the worshippers of the Beast and its image, the devotees of its cult: and those who do not wear it go in peril of their lives. In 14.9 the opposite side of the picture is shown: those who do wear the mark will have to endure the wrath of God. In 15.2 those who refuse the mark stand in triumph in the temple of God; while in 16.2 the last series of judgements is directed primarily against those so branded, in much the same way that certain of the

plagues of Egypt fell only on the Egyptians (Exodus 9.4,26; 10.23; 11.7; 12.13). In 19.20 the wearers of the mark suffer the loss of their leaders when Beast and False Prophet are thrown in the Lake of Fire, and by implication suffer the same fate; while in 20.4 their opposite numbers receive the blessings of living and reigning for 1000 years in the kingdom of God.

This sequence of alternations: what God will do to those who bear the mark of the Beast, what the Beast will do to those who do not, and the blessings of God on the latter — should not allow us to think merely negatively of the saints as those who do not wear a certain brand. They are also distinguished as those who do bear a sign of another kind, being "sealed in their foreheads" (7.1-17; 9.4). This symbolic 144,000 declines the worship of the Beast because it is already committed to the service of God, and will emerge triumphant because it has "this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy 2.19). Only in 14.1,9 are the two groups specifically set in juxtaposition, but there is no doubt that the contrast is intended to be made: the judgements of God fall on those "which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (9.4), and on those which have the mark of the Beast as above. Men will have to choose which of the two tokens of recognition they will bear.

What the mark of the Beast is can hardly be decided. The claim that, "as this authority ('of the Papal image') was conveyed by signing the cross on the forehead or the right hand of the recipient of official favour, the cross became the subject of this symbolism as 'the mark of the beast'" (R.R., page 111) can hardly be accepted. For not only does this relate the symbol to a time long before the one we have come to see referred to here, but also it seems singularly repugnant that such an interpretation should be offered. It is true that the superstitious use of the sign of the cross as conveying some kind of security, or the wearing of emblems of the crucifix, is no part of true Christian worship. But it is also true that the Cross is a highly prized term in the New Testament for the manner of our redemption. We are bidden take up our cross and follow our Lord to a symbolic crucifixion. Our old man has been crucified with Him; they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts; Paul would glory in nothing save in the Cross of Christ his Lord, whereby the world had been crucified to

him, and he to the world (Matthew 10.28; 16.34 1 Corinthians 1.17-18; Romans 6.6; Galatians 2.10; 5.11; 6.12, 14; Ephesians 2.16; Phillippians 2.8; 3.18; Colossians 1.20; 2.14; Hebrews 6.6; 12.1). This perverse identification, with its associated fruitless argument as to whether the stauros, was or was not cruciform in shape, has done far too much damage in diverting attention from the true message of the Cross, and bringing its meaning into disrepute.

The word for 'mark' is kharagma, and is only found in the New Testament in Revelation and in connection with the Beast, except for Acts 17.29, where it refers to the graven idols of the Greeks. It is derived from the verb kharasso, to notch or engrave, but this is not found in N.T., and its single occurrence in LXX is of no assistance. All that it enables us to say, perhaps, is that it conveys some visible sign by which its recipient may be recognized. During the Second World War many people carried ration cards, without which essential foodstuffs could not legally be obtained, and identity cards which were a passport to important privileges. Passports themselves have related functions for travellers even in times of peace, it is now possible to mark the skin in a way which would be recognized by a computerized scanner, and which could easily be employed to admit, or deny admission, to stores and banks. Many people carry credit cards and cash cards which allow of deferred purchases or give access to money from cash-points. Such as these could easily be withheld from those out of official favour, or could be so programmed that they would refuse them service. The carrying of proof of party membership has already in 'iron-curtain' countries brought great hardships to those denied or refusing it. The storage of personal data in retrieval systems can (and to an unknown extent already has done this), provide instant evidence as to the credentials of private individual citizens, and there would be no difficulty whatever in extending it so as to make it produce exactly the effect here set out, "that no man might buy nor sell, save he that hath the mark" (13.17). It is plain enough what kind of thing this mark could be, and what misery its absence could inflict on the one declining to bear it.

13.18: Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred and sixty and six.

We need first some reference to the principles assumed in many calculations. In both Hebrew and Greek, numerical values are assigned to letters, as indeed in Latin too, although the last-named did not use the sequence of increasing values as one goes further down the alphabet. The essential data for indulging in this kind of calculation are provided in the Table on page 246.

Taking the figures in the Table, this would give as the numerical value: 1 30 500 100 5 4 (= 640); 50 70 100 10 6 (= 336), giving a total of 976 (using the 'final sigma' value for the last letter). We are now in a position to evaluate some of the suggestions which have been made.

One of the most popular of them all is LATEINOS, which when written in Greek characters is said to have the value 30 1 300 5 10 50 70 200 = 666, though it is hard to see the justification for avoiding the 'final sigma' value for the last letter, which would reduce the result to 472.

TABLE OF THE NUMERICAL VALUES OF LETTERS

No.

Hebrew Letter

Greek Letter

Latin Letter No.

1

X

aleph

a

alpha

i

1

2

3

beth

'ft

beta

ii

2

3

J

ghimel

y

gamma

iii

3

4

n

daleth

S

delta

iv

4

5

n

he

t

epsilon

v

5

6

i

waw (vav)

?

final sigma

vi

6

7

t

zayin

£

zeta

vii

7

8

n

cheth

•n

eta

viii

8

9

D

teth

4

theta

ix

9

10

>

yodh

i

iota

X

10

20

3

kaph

K

kappa

XX

20

30

">

lamedh

A

lambda

XXX

30

40

D

mem

M

mu

xl

40

50

J

nun

V

nu

1

50

60

D

samekh

f

xi

Ix

60

70

y

'ayin

o

omicron

Ixx

70

80

3

pe

'•

pi

Ixxx

80

90

X

tsadhe

P

(koppa)

xc

90

100 200

P T

qoph resn

v P

tr

rho sigma

c cc

100 200

300

0

shin

' T

tau

ccc

300

400

n

tau

V

upsilon

cd

400

500 600

X

frii

d

dc

500 600

700

psi

dec

700

800

<u

omega

dccc

800

900

•

(sampi)

cm

900

1000

m

1000

Starting with the confident assumption that the Beast is papal, R.R. writes (page 111):

There has been a great deal of guessing and speculating on this subject. It is a standing joke with the scorning and scoffing class, but it is a matter of wisdom for all that. The difficulty which most people have had in finding it out is due to the fact that their theology prevents

them from identifying the beast. . . Those who know the truth are burdened with no such difficulty. They see in the leading figure of Christendom ... an exact fulfilment. . . The only question is how the Apocalyptic identification of 666 can be found in him. Does any official title appertaining to him, when the letters of that title are summed up in their numerical value, yield the number in question as 'the number of his name'? It matters not if twenty other names can be made to yield the same number: it must be a name in connection with a one-man system which has wielded a compulsory authority in all the earth in centuries past. The Papal system is such a system, and there is no other system or

man of whom this can be affirmed. It is therefore a simple question of whether a system, answering in all material points to the prophecy, presents this feature of identification, that its name, numerically estimated, is equal to 666.

The answer is then given as LATEINOS, as above. It has to be said that the words quoted are both unwarranted and ungracious. In the first place, good reasons have already been given why the Beast is not a religious system: the Harlot no doubt, but the Beast, No. In the second place, who would have gathered from this quotation that the identification with LATEINOS was discussed by Irenaeus in the second century, even though he did not himself favour its acceptance? Who, moreover, would have guessed that Alford, in his Greek Testament of which the relevant volume was first issued in 1857, and the fifth edition of it in 1875, writes as follows:

Of all the hundreds of attempts which have been made in answer to the challenge, there is but one which seems to approach near enough to an adequate solution to require serious consideration. And that one is the word mentioned, though not adopted by Irenaeus, viz. Lateinos . . . This name describes the common character of the rulers of the former Pagan Roman Empire . . . and, which Irenaeus could not foresee, unites under itself the character of the later Papal Roman Empire, as revised and kept up by the agency of the false prophet the priesthood. The Latin Empire, the Latin Church, Latin Christianity, have ever been its commonly current applications; its language, civil and ecclesiastical, has even been Latin . . . There is no one word which so completely describes its character, and at the same time unites the ancient and modern attributes of the two beasts as this. Short of saying absolutely that this was the word in St. John's mind, I have the strongest persuasion that no other can be found approaching so near a complete solution.

It is true that Alford adds, in his Prolegomena to Revelation, V,32, the following:

Still less can I offer any satisfactory solution of the prophetic number of the beast (13.18). Even while I print my note in favour of the Lateinos of Irenaeus, I feel almost disposed to withdraw it. It is beyond question the best solution which has been given: but that it is not the solution I have a persuasion amounting to certainty. It must be considered merely as worthy to emerge from the thousand and one failures strewn up and down in our books, to be kept in sight till the challenge "he that hath wisdom" is satisfactorily answered.

Whichever position one adopts as to the Tightness or wrong-ness of Lateinos as the identification, there is no doubt that Alford was fully aware of the possibilities decades before R.R. was written, and some years before J.T. was published. What is more, and more regrettable, is that EHiott (H.A., III, 206ff.), who

comes in for some hard words from J.T. and whose first edition was published in 1844, writes emphatically in favour of the same solution, though in some respects he takes a wider view:

I subjoin in a Note a few other remarkable solutions of the numeral enigma, all bearing on the Papacy: and would call attention very specially to Mr. Clarice's of Hie Latirie'Basileia, which is indeed so remarkable that I cannot but think that the Divine Spirit had it also in view, as an alternative solution involving the word Latin in its more usual, though not the mystic, orthography. But the principal, and that which most clearly and simply answers to every requirement of the sacred enigma, I fully believe to be Irenaeus' solution, LATEINOS. And the total failure of every anti-Protestant solution, and of every one moreover of which the object has been to turn away the application from Popedom to some quite different enemy of Christ's cause and Church, has only served to make it the more remarkable and the more convincing. (Op. cit., 212-214).

These rather lengthy quotations are not made in order to make the solution in terms of the word Lateinos seem more probable. They are given in the hope of persuading all engaged in discussion of the Apocalypse and its interpretation (i) to play fair with the views of those whose theology they (like the present author) reject when they take them over and make them their own, rather than taking the appetizing food thrown to them and then growling menacingly at the donors; and (ii) to remember that, when these borrowed views are not accepted, no apostate desires underlie the rejection.

The interpretation here referred to for the number 666 is not the monopoly of one religious community, and it was not discovered by our own. Whether it is right or wrong can therefore be freely discussed without complaints of disloyalty to our traditions.

A number of other solutions offered to the problem, all in terms of this addition of numerical values of letters, can be mentioned, if only to show the variety which is possible:

NERON KAISAR, when assessed in Hebrew numerical equivalents, using the long consonantal waw, and samekh for s, gives 50 200 6 50 (= 306); 100 60 200 (= 360) = 666. This is the more remarkable in that, if the final n of the first word is omitted, the total becomes 616 which is the figure found in some manuscripts.

ROMANUS, when suitably transliterated into Hebrew, and ROMIYITH, as a Hebraized form with the same meaning, can both be made to yield 666.

TEITAN, which was the solution preferred by Irenaeus, not only has the desired numerical value (300 5 10 300 1 50), but denotes in mythology one of the giants who assailed the gods, and was thought to be an appropriate description for Antichrist.

VICARIVS FILII DEI (Vicar of the Son of God). The writer does not know the ultimate origin of this idea, but inserts it because it introduces a Latin ingredient into the problem. The method of calculation here is simply to ignore those letters which do not have a numerical equivalent in Latin, so that the values become 5 1 0 0 0 1 5 0 0 1 50 1 1 500 0 1 = 666.

One is not sure whether to regard the last example as the reductio ad absurdum of the whole system of interpretation. It is evident that the identifications are all in a way subjective. Those who lived in the earliest Christian times would tend to see a covert reference to their pagan Roman oppressors, which accounts for the popularity of TEITAN and NERON KAISAR in

those days. Those who lived in the ages of papal oppression would tend to favour words or phrases which, even though they could originally have been applied to pagan Rome, could also be applied to the Roman church: hence the great popularity of LATEINOS and the possible preference for HE LATINE BASILEIA.

There are many problems associated with looking at the matter in such a way, some of a general, and some of a particular character, and some of these should be mentioned:

1 The figure 666 itself appears in the Greek text of Irenaeus' comments as the three appropriate Greek letters X?X,(khi-xi-final sigma), and though it is written out in full in the earlier manuscripts, as hexakosioi hexekonta hex, it was in some later ones so abbreviated. How then could Irenaeus, or anyone else, take another word in Greek characters, Xa-miW (Lateinos), and give that final sigma the significance of a non-final one, thereby substituting the value 200 for the value 6? This seems to the present writer a far more serious objection to this word than the discussion as to whether Lateinos or Latinos is the more appropriate spelling.

2 In the quotation given on page 145 it was intimated that the papal identity of the Beast is so obvious that a corresponding word must be found bearing that significance as well as that value. But in that event why is the word needed at all, and where is the wisdom involved in finding it out? The discovery of a suitable word or words is then merely an exercise in confirming a conclusion already believed to be incontestible.

3 Sound reasons have already been given for denying to the Beast the strictly papal significance which alone would make Lateinos and its related words relevant.

4 If, as all our study so far has made increasingly likely, we are concerned with things close to the return of the Lord in Revelation 13-19, then a name which has endured, with such relevance as it might possess, for 18 centuries does not seem to fit the needs of the case at all.

If these considerations once again mean that we have to say, "Wait and see," then so be it. But there may yet be a little more to be said from a Scriptural point of view.

SCRIPTURAL PRECEDENTS FOR 666

The words expressing this number as above, occur in the Old Testament as hexakosia kai hexekontaex in 1 Kings 10.14; and as hexakosia hexekontaex in 2 Chronicles 9.13, the only difference, apart from the conjunction kai (and) in one of the cases, being due to a difference in gender. Both the passages are concerned with the number of talents of gold imported by King Solomon in a year, which might be thought to be of little relevance to our topic. This may be so, but it is the only numerical lead we have in Scripture, and when the Revelation was given to John the heavenly Revealer Himself would be perfectly aware of the fact. He would surely have foreseen that a search for a biblical interpretation of the number 666 would sooner or later lead to this passage, and so the 'coincidence' would be spotted: which makes it at least possible that He intended it to be so.

But can the two records really be linked? We would be better able to judge of this if we were able to find any other parallels between Solomon's reign and the Apocalypse; and in fact, whether significantly or not, we do. Solomon was a great international trader (1 Kings 9.26), having "ships that went to Tarshish . . . bringing gold, and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks"

(2 Chronicles 9.21). He brought also "gold from Ophir, . . . , great quantities of almug trees, and precious stones" (1 Kings 10.11-12). The terms in which this trade is described are very similar to those in which in Revelation "the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over" the fall of 'Babylon' (18.11-14), where here the merchandise includes gold and silver, precious stones (as in 1 Kings 10.11, 22), thyine wood (possibly to be identified with the almug tree (Illustrated Bible Dictionary III, 1953), ivory (2 Chronicles 9.21), cinnamon and spices (1 Kings 10.2, 10, 25; 2 Chronicles 9.9. Cinnamon is associated with Solomon in two of its three O.T. occurrences, Proverbs 7.17 and Song 4.14); wine and oil (2 Chronicles 2.10); wheat (1 Kings 5.11); cattle and sheep (1 Kings 8.65); horses and chariots (1 Kings 4.26-28; 10.25-29; 2 Chronicles 1.16-17; 9.24-28; 1 Kings 9.19, 22; 2 Chronicles 1.14; 8.6-9). Even the slaves and souls of men might be associated with the bondservants whom Solomon used to carry out his public works (1 Kings 9.21-22).

There is, however, another Old Testament parallel to this list of merchandise, found in the prophecy against Tyre in Ezekiel 27, which parallels the merchandise in Revelation in respect of ivory, linen and purple, silver, persons of men, horses, precious stones, oil, wheat, wine, sheep, spices, and gold. The parallel is made even closer in this case by the lamentation of Revelation 18.8, 15-19, which is clearly reminiscent of the mourning over Tyre predicted in Ezekiel 27.29-36; 28.19.

This by no means detaches the references in Revelation from Solomon, for the principal trading partner of Solomon in all his trading enterprises was this very Tyre of whose pride Ezekiel writes. It is even arguable that during the reign of Solomon Tyre became in effect a vassal province, prosperous primarily because of the patronage of Solomon, and given (most improperly) cities from Solomon's own dominions — which God had given to Israel! — so that Tyre's rulership over these would signify the fact that it held them from Solomon as overlord. C We must return to Revelation 13.18 and recapitulate. The number of the Beast is 666, the same as the annual import of talents of gold by Solomon, and paralleled nowhere else in Scripture. This same Beast is found in 17.3 to be carrying a Harlot on its back, and it is after the destruction of this Harlot, whose name is Babylon, that the lamentation over its fall is taken up in 18.9-19, in terms strongly reminiscent of Solomon and his vassal Tyre. It is true that Babylon is the name of the woman and her city rather than of the Beast, but it is the Beast on which she sits until she is destroyed, and she is engaged in the activities of the Beast as long as she controls it. he is, moreover, a main agent in the persecution of the saints of God which the Beast continues after her fall, and the saints are taught to look for the identifying number of the Beast from its uprise, including therefore the period when the Harlot rides it.

The suggestion is, therefore, that the Beast's power is at least partly financial, economic, and commercial; that at some stage this power is manipulated by an apostate organization, with likely links with the world churches and possible ones with Israel, both turned aside from the true ways of God. It is possible that the uprise of this monolithic tyranny controlling the world's economic life is something for which the saints should be looking. The suggestion is tentative certainly, and the manner of its outwork-

ing unknown: but to reject it utterly would be to say that the Lord Jesus asked us to look for a number, 666, whose only precedent in Scripture is nothing better than a trap for the unwary: a suggestion which must be judged unlikely.

Summarizing what has so far emerged from Revelation 13, then, we found the woman, the true Israel of God who gave birth to the Manchild Jesus Christ, flee into the Wilderness under

severe persecution when her Son had been delivered from the power of evil and had ascended to heaven. We found her accepting the help of the earth to such an extent that it was only the remnant of her seed which kept the commandments of God. These fell under the persecution of the evil power in their turn (12.1-17). The power of evil, which held the power to prevent men and women being received by God, because we are sinners and hitherto the Redeemer had not come, was cast out of that position when the Lord died and ascended (12.7-12), and amid the rejoicing of the heavenly powers the saints were granted spiritual access to God's heavenly temple (12.10-11).

We are still troubled by the fact that, though the Lord ascended so long ago, the period of His presence in heaven is described as "a short time" (12.12), but though a full explanation of this may not be apparent, it is of one piece with "shortly come to pass" in 1.1, and "the time is at hand" of 1.3, and with the general picture throughout the New Testament where the "last time" can commence in the first century (1 John 1.18). We meet the problem wherever we go, and it is not peculiar to the Book of Revelation. It would appear from this that the sojourn of the woman in the wilderness (12.6,14), described as 1260 days or time, times, and half a time, will be difficult to identify with a precise time interval, for we have seen that the historical identification with 1260 years cannot be sustained, and yet the exile of this Woman before we meet her again in 17.1 must be of long duration compared with the short and painful witness of the Two Witnesses of 11.3, during the same period, itself the same as that during which "the holy city" is trodden down (11.2).

It has more than once been pointed out that the number (if it triplicates the imperfection which is considered to be symbolized in the figure 6; and this is contrasted by the numerical value of the name JESUS, whose Greek original *Jesous*, adds up to 888 (10 8 200 70 400 200 = 888). This again, though, rests on the shaky foundation of taking a final sigma as though it were not. It is the case, of course, that Revelation is very much concerned with the conflict between the true and the false Christ, so the idea has its attractions if the method of counting could be justified.

Towards the end of the period after the power of evil has lost its influence in the heavens, it stands on the seashore (13.1) and summons forth a dreadful creature to its bidding, and we meet for the first time face to face the Beast of the Sea. We have already been told that this is the power which will persecute and slay the Witnesses (1.1.7), and when it emerges it does indeed reveal itself as the persecutor of the saints of God (13.3ff). It is the embodiment of all the four beasts of Daniel 7, the kingdom of men in its entirety, and after a period of defeat emerges marvellously to renewed power, and takes to itself a False Prophet, the Beast of the Earth (13.11-18) who proclaims a false religion and demands that all the world shall pay allegiance to its lord.

In the chapters which follow we learn that the Beast is for a while under the control of the apostate church or synagogue or both, which emerges from its wilderness sojourn in power (17.1-6), and sits, an unwelcome rider, on the back of this Beast to which all the kings of the earth have given their power (17.13), directing its persecution of the saints of God (17.6; 18.6,20). By the kingdoms which sustained her, though, she is toppled, stripped, devoured and consumed till there is nothing left of her, "utterly burned with fire" (17.16; 18.8). An apostate religion, dating back to the blood of Abel, going on to crucify its Christ, adding the affliction of the apostles to that of the prophets, and of later saints to all those, will then have "filled up the measure of its fathers" (Matthew 23.32 ; 1 Thessalonians 2.13-16; Revelation 18.20). Whether represented by apostate Jewry, or by the apostate descendants of the spiritual

seed of Abraham, or both, this Woman is guilty of turning aside from the God she once knew, and of seeking to frustrate His purpose.

When she has gone, however, the situation does not improve. The False Prophet promotes his false religion of Beast-worship (13.11-18; 16.13; 19.20), and the saints are still hard-pressed. But the time is not to be long now. The Beast is about to commit the crowning folly of waging war against the returned Christ (17.14), and in the ensuing war will be utterly destroyed with its False Prophet (19.11-21).

Into that broad canvass must now fit the events set out in chapters 14, 15, and 16.

Chapter 21 Revelation 14

CHAPTER XXI

Chapter 14: THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION

The picture here is drawn from that in Chapter 7. That chapter came at a point when the general survey of world events throughout the Christian epoch had been completed in the first Six Seals (Chapter 6), and when the clouds were gathering ominously over the world scene as the first warnings of the second coming of Jesus to the earth (6.16-17). To prepare the saints for their own tribulations, the picture of their sealing is given, that they might know in all that follows that they are remembered before the throne of God.

14.1: / saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having His name of His Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth (-14.3)

At the point we have now reached, however, the first stages of these judgements have been accomplished. In the first Six Trumpets the world has received a stern warning of worse things to come if it fails to respond to the last call to repentance. We are in the period when this offer is being made, through the witness described in 10.8-11; 11.1-13. The witness is conducted under conditions of persecution; at this stage the Beast is rampant, and to all appearances hope is gone. Reassurance is needed that the last retributions are not for the saints, and that there is triumph in sight. In fact, Chapter 14 does for the saints in anticipation of the Vials what Chapter 7 did for them in anticipation of the Trumpets.

The passage provides further confirmation of our earlier identification of the 144,000 of "the twelve tribes of Israel" with the redeemed from all nations. For they are "purchased out of the earth" (14.3), which is identical with the condition of those of whom the angels sang in 5.9, where "Thou didst purchase to God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation". This is positively not a flock of believers from natural Israel only.

The Lamb standing on mount Zion.

This is the first and only reference to Zion in the Apocalypse. Since we know that Zion is a principal part of "the city of the great King" (Psalm 2.5; 48.2; Matthew 5.35) which we await, it is natural and proper to see these words as a prophecy of the return of the Lord to reign before His saints and on their behalf. In Chapter 7 we saw the saints sealed in the perfect memory of their God. Now we see an anticipation of their reward. Yet, though Zion will literally be the place from which the Lord will reign, this present Zion, too, is "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12.22), to which the saints have already come through faith in Jesus Christ; it is "the Jerusalem which is above", which "is free, the mother of us all" (Galatians 4.26). As in the Letter to the Ephesians, the saints on earth live a double existence, sitting also spiritually at the right hand of God in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1.3; 1.19-21; 2.6). When the Lord Jesus returns to the earth, He will cause

this spiritual city to descend from God, so that we shall later read of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven" (21.2). Of all the saints, awake or asleep in Christ, it is written: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3.3-4).

It is no surprise then to find that, though the scene is on mount Zion and therefore earthly, it is also before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders (14.3), and therefore also heavenly, taking us back to the scene to which John was introduced in 4.1-10. The fact that the redeemed appear in the same scene as the living creatures and the elders, again serves to emphasize that the latter describe qualities attaching to the eternal court of God in the heavens, and are not descriptive of the saints yet to receive their reward. The vision looks forward, beyond the time reached in this chapter, for though the saints are here pictured in their future blessedness, there is work yet to be done in preaching (14.6-7); persecutions and threats yet to be resisted (14.9-11); patience to be shown, and deaths to die (14.12-13). The day of triumph is near, but the road to it will not be easy.

14.2: A voice of many waters as of a great thunder.

The voice of many waters in Revelation is the voice of the risen Christ (1.10). The voice as the sound of thunder announces God's coming judgements. The saints are hearing the voice of hope, but the thunder is for the world. The Lord is to come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ" - "when He shall come to be

glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe"; and so the message, here as in 1 Thessalonians 1.7-10, is "You who are troubled, rest with us".

The voice which I heard was of harpers, harping with their harps. 14.3: And they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders, and no-one could learn the song save the 144,000.

In 5.8 the harps were in the hands of the 24 elders: now, or at least when we reach 15.2, they are also in the hands of the saints in an anticipation of the glory shortly to come. As we observed on 5.8, the elders are not themselves the saints, for they are present separately in our picture. The instruments used at David's instance in Solomon's temple provide the pattern and the shadow for the symbols (1 Kings 10.12; 2 Chronicles 5.12; 9.11; cf. 1 Chronicles 13.8; 15.16,21,28). Everywhere in Scripture harps are turned to sounds of joy (1 Chronicles 25.1,3,5; Psalm 71.22; 92.3). When evil is triumphant they hang silent on the weeping willows until the time of deliverance comes (Psalm 137.2). (See footnote to page 257).

The elders have already been heard singing their new song (5.9), the words of which are given to us as the heavenly hosts acclaim the risen and ascended Christ and the coming blessing of those whom His death has redeemed. But no one can learn the present new song save the redeemed themselves. The psalms of the saints must of necessity be different from those of the angels: the heavenly messengers can praise God for His greatness, and His salvation brought to others, singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well-pleased" (Luke 2.14). But the saints themselves may and must thank God for His mercies to themselves. Was not Paul rehearsing such a song when, having "thanked God through Jesus Christ our Lord" for His mercies to such a wretched man, cumbered with a body of death, he composed in the Spirit the matchless doxology of Romans

8.31-39. The Song is for the redeemed alone: the angels may stand rapt and listen to it, but the unredeemed world has no part nor lot in it.

14.4: These are they which are not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

The term *parthenos*, virgin, is proper to chaste women before marriage, though it is used symbolically of the spiritual chastity which the body of saints as a whole owes to the Lord to Whom it is betrothed, in 2 Corinthians 11.2. It can have no bearing on whether or not the saints have been married in the ordinary sense of the term, for though abstinence from married life is sometimes and in some circumstances commended (1 Corinthians 7.1, 7-9; Matthew 19.12, in this latter case probably of those afflicted with an unfaithful partner, encouraging abstinence from then on), it is never required of disciples, and there is condemnation of those who "forbid to marry" (1 Timothy 4.3; cf. Hebrews 13.4). Even so, the words of the Lord Jesus and of Paul do have their relevance here: those who stand before the throne will, indeed, be those who have allowed no obstructive fleshly desires to stand between them and their service to God. The curious use of the term of the purity of male persons, though, is required by the symbolism, since those numbered as 144,000 would in symbol be men, like those numbered for war or worship in the camp of Israel or among the Levites (Numbers 1.20 ; 3.15, etc.). Obviously, the saints will consist of both men and women, but the symbolic picture of them is of a male army. There is, too, a pointed contrast with the kind of temple with which John's first-century readers would be familiar, where 'virgins' prostituted themselves to the impure worship of their gods. Instead of prostitutes installed for the licensing of idolatrous sin, we have those who have purified themselves in the blood of the Lamb, granted entry into God's temple for the purpose of innocent adoration.

These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

This is a present following of the Lord. At this stage the presence of the saints on Mount Zion is in anticipation only, and though their heads are in the spiritual clouds, they are standing and walking with their feet on the ground, following the Lamb wherever He leads them. To them all the Lord has called, "Follow Me!", and they have left all that hindered and done so. It might not be comfortable either for writer or for reader to be reminded of it, but there is no better example of the best we can do in following than the way in which Elisha accepted Elijah's rebuke in 1 Kings 19.19-21. The saints follow the Lamb now because His grace calls them, sinners, to repentance. They will follow Him then, as we learned when first their sealing as the servants of God was brought to our notice, because "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and shall guide them

For these touches I am indebted to H.A.W., pages 175,176. There are doubtless other traces of that book in these pages, unacknowledged because the source is unremembered. There are also coincidences of thinking which did not involve borrowing. But among a few notes revealing differences of interpretation, it is right and pleasurable to acknowledge indebtedness.

unto fountains of the waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7.17).

Excursus VIII: THE MEANING OF REDEMPTION

Only in 5.9 and 14.4 has A.V. rendered the Greek word *agorazo*, by "redeem". Elsewhere, some 28 times, the translation is uniformly "buy", and the Revised Version even in the present passages renders it "purchase", consistently with this. It is normally used of ordinary transactions, the buying of food, fields, pearls, or swords, and there are three such occasions in this Book (3.18; 13.17; 18.11). Three times in the Epistles, though, the meaning is the same as in 5.9 and 14.4. Thus: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23); and, sinners will arise "denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2.1). The word means nothing more subtle than buying as commonly understood (for an *agora* is a marketplace), and R.V. was right to translate consistently. There is another, more specific related word, *exagorazo*, twice used of buying back the saint from bondage to the Law of Moses (Galatians 3.13; 4.5), and twice of his duty to buy back his time from unprofitable uses (Ephesians 5.16; Colossians 4.5). There is also a word of quite different origin, *lutroo*, which really does mean 'redeem' or 'ransom', and which, together with related words is used specifically of the liberation of men from sin and death through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, in Matthew 10.28; Mark 10.45 (*lutron*); Luke 24.21; Titus 2.14; 1 Peter 1.18(*lutroo*); Luke 1.68; 2.38; Hebrews 8.12(*lutrosis*); 1 Timothy 2.6(*antilutron*); Romans 3.24; 1 Corinthians 1.30; Ephesians 1.7, 14; 4.30; Colossians 1.14; Hebrews 9.15 (*apolutrosis*). The last of these words is also used of the ultimate redemption of the body when the Lord returns (Romans 8.23), as well as, once, of the redemption from temporal suffering which men of faith rejected (Hebrews 11.35). A related noun, *lutrotes* is once used of Moses as the deliverer of God's people from Egypt (Acts 7.35).

A doctrine has been based on a literal understanding of these words which used to be widespread among the churches, and is still common among conservative evangelical groups. This is what might be called a transactional, or substitutionary doctrine of the Atonement, according to which the death of the Lord Jesus was a more-than-adequate payment accepted instead of the deaths of the sinners He came to 'redeem'. Sometimes this is expressed as though the Lord endured punishment in place of the men He redeemed: a sentence must be carried out because sin has been committed, in order to satisfy the justice of God, and this justice is considered to be satisfied when Jesus voluntarily accepts death instead of sinners. Sometimes it takes the form of supposing that a malevolent Devil has mankind in his grip since the original sin put mankind in his power; so that the Devil was then bought off by agreeing to accept the infinitely precious Person of Jesus instead of the finite souls of the rest of mankind.

Not only are both these explanations of the Atonement quite untenable in themselves; they are based on understandings of the relevant passages which will not bear examination. As to the former, there is no semblance of justice in God's accepting the punishment of a righteous Person so that sinners may escape it. "Someone has to be punished regardless" has no foundation in reason, whereas "the sinner has to be punished has". It is simply immoral to suggest that it is all one as to who is punished, so long as the one being punished had not committed crimes on His own account. The matter is not made any better if the point is stressed that God did not demand the death of the righteous Son: rather that the Son volunteered that death. Even with this it would still be the fact that God cannot be regarded as "just, and the Justifier of them that believe" (Romans 3.26) if He accepts, rather than imposes, such a condition. But there is another matter too: even if such an exchange were acceptable, it would have to be a real one. The wages of man's sin is death, and however that death is inflicted or endured, it carries with it only eternal hopelessness unless the Atonement is brought about. So the punishment is death and remaining dead (or, some would say, death and torment in hell). If an exchange were permitted, would not the price of it be that the

substitute, too, should endure the real punishment of death and remaining dead, or death and subsequent misery? The horrors of the Cross, grievous though they are, would not meet even this singular conception of justice unless the Saviour met the penalty to the full: and then there would have been no Resurrection.

The case is no better if we consider the thought of paying a ransom price to the Devil. For if there be such a Devil He must be paid in full, or justice has not been done (even if we waive the issue as to how the Devil came to be in control of human souls in the first place — a formidable problem in itself). And there is no payment if, in exchange for his unholy compact, the Devil is allowed to work his will on an innocent if willing Victim only to the extent of accomplishing His death, then to see Him escape his grasp because "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16.10; Acts 2.24-31). Well might one of the schoolmen, accepting this extraordinary view of the means of our redemption, have described the Cross as "a mousetrap for the Devil, bated with the blood of Christ": but what kind of God would He be Who would spring such a trap, and what kind of a Devil would he be who, for all his cunning, allowed himself to be taken by such a cheat?

In the variant of this view preferred by the 'Jehovah's Witnesses' the situation degenerates into the near-comical, which with such a solemn subject as this is deeply to be regretted. For the strange theology of that community tells us that Jesus Christ did not rise in a real body, because His body had been offered in a substitutionary sacrifice, to the Devil, and therefore could not be assumed again at the 'resurrection'. If one has given his body as the price of redemption one cannot take it again! The puerile mathematics of this, apparently, does not stop to contemplate what the Devil would want with a body, even that of the Son of God, which would encourage him to agree to the transaction. This is the more so since this community rightly rejects the idea of an immortal soul over whose fate the Devil could preside.

So much for the mere logic of the matter. In the passages themselves it is clear that no such purchase could be intended. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law" (Galatians 3.13): but you cannot buy anything from a curse, or a law either, and this is the nearest the Scriptures get to naming a possible vendor. People are bought back to God, but only from the impersonal Law, or sin (Titus 2.14), or from ourselves, for "ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23). Evil men "deny the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2.1), but there is no answer to the meaningless question, "bought them from whom or what?" And though the Scripture affirms beyond doubt that the price paid for this redemption was "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and blemish" (1 Peter 1.19), it is impossible to see the actual blood of Christ as meaningful currency in a real purchase or sale.

These passages are plainly intended to tell us that our race is in helpless bondage to sin and death, a state which cannot be remedied by any action of ours. Only by the laying down of the life of the Lord Jesus could our liberation be brought about. The Lord therefore, in our modern idiom, "paid a high price" for our redemption, and the outworking of our salvation cost His Father dear: but it is a meaningless question to ask to whom the ransom was paid. We are to be "bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ", more precious than "corruptible things such as silver and/gold" (1 Peter 1.18-19): but no one took payment of the blood. We are to be redeemed from the slavery to our sins and to death, but there is no-one to whom the ransom is paid. Sin is robbed of its prey, and, for the Lord first and then for His disciples at His coming, the outcome of the death of the Lord is to "bring to naught him that

hath the power of death,; that is the devil" (Hebrews 2.14). There is a rich variety of figures under which the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in saving sinners is represented. We are washed with His blood; our garments have been made white in His blood; we have received "the blood of sprinkling"; He carried our sins in His body up to the tree. But none of these metaphors can be construed literally without making them both false and ridiculous. It is the same with our phrase here, "redeemed out of the earth, redeemed from among men".

First fruits to God and to the Lamb.

Firstfruits are the foretaste of the full harvest. In one sense the Lord Jesus Himself is the firstfruit (1 Corinthians 15.23), in relation to the harvest to be reaped when the dead are raised at His second coming. But in James 1.18 it is the saints as a whole who "are a kind of firstfruits of His creatures". In Romans 8.23 those who witnessed the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were said, as its earliest recipients, to have-"the firstfruits of the Spirit"; in Romans 11.16, since the admission of the Gentiles into the faith of Abraham through belief in Jesus is under discussion, perhaps the Lord is firstfruit again, this time of the work of salvation as a whole. In Romans 16.15 the earliest converts in Corinth are described as the "firstfruits of Achaia". Here, having regard to the wide scope of Revelation, which takes us forward to the end of all sin and death, and the resurrection at the end of the Millen-

nium also, the firstfruits here referred to must be the first group to be raised, shortly after the return of the Lord, in contrast to the great harvest at the end (Revelation 20.11-15).

That the redeemed are Firstfruits "to God and to the Lamb" couples together most beautifully the parts played by the Father as Creator, and by the Son as Redeemer. The design is from the Father, but the One through Whom the design is accomplished is the Son, whose dying is the sowing of the seed from which the harvest will follow (John 12.24). The Father is the Creator of all, but the new Creation is brought into being through the Son (Colossians 1.15,18). And so it will truly be, when the Lord returns, that "when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53.10).

14.5: In their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish.

The association of blameless speech with faultless life in Scripture is remarkable. It is written of Jesus Himself that "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2.22), and the same Lord who inspired both writers must have intended the close parallel to be drawn. In his counsel about taming the tongue, James assures us that "if any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (3.2). The Lord Jesus makes the connection quite precise when He says, "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12.34), and goes on to warn His hearers, who at that very time were showing their true nature by slanderous Him, and the Holy Spirit by which He did His mighty works, that, "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (12.36-37).

Of course a man does not make himself righteous by putting a guard on his lips, and the Lord is not saying this; but an evil man will be unable to restrain the corrupt speech which is impatient to emerge and betray him, when his guard is down and his heart discloses its contents. That is why the Lord speaks about the 'idle word, meaning not so much that every

lighthearted utterance will be stored up against us, as that every uncensored word is a true indication of the kind of people we are, inside. It cuts both ways, of course, and the good man will find that his unguarded moments will disclose his true nature also, and therefore in the day of judgement the uncalculated words will be better witness before God and men as to what kind of people we really are than all the fine speeches we might like to prepare. The simple mind, and the single eye, will take every disciple nearer to hearing his Lord say one day words like those which He spoke to Nicodemus: "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile!" (John 1.47).

14.6: / saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people: and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give Him glory; for the hour of His judgement is come: and worship Him that made the heaven, and the earth and sea, and the fountains of water (-14.7).

The fact that this preaching of the gospel occupies an intermediate position between the Trumpets and the Vials has already been set out in detail (pages 149-159). After God has inflicted His severe but partial judgements on earth, sea, rivers and fountains, and heavenly bodies (8.1-12), He causes His message of repentance to be proclaimed to all the earth (10.1; 11.3,6; 14.6-7), by heeding which men might avert, or at least escape, the final judgements about to be poured out (16.1, 3, 4, 8). Only by putting the heavens first does 14.7 differ from the order in both Trumpets and Vials, and the reason for the change is evidently to relate the titles given to God to His work of Creation, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1.1). A glance back at the pages cited will show convincingly that the world is being told; "God has shown that He has power to determine what shall happen in earth, seas, rivers, and skies. He has the right to do so because He is their Creator. Now repent lest He should once again visit earth, seas, rivers, and skies, with a visita-tinn which no earth-dweller will be able to escape". In the light of this it is quite unthinkable that this preaching should be deferred to the Kingdom age. For in the heart of the message is "The hour of His judgement is come" (14.7), and the sequence of events is made very clear in the messages of the three angels:

14.6: / saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim (to all peoples).

14.8: Another, a second agnel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. . .

14.9: Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast and his image . . . he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God,

The first angel is charged with preaching the eternal gospel; the second warns that Babylon is about to fall (which will be described in detail in chapters 17 and 18); and the third warns against receiving the sign of allegiance to the Beast. It is quite impossible to imagine this message being given when the Beast has already been overcome and cast into the Lake of Fire (19.20). There is still, at this point, the opportunity of decision for or against the gospel, and the saints who do so, or have already done so, can maintain their patience and faith (14.12) until that victory is achieved.

14.8: Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, which hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornications.

That the fall of this Babylon is future but imminent is made yet plainer by the terms in which this Babylon is referred to. For this "wine of the wrath of her fornication" is repeated again in 17.2,4; 18.3 in the same context; and, moreover, the hour of God's judgement of 14.7 clearly anticipates the words of 18.10, "in one hour is thy judgement come", spoken as it is again to the same Babylon. We have already learned in detail about the pending uprising of the Beast and his image which are to enslave all nations. Now, evidently before it comes about, or at least before it is consummated, this design of the Beast is disclosed to the saints, who are warned not to be deceived when that time does come. It is the events of chapter 13 concerning the Beast and his image (13.1, 4, 14), the mark in hand and forehead of its devotees (13.16), which are brought before us to help us picture the situation when the Vials are poured out.

14.9: If any man worshippeth the beast or his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of His anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (-14.12).

There is a strange contrast between the way in which the words, "they have no rest day and night" are used here, and that in which they appear in 4.8, in relation to the praises sung to God by the four living creatures. Apart from a slight difference in order, the phrase is the same in Greek also: so the living creatures praise God as endlessly as those are tormented who wear the mark of the Beast. God is constantly worshipped with the praises of His heavenly host: and those who rebel against Him are as eternally excluded from His presence. While on good scriptural grounds we cannot accept the idea that any human being will have his mortality swallowed up of an endless life which will be spent in eternal conscious torment, yet it remains true that the last conscious experience of those so rejected will be of "weeping and gnashing of teeth", and that this will be the experience with which they will pass into the shame of eternal oblivion.

The reference to the patience of the saints is an unmistakeable allusion, once again, to the Olivet Prophecy, for is not this, in the context of their suffering for their faith, to be equated with the words, "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake. And not an hair of your heads shall perish. In your patience ye shall win your souls" (Luke 21.17-19). Even the word 'souls' in such a setting takes us back to the fellow-servants of the souls under the altar (Revelation 6.9-11) who are to be slain for the Lord, and will stand to be blessed by Him when He returns (20.4).

14.13: / heard a voice from heaven, saying, Write: blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them.

Is it not absolutely plain from the juxtaposition of 14.13 with 14.12 that a stark alternative is presented here? Either one will accept the mark of the Beast, and incur in consequence the irrevocable wrath of God, or one refuses this allegiance and, though assured of God's ultimate blessing, suffers the vengeance of the Beast, and "dies in the Lord", then to rest in anticipation of the blessing now assured. These will have died, "refusing to accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11.35). There could

hardly be a plainer picture of persecution to come than this. These represent the second group of martyrs considered under the Fifth Seal (6.11).

14.14:1 saw, and behold a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like to a son of man, having on his head a

golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. Another angel came from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud. Send forth thy sickle and reap, for the hour to reap is come: for the harvest of the earth is over-ripe (-14.15).

This is again part of the setting of the scene for the detailed judgements to be described under the Vials in chapter 16. The theme of reaping has been met before in the New Testament, though there primarily of the harvest of the gospel, whether of good grain (Mark 4.29), or of good mingled with tares (Matthew 13.24-30, 41-43). Here, though, we are dealing with the cutting down of the wickedness of the world, to be consigned to its destruction.

This reaper with the golden Stephanas is a herald of the afflictions to be revealed under the Vials. His activities are mirrored on those described in Joel 3.12, "There (in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which means "Jehovah will judge"), will I sit to judge all the nations round about. Put ye in the sickle for the harvest is ripe", and the passage in Joel, like our present one (14.19) goes on to speak of the treading of the world's winepress. The Lord Jesus Himself is pictured as treading "the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" in Revelation 19.15, a passage which is again rooted in the Old Testament in Isaiah 63.1-5. At the present stage, though, the judgements are not the ultimate ones of the actual conquest of the Beast: the plagues to come under the Vials are the portents rather than the final event until the Sixth Vial is reached. The one "like to a son of man", or The Son of Man, and wearing the crown of victory, evidently acts for the Lord Jesus and mediates His presence in what he does.

There is a multiplicity of angels in this chapter, and it is not easy to disentangle their various functions. It might be helpful to set them all out in sequence:

1 14.6: / saw another angel flying in mid-heaven having an eternal gospel.

2 14.8: Another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon.

3. 14.9: Another angel, a third, followed him, saying. . . if any man worshippeth the beast. . .

4 14.14: (The one like a son of man on a cloud.)

5 14.15: Another angel came out from the temple, crying . . . Send forth thy sickle and reap.

6 14.17: Another angel came out from the temple, he also having a sharp sickle.

14.18: And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle . . . That makes six angels specifically so called. If the one like a son of man is also to be called an angel there are seven; in which event it is tempting to identify them with "the seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last" of 15.1. This is made more likely by the fact that one of the present group is "he that hath power over fire" (14.18), which seems to refer to the

angel of the Fourth Vial in 16.8, "and it was given to him to scorch men with fire". Since we should always try to picture what John actually saw in his vision, it looks as though what happened was that John saw a succession of angels assembling themselves. The first flies in with the message that the gospel is to be preached for the last time; the second follows him (also flying in mid-heaven?), and announces the pending doom of Babylon; then a third arrives with the warning against becoming compromised with the activities of the Beast; then a fourth, the one like a son of man, with the promise that the wicked world is about to be reaped; then the fifth, encouraging

the fourth to start his work; then a sixth to support him, and a seventh to urge him into action. All these fly in and assemble before the throne of God, the one on the cloud with the crown in the centre, and to each of them is given by "one of the living creatures" his vial to pour out on the earth (15.7).

If the scene is actually pictured like this, then the need to assign particular tasks to each angel in chapter 14 falls away. The angels are assembling to get ready for work yet to be done, and going through motions suggestive of what will happen as they do so. The actual doing of it is quickly to follow, but this is an interlude scene.

14.16: He that sat on the cloud cast his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. 14.17: And another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 14.18: And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over the fire, and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 14.19: And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress of the wrath

It is very difficult to accept the view introduced by H.A.W. on pages 50-53, and elaborated on pages 177-183 that the six angels specifically so named in this chapter, and the great voice of 16.1, represent one by one the Seven Thunders of 10.4, which John was commanded at that time not to write, (i) It is very unlikely that "write them not" would mean, "because they are going to be written later in your Book"; (ii) it would be the first and only time in the Apocalypse that the voice of action did not correspond to the events themselves; (iii) a plain fact is that the angels of 14.6,7 correspond to the same event; (iv) because the attractive 4 3 structure discovered by H.A.W. in the Seven Letters (perhaps), Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, Seven 'Dramatis Personae' of chapter 12 (perhaps), and Seven Vials, each terminating in a doxology, is not really followed with regard to the 4 3 structure, since 14.13 hardly qualifies as an 'interlude' (there is not really one with the Seven Letters either). In chapters 14 and 15 the whole scene is an interlude between the Trumpets and the Vials, -the Vials, as the Trumpets did for the Seventh Seal, fulfilling in detail the contents of their parent Seventh Trumpet. The thunders of 10.5 are embodied within the Sixth Trumpet, which represents no parallel with the other septets.

14.20: And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

The only other occasion when the word *drepanon*, sickle, is found in the New Testament is Mark 4.9, where the harvest which is reaped is a grain-harvest, the fruits to the kingdom of God of the seed sown by the Son of man. That harvest is of joy and blessing, and concerns the gathering of the saints to meet the Lord at His return. But it is not of that kind of harvest

that we read here, nor yet of that kind of fruit. What this reaping yields is dried-up grain for the burning, and grapes for the treading, yielding blood as their wine. Apart from the Parable of the Husbandmen (Matthew 21.33) this word for winepress (*lenas*) only occurs in this chapter and in 19.15. There is something incongruous, though, about the use of a sickle for harvesting grapes. It is a reaper's tool, which might be used for pruning vines but not normally for cutting grapes, and certainly the idea of casting the sickle, rather than wielding it by hand, runs contrary to both. The use of the term 'reap' in 14.15 is appropriate to the harvesting of grain, which is what we should have supposed to be meant were we left with that passage alone. And it may be because the horizontal movement of the sickle in reaping that the first sickle is cast 'upon' the earth. When, however, we come to 14.18 the grapes are harvested by 'thrusting in' the sickle, which is cast 'into' the earth (14.19), so that from within the plantation the clusters can be cut and sent to the winepress. This combination of the functions of grain-harvesting and grape-gathering might well account for the presence of the two beings with their sickles in the chapter; it is the comprehensiveness of the judgements brought out by the two which makes this double image so appropriate.

Not only are reapers and grape-cutters blended together, but so are grape-treaders and horsemen, for "there came out blood from the winepress to the horses' bridles" (14.20). Of course the idea might only be to indicate the depth of this dreadful symbolic stream, which, for a horse of sixteen hands would be about 5½ feet or 1.7 metres: a stream of blood as high as a man and two hundred miles long! But the blend of reaping with the waging of war is also intended, and prepares us suitably for 19.13,15.

The furlong, or stadion, was "600 feet, or one eighth of a Roman mile" (Vine), and since the latter was near enough to the English mile, the figure of 200 miles or 320 kilometres is a close approximation. There is no obvious scriptural parallel to this distance, though it is interesting that it represents about as far as the eye can see if, on a perfectly clear day, one were to look around with the keenest eyesight from the highest spot on the

earth. But there seems to be an intended contrast, too, between this tremendous river or sea of death, and the river of the water of life to be met in 22.1, and its origins in the river from the Temple in Ezekiel 47.1-7. There, when Ezekiel had travelled 4000 cubits, the river had become too deep to wade, and would have needed a swimmer to cross it. That would have been a mere 1½ miles or 2 kilometres, so that the scale of the figure in Revelation dwarfs the measurements in Ezekiel. The terrifying scale of the events it depicts becomes apparent beyond evasion.

There is very little probability in the idea that, since 1600 is the square of 40, we can take this 40 as a unit of time, and so regard the events here described as predicted to occupy 40 years. One does not take square roots of distances to get any sort of recognizable concept, and a "root-furlong-for-a-year principle" would be too much!

These figures are much smaller than the dimension of the New Jerusalem given to John in Revelation 21, where length, breadth, and height are 12,000 furlongs or 1500 miles (2400 kilometres). Such a city, if literal, could not have been seen in its entirety after reaching the earth, even if the world's highest mountain were placed in the middle of it, and the prophet on the top of that mountain. A mountain 70 miles high would be needed. The obviously symbolic nature of this revelation is placed beyond doubt by this fact, and may help to throw light on the meaning of Ezekiel's own high mountain (40.2), as well as that on which the Lord

was tempted (Matthew 4.7). A more precise estimate of the Roman furlong is considered in connection with 21.16.

R.R. refers to this possibility rather gingerly on page 124.

Chapters 22,23 Revelation 15 and 16

CHAPTER XXII

Chapter 15: NO ESCAPE

We have already seen the appropriateness of the sequence SEALS — TRUMPETS — VIALS. The first describes in leisurely fashion the disclosure of the purpose of God as a whole from John's day, leading to the trumpets, blown concerning events shortly and suddenly to come to pass; and the last speaks of the outpouring of God's judgements as a prelude to the establishment of His own kingdom. It is to the last of these that chapter 15 forms the curtain raiser.

15.1: / saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God. 15.2: And I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire; and them that had come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the glassy sea, having harps of God.

The saints are now pictured in their unassailable security of salvation. It would seem that they have now been caught away from the scene of the world's tribulations, for in this picture they have already gotten the victory over the Beast and his image: that is, they have refused to bear his mark, have endured whatever sufferings this might have brought upon them, and have been accepted and glorified. Only in symbol do we know where they are, and that is "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" (15.5).

The saints are pictured on a glassy sea mingled with fire, suitably reminding us, of the Refiner's fire which purifies those whom God receives (Malachi 3.2-3), as well as of the fire which shall then destroy the wicked (4.1).

It is with very different eyes that righteous and the wicked behold the fire of God. For "the sinners in Zion", and elsewhere, such fire is only to be feared (Isaiah 33.14), for nothing but destruction is in store for those to whom a rejected Lord must come in flaming fire taking vengeance. But to the saints, even though it will not be pleasant to be reminded of the wood, hay, and stubble which have been thoughtlessly or carelessly incorporated in their building on the only acceptable foundation, Jesus Christ, the purgation of that day will issue in their salvation, "so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3.11-15). When they are finally accepted before their Lord, the trials of the last purification will be forgotten as the 'devouring fire' becomes the divine glory to him "that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; that despiseth the

gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking on evil. He shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall behold the King in His beauty; they shall behold a far-stretched land" (Isaiah 33.15-17).

Now, "having the harps of God", the saints themselves join in those praises of God which have hitherto been the prerogative of the heavenly host (5.8; 14.2). The symbolic heavenly temple resounds with such music as eclipses that provided by David's divinely approved

system of worship in Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles 13.8; 15.16-28; 2 Chronicles 5.12; Psalm 147.7, etc.)

15.3: They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty, righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages.

The first Song of Moses celebrated the victory over the Egyptians (Exodus 15.1-18, 21). If there is one thing more than any other which stands out from this, it is that the victory is attributed wholly to God, without Whom Israel would have been utterly helpless. "Thou in Thy mercy hast led the people which Thou hast redeemed", and, "Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy habitation" (Exodus 15.13) could hardly be more appropriate. Israel was, and the new Israel is, "The people Thou hast purchased", which "Thou shalt bring in, and plant in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, the sanctuary which Thy hands have established"; words which truly describe the indebtedness to God of those who join the Lamb on Mount Zion. The other Song of Moses tells in other language, and on a wider canvas, the same story, with yet more telling references to His mercy in the face of the people's sin (Deuteronomy 33.5-28).

As for "the Song of the Lamb", this must be the "new song" of 5.9, celebrating the accomplishment of the work of redemption by the Lamb of God, perhaps supplemented by the choruses of 5.12, 13, the doxology of 7.12, and the celebration of 7.13-17. Some of these are sung as anthems in the congregations of the saints in our own day: how much more appropriately when their triumph has been fully achieved?

15.4: Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy: for all the nations shall come and worship before Thee: for Thy righteous acts have been made manifest.

Of course, the remaining words of this verse also represent a song, though, almost surprisingly, they are not addressed to the Lamb Himself, but to His Father. This is appropriate all the same: "fear God and give glory to Him" has been urged in vain on the nations; it has been denied to Him throughout the ages of which He is King. The Lord Jesus came to see to it that, in the end, "Thy will be done" should be achieved (Matthew 6.10), and it will be His own great joy to celebrate the final achievement at the very end, when "the Son shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15.30).

15.5: After these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed in linen pure and bright, and girt about their breasts with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and none was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished (-15.8).

Never was there a sharper division drawn between the true worshipers of God and the slaves of the Beast than in this place. The heavenly sanctuary is a symbol of the refuge of all the saints in all their walks of life: their names are in God's keeping; those who have died are remembered beneath His altar (6.9); while they live they have access with boldness before

the throne of grace, finding mercy and grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4.14-16). There sits their great High Priest, ever living and making intercession for them (Romans 8.35). But now, it may be, the distinction could be physical also. At some point, we know, the saints are removed to meet their Lord. Whether this is so at this point, is not a matter on which we can be quite certain, for as late as the Sixth Vial (16.15), when the world is gathered to battle, the exhortation to be watchful and hold fast is still being given. In that event the saints are being given the assurance that the plagues shall not smite their dwellings. As the prophet wrote, "Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to judge the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (Isaiah 26.20-21). Some of the events of the vials are further elaborated in 17.1-18,24 and the following chapter, where the saints are bidden concerning 'Babylon', "Come forth, My people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (18.4). But whether the saints

are absent from the scene, or present as these judgements are poured out, they are plainly told that they have nothing to fear from them.

These judgements will fall only on "the men which had the mark of the Beast, and which worshipped his image" (16.2), on those to whom "the Lord has given blood to drink, for they are worthy" (16.6); who "repented not to give Him glory" (16.9); upon "the throne of the Beast" (16.10); upon the nations "gathered together to the great war of God Almighty" (16.14); and upon "great Babylon, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (16.19).

The saints' immunity at this stage from the visitations of God is not incompatible with their being still on the scene, and still suffering the displeasure of the Beast. Israel was, no doubt, still persecuted in Egypt even during those plagues which afflicted the Egyptians alone: man would continue to hurt them even though God showed them favour (Exodus 8.22; 9.4-6, 26; 10.23; 12.21-30). What measure of protection God will give we do not know, but it would be foolish to build one's hopes on what He has not promised.

If, as seems possible, the pouring out of the Vials is immediately preceded by signs in which the servants of God participate (11.3-6), then this very fact may make life at the hands of the earthly authorities harder for them during this period. The essential thing for us all to remember is that the Lord knoweth them that are His (2 Timothy 2.19), and that, if His strength is sought, they will not be tested above that they are able to bear, but will be provided with a way to escape capitulation and to prevail (1 Corinthians 10.12-13).

But the day of effective repentance for the world is at this stage past. No-one who is not already repentant can be admitted into the temple of the living God. The "temple is filled with smoke" (Exodus 40.34; Isaiah 6.4), and no unauthorized person can now gain admittance.

CHAPTER XXIII

Chapter 16: THE POURING OUT OF THE VIALS

It is perhaps of no particular importance, but the word rendered "vials" in A.V. is practically transliterated, for it's the Greek phial?, and it only occurs in the New Testament in this Book

[5.8 ("full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints", in the hands of the living creatures and the elders); and, all concerned with the judgements described in this chapter, in 15.7; 16.1,2,3,4,8,10,12,17; 17.1; 21.9]. The same word occurs more than 30 times in the Old Testament (Exodus 27.3; 38.23; Numbers 4.14; 15 times in Numbers 7; 1 Kings 7.26, 31, 36; 2 Kings 12.13; 25.14, 15; 1 Chronicles 28.17; 2 Chronicles 4.8,21; Nehemiah 7.70; Proverbs 23.31; Song of Solomon 5.13; 6.1; Jeremiah 52.18; Zechariah 9.15; 14.20). The ritual use of the term is predominant, and the translation 'bowl' or 'basin' typical. Only in Proverbs and Song does the word have any secular significance; and nowhere is it used in anything like the way we find it here. Vine lists the word under 'bowl' and says that this is what it means, its shape denoting the ease and rapidity with which its contents could be poured out; while the small Liddell and Scott describes it as "a flat shallow cup or bowl, especially a drinking bowl, or bowl for libations; also a funeral vase or urn". If the word 'vial' is retained here, it is of human weakness because of the euphony of the word, and because, since it represents in this Book something unique and terrible, it seems not amiss to let it keep this special term of its own.

16.1: / heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Goye, and pour out the seven vials of the wrath of God into the earth.

There is a grimly dramatic air about this command. The long delay in the apparently sluggish movement of human history towards its divine climax has been brought to an end some little time before this, when the Sixth Trumpet announced to us that "there shall be time no longer" (10.6); and, with the end of the breathing space provided by the preaching that should follow, the remainder alone of that promise remains to be fulfilled: "In the days of the seventh angel, then is fulfilled the mystery of God" (10.7). These events of the Seventh Vial are all comprehended within the period of the Seventh Trumpet; and the curt "Go ye and pour out the seven vials!" is as abrupt as a military command: "Charge! and get the wretched business over!" is the dramatic

impact of this instruction. Nowhere else in the Book is this urgency found. The Lamb remained seated on His throne as He opened the Seals; the angels sounded their alarms, indeed, but took their time, "preparing themselves to sound" (8.6), as it were. But now the divine edict goes forth: "Pour them out!".

16.2: The first went, and poured out his vial into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast, and worshipped his image. 16.3: The second angel poured out his vial into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, even the things that were in the sea. 16.4: The third poured out his vial into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and there came blood. . . 16.8: And the fourth angel poured out his vial on the sun. . . 16.10: The fifth poured out his vial on the throne of the beast, . . . 16.12: The sixth poured out his vial on the great river, the river Euphrates;. . . 16.17: The seventh poured out his vial upon the air ...

The comparison of these Vials with the Seven Trumpets has already been tabulated (pages 149-150). Now what was then provisional is made final. Then the four spheres of operation were injured; but now they are destroyed. The direct intervention of God in the Trumpets is continued and extended. It is, indeed, made even more direct. Then trumpets were blown, and events occurred. Now God's angels actually pour out the plagues, so to say, with their own hands. As to interpretations of these signs, though, the uncertainty which we had to acknowledge in connection with the still-future events of the Trumpets is yet more a factor

here. It is almost like trying to predict before they occurred what form the plagues of Egypt would take.

We should remind ourselves at this point, though, of the close and purposeful parallels between the Trumpets and the Vials tabulated already. The activities referred to here cover the same areas, but with comprehensive force. Yet they are more focalized: the wrath poured out on the earth affects particularly those who bear the mark of the Beast (16.2); that on the rivers wreaks vengeance on those who have persecuted the saints (16.6); it is the kingdom of the Beast which is singled out for attack in the Fifth Vial (16.10). But beyond pointing to the certainty that when these signs appear they will be recognized by the saints as directed against the antichristian power which will then be rampant in the earth, we can only watch the events as they unfold, and then fill in the gaps in our knowledge. When the saints see the Beast revealed in all its terrible power, then they will be in a better position to see where it must be attacked by their God and His angels.

It is important, in view of the inevitable incompleteness of the

exposition, specially at this point, that the major alternative exposition should be examined particularly critically, since otherwise its apparent completeness where we have offered only tentative solutions might be deceptively attractive. We turn then to:

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORIC VIEW OF THE VIALS OF REVELATION 16

The first five Vials have been supposed to symbolize certain events in Europe just prior to the rise of Napoleon (regarded as a type of Christ in his judicial capacity), and certain features of the . Napoleonic Wars up to 1814. The Sixth Vial is then held to represent the decline of the Turkish Empire from 1820 to 1918. Some readers may remember the attractive maps, with the Turkish Empire represented by coloured sections, which could be removed one by one to show the "drying up" of the Empire with time.

The First Vial (16.2). Dates are arrived at by starting from the Decree of Justinian, in 533 (recognizing the Pope as spiritual lord of all mankind), and adding 1260 years to bring us to 1793, "when all Europe was convulsed by the anti-papal French Revolution" (R.R., page 130). This is already unsatisfactory. The two decrees of Justinian are dated 535 and 545 and, as we have already noted, his reign proved "throughout a period of deep humiliation for the Papacy". Even if the addition of 1260 years is accepted, this brings us to 1795 and 1805; it is in any case strange that a switch should have been made from a date of 606 and the Decree of Phocas, leading to 1870 or thereabouts, to a decree by Justinian, leading to 1793 or so. The change was necessary if the scheme of interpretation of the first five Vials as covering events from 1795 to 1815 was to be retained, but this hardly seems a sufficient reason. Both starting points are in any case unsatisfactory, as we have seen.

Passing by these defects, though, can the history of that period properly be made to correspond to these Vials? First, the great voice from the heavenly temple (16.1) is said (J.T. Ill, page 472) to be fulfilled in the Declaration of Pillnitz (1791) by which the Austrian Emperor Leopold and the King of Prussia demanded that the French king, now sorely beset by the French Revolution, should be free to go where he pleased, and that the French Assembly should be disbanded, in default of which war was threatened. Yet in E.B. (11th Edition, X, page 854) we are told that "this Declaration was but an excuse for non-interference"; and S.R. Atkins ("From Utrecht to Waterloo", page 208) writes, "This guarded

statement really meant that the cautious Leopold would do nothing". How this Declaration could fulfil the global terms of 16.1 is beyond understanding. It is noteworthy that this point is omitted in R.R., C.C.W., and W.H.B.

The First Vial proper is interpreted as judgements on the papal populations of Europe, beginning with the terrors of the French Revolution and continuing to the campaigns of Napoleon. We have already questioned the Tightness of referring "them which had the mark of the Beast" to the Catholic people of Europe, and the mark itself to the sign of the Cross. But passing over this, and

assuming, without necessarily agreeing, that it was the Catholics of Europe who were the worst sufferers in this period, we consider France under the Revolution. The basic purpose of the National Revolutionary Assembly of 1789 was not opposition to Roman Catholicism as such: it was simply the abolition of feudalism and privilege wherever it was found, and the Catholic church was not exempt. Tithes were abolished, ecclesiastical property confiscated, and the Pope deprived of all executive power, the organization of the church becoming almost presbyterian in character. Reform rather than oppression marked revolutionary policy until 1793. Then the Reign of Terror began, political opponents and rebels being the chief sufferers. One section led by Hebert did introduce a religious Reign of Terror also, and churches in Paris were closed, stripped of their bells to make cannon, and of their silver and gold to fill the depleted national treasury. Violence against priests was discouraged by the Committee of Public Safety; in any case Hebert and his principal colleagues were executed in 1794, and the situation of the Catholic church became much easier.

Napoleon, who now rose to power, was not anti-catholic; but, like others before him, he was determined to keep the church in its place. In spite of opposition from his advisers he concluded a concordat with Rome in 1801 which remained in force until 1905. The principal European countries troubled by Napoleon's campaigns during this supposed First-Vial period were Holland, Belgium, Prussia, the German States, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, together with Egypt in Africa and Syria in Asia. Of these, Holland, Switzerland, Prussia, the North German States, Egypt, and Syria could scarcely be called Catholic, and in any case the hardships which befell the oppressed and largely illiterate populace could hardly be thought to arise because they bore "the mark (sic) of the Beast". Their worst troubles were in fact that the French armies lived off their countries. The hardships of much of Europe during the Thirty Years' War two centuries earlier, followed as it was by civil war in France and the Dutch land wars, were far greater and more protracted. In brief, the application of the First Vial to this period is totally unconvincing.

The Second Vial (16.3). This is said to have been fulfilled (C.C.W., pages 47-48) when "the maritime power of the Beast" was destroyed in the wars that followed the Revolution", while we read in R.R., page 153 that, as a result of the victories of the English navy from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th over the ships of the Beast-worshippers', "every living thing died in the sea; that is, every living soul on the sea belonging to the continent (which was the subject of the operation) died in the sense of ceasing to have life permitted on it."

In fact, except for short intervals, France and Britain were at war for some 20 years until 1815, and each country tried to blockade the other. British and French fleets were engaged in constant war, and Britain gained complete supremacy. British trade was not seriously affected

until 1811, and by 1809 British exports had reached a record height. With Napoleon controlling much of Europe, French trade there prospered. France and Italy (two

'Beast' countries) suffered little, as both could grow many of the excluded articles. The main nations to suffer were Spain, Holland, and northern Europe, of which only Spain was Catholic. Neutral, including American, shipping prospered in spite of the risks. By no means did the sea become stagnant, as the interpretation demands.

The Third Vial (16.4-7). This is referred to Napoleon's campaigns in northern Italy, desolating the country and decimating its inhabitants; the area being described as "a perfect network of watercourses", and as a country "most distinguished by the shedding of the blood of saints and prophets" (R.R., pages 132-133). The last statement is incorrect. Bohemia, France in particular, England, Spain, and Portugal were much more notorious in this respect. In his 'Book of Martyrs' Foxe has much to say about persecutions in Bohemia, France, and England, and nothing about the same in Italy, probably because Protestantism had never made any headway there.

In 8.10-11, the judgement of the Third Trumpet fell on a third part of the rivers and fountains of waters, supposed to denote northern Italy, though C.C.W., page 23, also includes the regions of Danube and Rhine. We have already noted that two other parts of the Roman Empire would fit this description, if this is the right kind of interpretation. The devastation by Attila the Hun, supposedly occurring under that Trumpet, was far more frightful than anything under Napoleon, yet is directed against "the third part" only, whereas the current prophecy is not so restricted. Napoleon's first invasion of Italy was in 1797-8, when Napoleon issued a proclamation to the people, then under Austria and Sardinia, containing these words: "People of Italy: the French army comes to break your chains . . . Your property, your religion, and your usages will be respected. We make war as generous enemies, and we have no quarrel save with the tyrants who enslave you." (H. A.L. Fisher, History of Europe, page 823). The assurance was not kept well, for picture-galleries and museums were plundered, heavy taxation levied, and supplies requisitioned, but Fisher adds, after observing that Napoleon was himself an Italian: "Though he was severe, he seems to have been a liberator . . . Much was forgiven to the young general who broke the Austrian stranglehold . . . The Italian literati praised him to the skies; the best Lombards crowded to his court." (page 824).

Napoleon's second campaign was brief (1800), and not marked by severe measures against the Italian people. The professional classes supported the new regime enthusiastically. Only the ecclesiastical hierarchy remained hostile. A number of republics were formed under French control, heavy tribute was levied, and many Italians were conscribed into the French army. But it is estimated that only a minute fraction of the population was involved. The campaign in Italy, and the short-lived occupation of the entire peninsula (not just the north) is hardly a convincing fulfilment of the fearful judgements indicated in this prophecy. It has to be said, too, that the "continuous-historic" school of the 19th century lived too close to the events of the Napoleonic era to assess their passing

importance, and their expectation of the Lord's advent in their own days has not been fulfilled.

The Fourth Vial (16.8-9). The sun is said to symbolize the Holy Roman Emperor (R.R. page 134; also W.H.B., C.C.W. page 48, include other 'kings and emperors' made and unmade by

Napoleon). The "him" (R.V. "it") of 16.8 is regarded as being Napoleon himself (J.T. and W.H.B.).

But "him" has nothing to do with Napoleon: it refers to the sun of the symbol, which is a masculine noun. The enhanced heat of the sun here in no way corresponds to the condition of the countries supposed to be represented. The Austrian Holy Roman Empire was crushed by Napoleon's victories, and the Holy Roman Empire came to an end in 1806. As observed by H.A.W., page 196, the result of the Napoleonic wars was the opposite of what is supposed, for they were followed by "the biggest revival of religion the world has ever known, with the possible exception of the Reformation". The revival was particularly prominent in America, and even in France there was a remarkable pro-papal revival in the 19th century. As for the suggestion that Napoleon was a type of Christ executing judgements, he was totally unlike our Lord, being motivated by sheer ambition.

The Fifth Vial (16.10-11). The seat of the Beast is said to be Rome, not in itself an unreasonable identification. Its correctness (R.R., page 135) is regarded as proved by the events after Vials 1-4 being directed against the Pope and his dominions. However:

Though relations between the revolutionary French government and Pope Pius VI had been strained, Napoleon took exception to the way the Pope had been treated, and to the circumstances of his death. The new Pope, Pius VII, was only elected after some delay, and at this time Napoleon was determined to restore the position of the Catholic church in France to some degree, and signed a Concordat in 1801 on terms favourable to himself. In spite of uneasy relations, in December 1804 the Pope was induced to proclaim him emperor. From summer 1805 relations deteriorated, owing largely to Napoleon's high-handed attitude, and in 1808 the Papal States were put under French military occupation, the Pope's political authority in Rome and district remaining intact. In summer 1809 things came to a head, the Pope's temporal power was abolished, and French troops assumed full control of Rome. The Pope excommunicated Napoleon, and French troops, going beyond Napoleon's orders, kidnapped the Pope, and took him to Savona in N.W. Italy, where he lived for some years in virtual captivity. Early in 1811 Napoleon suspended the power of the Papacy throughout his empire, and had the Pope transferred to Fontainebleau, where he remained until 1814. Then, following the collapse of the French Empire, he returned via Savona to an excited reception in Rome. In October 1817 the Pope actually intervened to try to improve the conditions of Napoleon's exile on St. Helena, in the course of which he acknowledged the latter's work in re-establishing the Catholic religion in France.

Must we not say that the terrors predicted in 16.10-11 far exceed

the troubles experienced by the Pope early in the 19th century; nor was there any noteworthy "blasphemy" from the 'subjects of the Beast'. To try to stretch the application of 16.11 to events in 1854 and 1870 (W.H.B., 4th. Edition reprint 1969, pages 143-144) is a desperate expedient. In any case, the decisions taken by the Papacy during this period should be regarded as wrong rather than especially blasphemous.

The Sixth Vial (16.12-16). This has been interpreted of the gradual decline of the Turkish Empire from 1820 to 1918. The author of the present notes spent a long time before he rejected it, even when inexorable historical facts had compelled him to reject the continuous-historic scheme as a whole. Joseph Mede's "Key of the Revelation" was published in 1643. Writing 200 years in advance, when the Turkish Empire was almost at its zenith, Mede

viewed this Vial as predicting its decline. The nation of Assyria which occupied the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris for centuries, is described in Isaiah 8.20 as "the waters of the river", whilst the fall of kingdoms is likened to the drying up of waters in the cases of Egypt (Isaiah 19.4-5), and Babylon (Jeremiah 50.38; 51.36), and powerful nations generally (Zechariah 10.11). Again, while the entire length of the Euphrates formed part of the Turkish Empire until 1918, once this area (Mesopotamia) had been wrested from it, the long decline was arrested by the famous Mustapha Kamal Ataturk. These seemed to be impressive reasons for accepting Mede's views. .

But they must now be examined more closely. In the first place, the decline did not begin anywhere near 1820. Some of the eastern conquests were lost in the 17th century, and the northern territories in the 18th, which breaks the supposed historical sequence as a sequel to the Fifth Vial. Nor is the statement (J.T., III, page 546) that "affairs continued generally prosperous with the Turks till the commencement of 1820" correct. "Things went radically and irretrievably wrong at the end of the seventeenth century" (A. Mango, "Turkey", page 25; cf. H.A.W., page 200). In the second place, Turkey retained control of the entire territory bordering the Euphrates during the whole period of its decline right up to 1981. But, notwithstanding present difficulties, Turkey underwent an immense revival under Ataturk, and this cannot be reconciled with the view that the decline of Turkey could cease as soon as the Euphrates ceased to be part of its territory, for this is still not the case. A good one-third of its length is still in modern Turkey, and in the 1970s a giant dam for power and irrigation has been constructed at Keban on this river. If Turkey is understood under the term, the river has not dried up even now.

16.12: The sixth poured out his vial on the great river, the river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sunrising.

Mede wrote his *Clavis Apocalyptica* in 1627, and the slow decline of the Turkish Empire which he predicted has been urged on the present writer as an impressive reason for accepting the continuous-historic view, here and as a whole. But Turkey lost the Mesopotamian part of the Euphrates in 1917-18, and the 60 years which have elapsed since do little to support Mede's inference that the departure of Turkey would facilitate events leading to the return of the Lord, and of "the kings from the sunrising". If a different power has controlled the Euphrates, or this section of it, since those days, the powers in command there have been no more favourable to this event than were the Turks, and the link of an event now so long ago with urgent preparation for "the war of the great day of God Almighty" (16.14) is hard to see.

We must emphasize again that, in the Old Testament, Euphrates is firmly linked, if first with Assyria, ultimately and decisively with Babylon, and since the fall of Babylon is a topic for the next Vial (16.19) this must be significant (see pages 171-172). Broadly speaking, they were kings from the east which overwhelmed Babylon in -538 (Media is N.E., Elam E., Persia S.E.), so the case for the use of the fall of literal Babylon as a basis for the destruction of the spiritual Babylon here is very strong. This Vial takes us Biblically, not to Turkey, but to the harlot Babylon of 17.1-5. Just as the ruin of that evil power in 17.16 leads to the return of the Lord and the destruction of the Beast (17.14; 19.19-21), so does the drying up of Euphrates here signify the preparation for the same events.

16.13:1 saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as it were frogs: 16.14: for they

are spirits of demons working signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

We have already found the dragon (12.3,9; 13.2), with his comprehensive title of "the old serpent, he that is called the devil, and Satan". We saw him convey his power to the Beast which emerged from the sea (13.2), while this Beast in his turn gives authority to a second beast, here for the first time called the False Prophet, who "exercises all the authority of the first beast in his sight". So the overriding power of all human sin is to be mobilized together with its political manifestation, and its pseudo-religious henchman, to bring the world to challenge the very power of God Himself. The fact that one unclean spirit is assigned to each seems to suggest that, notwithstanding the fact that they form three links in a chain of authority, each will be playing its own part. It is easy to conceive of the False-Prophet system working what appears to be religious wonders; and the Beast working political and military ones; but what are signs by the dragon itself? For the moment we can only leave this as a question.

And why "like frogs"? This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament, and in LXX batrakhos, is only found in connection with the description of the plagues of Egypt and in recapitulations of these (Exodus 8.2-15; Psalm 89.45; 105.30). Moses brought forth frogs by the power of God; the magicians did so too, with their false enchantments: so this is an excellent way of telling us that there will be claims to divine powers which will seem to match those of God Himself, able to seduce if it were possible the very elect (Matthew 24.14; Revelation 13.3, 13-15). The signs spoken of in the Sixth Vial are plainly the same, and from the same sources, and for the same reasons, as those referred to in 13.3-15.

They are "the spirits of demons, working signs". As to the latter, we are back with the Olivet prophecy once again as we have seen. As to the former, though the demons of the Gospels in the main denote human bodily and mental afflictions, in the Epistles they are sometimes false gods, from which the believer must turn away (1 Corinthians 10.20-21; 1 Timothy 4.1; see also Acts 17.18; Revelation 9.20: the word in Revelation 16.13 is daimon, and not the more common daimonion, of the other passages referred to. The shorter word is also found in 18.2, "Babylon is become a habitation of demons", which in its turn is taken from Isaiah 13.21, where LXX uses the longer word, thus establishing their substantial identity. In fact Vine (under 'Demons') indicates that daimonion is the neuter form of the adjective derived from daimon.

16:5: Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

At this point we are warned at one and the same time that the Lord's coming is imminent (for we have not met this expression since 3.3: the whole Book has been leading up to this, and now it is close at hand), and that it cannot be pin-pointed. The thief does not make an appointment with "the goodman of the house" (Matthew 24.23; Luke 12.39). The timing has been so successfully obscured in Scripture that even in the first century men could not be sure that it would not be in their time (1 Thessalonians 5.2,4; compared with 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12). Those who received the warning of 2 Peter 3.3 first of all would feel themselves included, and encouraged not to join the ranks of scoffers who might come at any time. It is in fact a point strongly in favour of the approach to the Apocalypse made in the present work that the warnings should be given in such terms. Had it been possible to calculate even approximately that the return of the Lord would not be until around 1900 years after the Book

had been written, then many generations would have felt no urgency in "watching and keeping their garments against that day". The fact that signs have so accumulated in our own day that it seems impossible to contemplate any great further delays, should not alter for us the fact that these latest signs have piled up very quickly, and so far as the earlier readers were concerned might have done so at an earlier stage. And, once again, attempts to use the data in this Book to fix the time have failed repeatedly, and led to many false and damaging expectations.

16.16: They gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har Magedon.

References to this proper name in the Old Testament are found in Joshua 12.21 (a king of that area whom Joshua defeated); 17.11 (the area which fell within the western half of Manasseh); Judges 1.27 (the place was not immediately subjugated); 5.19 (in Deborah's song celebrating Israel's victory); 1 Kings 4.12 (which shows that Solomon had firmly established his authority there); 9.15 (the fortress city he built there); 2 Kings 9.27 (where Ahaziah died from his wounds); 23.29,30 (where Josiah was killed in battle with Pharaoh's forces); parallel references to these last two in 1 Chronicles 7.29 and 2 Chronicles 35.22; and finally Zechariah 12.11 (the mourning to come over Israel when they meet the Lord they crucified, compared with "the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the Valley of Megiddon", probably an allusion to the sorrow felt over the death of Josiah).

Though there is a general picture of Megiddo as a battlefield in all this, it is not specially instructive as to why the name is used in Revelation. The place is geographically significant though, The plain of Megiddo is the broad valley of the Kishon, extending inland S.E. from Mount Carmel, and known in Roman times as "The Great Plain", effectively dividing Samaria from Galilee. The prefix *liar*-suggests that "Mountain of Megiddo" is meant, as the following note may elucidate:

The earliest known interpretation, extant only in Arabic, is 'the trodden, level place (Arabic 'Imwd'lwtv = the Plain?) . . . Of four modern interpretations, namely 'mountain of Megiddo', 'city of Megiddo', 'mount of Assembly', and 'his fruitful hill', most scholars prefer the first. The fact that the tel of Megiddo was about 21 metres (70 ft) high in John's day, and was in the vicinity of the Carmel Range, justifies the use of the Hebrew *har*, used loosely in O.T. for 'hill' and 'hill country'. . . The 'waters of Megiddo' and the 'valley-plain of Megiddo' have witnessed many battles, from one fought by Tuthmosis III in -1468 to that of Lord Allenby of Megiddo in 1917. (Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 'Armageddon'). The modern event, in which Megiddo was the "scene of the operations, opening on 19 September 1917, by which Allenby, brilliantly outwitting the German commander, Limon von Sanders, broke the enemy's right in Palestine, encircled two Turkish armies with cavalry, and paved the way for the Turkish capitulation a month later" (Chambers' Encyclopedia in loc), especially since it gave Palestine in mandate to Britain the following year, and led to the beginning of the large-scale return of Israel to the Land. This has tended to focus attention on the geographical area as such, and led to confident anticipations that the actual final conflict between the Lord Jesus and the nations will take place at this very spot.

It may prove to be the case. There are complicated problems of chronology and of geography to be solved in that event, which it is not the purpose of this book to consider, but they can at least be indicated. In Zechariah 14.1-3 a deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus is located at Jerusalem (as it is also in 12.1-9). In Joel 3.2,12 the defeat of the nations is located in "the Valley of Jehoshaphat", and whatever the position of this valley was it seems not to have lain

as far north as Megiddo, S.C. locates it near the Dead Sea at Ein-Gedi, where Jehoshaphat fought against the Moabites (2 Chronicles 20.2), some 30 miles south of Jerusalem. Tradition, perhaps with little historical foundation, has associated it with the Kidron Valley near to Jerusalem itself. If all three of these locations are geographical entities, then the campaigns of the last days are described in various Books of Scripture in ways which will require considerable industry to piece together. It may be interesting and possible to do so, but it is not the kind of detail with which we are here concerned.

Joel may lead us to a conclusion of a different kind. Apart from the fact that the Kidron Valley simply could not accommodate large armies locked in battle (Would any conventional battlefield do so?), the meaning of the name is perhaps more important than any geographical location. Jehoshaphat means "Jehovah is Judge", and the theme of Joel 3 is that of God's judging the nations for their offences against His people, in "the Valley of decision" (3.14). So Joel may be telling us that the nations will be subdued in "the Valley where the Lord shall judge them". Can the same be true of Har-mageddon? Young gives the meaning of Megiddo as "place of God", for no discoverable reason. Gesenius, and also Davidson, give "place of crowds" or "place of troops", as a possibility, linking it with the verb, gadhadh. As for the "mountain" of Megiddo, while there is not much to be said for I.B.D.'s suggestion of a tel only twice as high as a two-story house, might not the fact that Carmel is at the seaward end of the Valley of Megiddo suggest something much more appropriate? It was on Carmel that Elijah faced the host of priests of Baal, and God judged between them, resulting in the destruction of Baal-worship for the time: how seemly it would be for us to learn that those gathered together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty will learn in their discomfiture that "The LORD He is God! The LORD, He is God!" (1 Kings 18.19-40). Revelation is not otherwise concerned with geography, and we might feel that in a Book of symbol a symbolic understanding of Harmageddon is as congruous as the same for Babylon and the Euphrates.

16.17: The seventh poured out his vial into the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, It is done. 16.18: And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunder-ings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men on the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell; and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 16.19: And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 16.21: And great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent, cometh down from heaven to men: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is exceeding great.

This is the last Vial, the last phase of the Last Trumpet, itself the final scene in the Last Seal. The words "It is done" which introduce the Vial say as much. The Vial includes major events, however, and therefore what follows in the next three chapters must be thought of as the elaboration of the work here so briefly summarized. The lightnings with which this message is associated take us back to 4.5; 8.5; 11.19; the voices to 4.5; 8.5,13; 10.3,3,4; 11.15,19; and the earthquake to 6.12; 8.5; 11.13. We are being told: all that you have so far read about is now coming to its fulfilment. Watch, and be ready for the outcome.

Chapter 24 Revelation 17 and 18

CHAPTER XXIV

Chapters 17 and 18: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GREAT HARLOT

17.1: There came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and spake with me, saying, Come hither: I will show thee the judgement of the great harlot that sitteth on many waters.

That is, one of the angels concerned with pouring out the Vials of the last outworking of God's wrath came to John, to reveal to him and us the detailed outworking of one of the matters already summarized in the previous chapter. Since the woman is to be called Babylon (17.5), it might be guessed that the particular angel would be he who poured out his vial on the Euphrates (16.12).

We have already shown that "the great Harlot" must originally have been a pure community pledged to God's allegiance, which subsequently falls away, and prostitutes her powers and duties to evil ends (pages 209-218, 225-227). We have shown that the two candidates for the office are apostate Jewry and apostate Christianity. If the Old Testament were to be our only guide, Jewry would be the only candidate, since the harlot figure is constantly applied to its declension from its covenant with God. But since the New Testament describes the bringing into being of a new people of God (1 Peter 2.9-10), whose apostacy is plainly prophesied, this new pervert could equally reasonably qualify for the title (1 Corinthians 6.15; Acts 20.29; 2 Thessalonians 2.3-11). International Jewish finance might be indicated by the horror of the nations of the world at the fall of 'Babylon' in 17.4; 18.3-14, and the parallels with the trading activities of Solomon could point in that direction. But apostate Christianity is also by repute fabulously rich, with its finger on the pulse of much of the world's trade.

We are confronted, in fact, not with two but with three sources of financial and commercial power such as could throw light on Revelation 18.3-14. The Israeli one is currently discounted in the media of communication, especially in view of the economic difficulties of the land of Israel itself. But it is surely not negligible for all that. The Vatican one is not currently given much attention. But this, too, is far from insignificant. The third major factor in the control of the world's wealth to-day is, of course, the riches of the Arab oil-states. All the signs are that this could easily measure up to the other two in the league of world wealth, though it hardly seems that Islam can qualify for the Harlot's

office in view of the fact that as a religious faith it has apostatized neither from Judaism nor from Christianity. That Islam may, nevertheless, play its part in the symbols of Revelation is not to be overlooked: but in that event it would seem that its office is far more likely to be that of the False Prophet than that of the Harlot, especially in view of its slogan, "There is one God, Allah, and Mahomet is his prophet".

17.2: With her the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and they that dwell on the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication. 17.3: And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 17.4: And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones, and pearls, having in her hand a

golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication. 17.5: And on her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Whoever the woman turns out to be, she is in control for a while of many peoples, for the "many waters" on which she sits (17.1) are to be equated with the scarlet Beast on which she also sits (17.3), and with "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (17.15). The fact that she is found in "a wilderness" (17.3), as we have suggested, invites us to compare her with the woman who went into the wilderness in 12.6,14, to stay there for a period of time and then presumably to return, for we have no record of her return if it be not here. This again, would strengthen the view that the Harlot is a fallen people of God, for the woman who gave birth to the Son of God in 12.5 was Israel as ideally represented by the faithful mother of Jesus, and her departure under persecution could correspond to the persecution either of Jewry or of the true church of God. Since, still recapitulating, it is "the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God" (12.7), the way is already prepared for the view that, since accepting the help of the earth, she herself ceased to keep them, and so could become the apostate of 17.1.

17.6: / saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

There have been Protestant expositors a-plenty who have called attention to the horrors committed by the Inquisition, to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and all the other horrors perpetrated in seeking to overcome the work of the Reformation, and there is no reason at

all to wish to diminish from their picture of the appalling things that were done. It remains a mystery as to how the human mind, when so plainly instructed by the Lord Jesus on the matter of loving one's neighbours, and seeking to overcome evil with good, could ever have allowed itself to name the name of Christ while committing such monstrous acts. It is hard to believe that some, at least, of the more learned among the persecutors did not realise how utterly wrong such behaviour is, and against the background of such calculated wickedness the stern punishments called down in such passages as 18.20,24; 19.2 seem very well deserved.

It has to be recognized, though, that the persecuting was not all on one side. Protestants could be as harsh to Catholics as Catholics had been to Protestants; and Gentiles could be as ruthless with Jews as Jews had been with their own prophets, with the Lord Jesus, and with the apostles. It is impossible to overlook Jewish guilt in any discussion of the persecutors of the saints of God (Matthew 23.32; 1 Thessalonians 2.14-16). On the other hand, the "little horn" which sprang up among the divisions of Daniel's empire of the Fourth Beast (Daniel 7.8, 20-21, 25) seems to belong politically to the last phase of empire. What this comes to is that the persecution of the saints has historically issued from Jewry, from Rome and other pagan powers, from apostate Christianity, from Islam, and from modern atheistic states, and any or all of these could be in principle included in 17.6 (of the Harlot), or in 13.7 (of the Beast). We are taught to expect both religious and secular persecution of the saints close to the time of the end, and it is better to keep a wary eye open as to the sources from which it might come, than to decide inflexibly beforehand that we know the answer beyond the possibility that our knowledge might be mistaken or incomplete.

17.7: The angel said to me, Wherefore didst thou wonder ? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the

These words are substantially as they appeared in the first edition of APOCALYPSE FOR EVERYMAN. In the meantime, however, Peter Watkins' EXPLORING THE APOCALYPSE AND THE FUTURE has appeared, with a very different suggestion as to the meanings of Daniel's horn and the last phase of the Beast. This has been summarized and commented on pages 238-242 of this second edition, and in this writer's view the suggestions made above have still to be considered as more likely to be true.

foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come (-17.8).

In interpreting the Beast in the phase in which we see it here, everything depends on when the Beast "was, and is not, and shall come". If we think of John's own day, the Roman Beast was then in full cry, so "is not" would hardly apply. If we think of our own day, when the glories of the Roman Empire are long past, then it may be that this power, by no means evident at the beginning of the events now being discussed, is to be resurrected in the course of them, so that a Fifth Universal Empire will arise, however fleetingly, from the world's abyss, with such suddenness and completeness that the world will wonder at it and helplessly accept its yoke, save only for those whose names are in the book of life, who will be protected from the deception.

The Beast "was, and is not, and shall come" (17.8). The words in transliteration are:

en kai ouk estin hai mellai anabainein eh tes abusson (17.8a) and, en kai ouk estin kai parestai (17.8b) which seem to be designed as a parody of the very nature of God Himself, Who has been described in 1.4 as: ho on kai ho en kai ho erkhomenos.

The true God constantly is. The one who seeks to usurp the power of God has had a past; at the time under consideration has undergone eclipse, and is to have a brief future. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, as God's manifestation, was in mortal form until, briefly, He lay dead; He is now at the right hand of the Father, and He will come with power and great glory. The future of the Lord Jesus is eternal: the Beast which opposes Him will "continue a little while" (17.11), and then go into perdition.

No doubt the wondering of the world at this restored Beast will be the same as its wonder at the deadly wound from which it is healed (13.3,12), for the verb and the identity of the wonderers are the same on both occasions.

17.9: Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth; and they are seven kings: the five are fallen, the one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven, and he goeth into perdition (-17.11). . .

17.18: The woman which thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

First, the seven mountains. The seven hills of Rome are legendary, but the certainty of the identification has already been examined. "Here is wisdom", to examine the obvious and be prepared for surprises. "The great city which rules over the kings of the earth" was Rome in John's day; in the purpose of God it was intended that at a day to come it would be restored Jerusalem. It is, as we showed, not in any case the political great city of which we are speaking, for the woman, not the heads themselves and not the Beast, is that great city (17.18).

So wisdom will keep its eyes open, and when it sees a great false pseudo-Christian (or perhaps pseudo-Messianic) power sitting astride the unified kingdoms of the world, it will know how close it is, however bitter the trials through which the wise ones must pass, to the time of permanent deliverance. Rome may indeed prove to be the physical centre from which the evil system will hold sway, but there will be no mistaking it in any case. The purpose of this and other prophecies is not to make it possible for us to write the history of the future, but to make it possible to recognize it as it unfolds.

The seven heads moreover do not only symbolize mountains. They denote, we are told, seven kings (17.9), of which "five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come". The last of these, in effect, is to be the same as the revised form of the Beast when it appears in the last time. So what are these seven kings, or systems, of which five have fallen, one remains, and one is awaited? If we have decided that the Beast in its ultimate form was not present at the beginning of the modern events with which the Vial period is concerned, then we must say the same of the 5 1 1 position referred to here. By that time five kings will have gone, one will be extant, and one will be yet outstanding.

It is already impossible to accept the interpretation offered by continuous-historic interpreters. Adam Clarke supposes that John is telling us of seven systems of government in the Roman Empire: Kings (-1181 to -753); Dictators (to -665); Decimvirs (to -336), Consuls (to -43); Triumvirs, and Emperors: of which the last would be the one existing in John's time. The one yet to come on this view would be the "Carlovingian Patriciate", a system set up in Rome by Charlemagne, and said to have lasted a mere 45 years (Bible Commentary, Abingdon Press reprint, VI, 1040-1041). This view arouses total incredulity in the present writer. To what purpose would John and ourselves be invited to look back more than a millennium before Christ to governments existing in Rome when even the Babylonian Empire was in the remote future? Why would we be asked to interest ourselves in Dictators and Decimvirs who were reigning in Rome while the dominant powers in the world were still Babylon, Persia, and Greece?

The Speaker's Commentary offers (but not with approval) another list, ranging from Kings to the Popes before the attainment of temporal power, while J.T. (III, page 44, on Revelation 12.3), lists the following: Regal, Consular, Dictatorial, Tribuni-tial, Imperial (-31 to 76), and Gothic (76 to 554). But all this seems far removed from the purpose of this chapter, which it is very hard to see concerning itself with the trivialities of the internal organisation of the Roman state. P.W. is surely right thus far in asking us to direct our attention to the beasts of Daniel 7; but if the first beast is Babylon, with one head (Daniel 7.4); the second Medo-Persia also with one (7.5); the third Greece with four (7.6), and the fourth Rome with one (7.7), making seven in all, then the fifth fallen head would be the third of the Greek four, as he supposes, so that "one is" would be the fourth of these, with the Roman head yet to come! On every count the interpretation of this is difficult, and the solutions offered tortuous.

We may, after all, be driven back to a vintage solution of this problem which sees the Beast as representing the whole succession of human kingdoms in biblical lands, so starting earlier than Babylon. In this event the heads which have fallen would be (i) Egypt, (ii) Assyria; (iii) Babylon; (iv) Medo-Persia; (v) Greece. The one which still exists in John's day and is represented by its fragments now would be (vi) Rome; and the one yet to come would be (vii) the 'man of sin' regime to be destroyed by the Lord with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2.8). This is the view of Alford and S.C. It fits in well with the assurance that when the last phase arises it will continue only a little while (17.10). The kings of the earth will share their power with it for only "one hour" (17.12; 18.10,17,19). The Beast dominated by the Harlot would be the seventh and short-lived head, and the Beast standing alone in all its arrogance would be the eighth and last.

17.12: The ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast (-17.13).

Whether we suppose that there are exactly ten such powers when this time comes will be decided by the degree of literality we are willing to ascribe to a symbolic Book. Our own bodies have ten fingers and ten toes; it is likely that the image of Daniel 2 had the same (though this is not stated). The figure 10 is used sometimes to mean 'a considerable number' (Genesis 31.7,41 of the changes in Jacob's wages; Leviticus 26.26 of the 'ten women who shall bake bread' in time of famine; Numbers 14.22 of Israel's repeated provokings of God; Daniel 1.20 of Daniel's superior

wisdom; Luke 15.8 of the number of coins on the woman's rope; 10.16 of the maximum gain from one pound). So 'ten kings' may well be a synonym for "all the authorities in existence at the time".

Without in any way making a precise prediction, it is noteworthy that in the decades since the Second World War we have seen the creation of many new national entities in Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Caribbean, some of which have already thrown in their lot with Marxist ideology, and all of which could well join other world powers in "giving their power and authority to the Beast". Indeed, the free world seems almost bent on its own destruction, when in the name of freedom it awards independence to once colonial nations on terms which are bound to favour one-party states with an eye on Marxist goals. As the senseless cry of "one man, one vote" is used to put apparent power in the hands of those who have no idea how to exercise it, and actual power in hands which, politically at least, know only too well, the door is being opened wide to the kind of domination we seem increasingly to be experiencing, and with more to come.

17.15: He saith to me, the waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. 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 in their hearts to do His mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished (-17.17).

We have stood back and wondered at the suicidal folly of what goes on in the western world. Professing freedom, these countries nevertheless pursue policies fated to destroy that freedom, and impose on nations either the desperate tyranny of the far right as existing

powers retrench their authority, or the designing tyranny of the far left, as oppressed peoples turn to the only source from which they think relief may come, and are Shamelessly exploited anew by the cynicism of their 'liberators'. As (to present appearances) the 'United Nations' is impeded or misdirected by the policies of left-wing members under an un-confessed but powerful central direction, so do the powers which reject this domination seem increasingly unable to coordinate their own policies, as 'democracy' is splintered by the very freedom which it allows to its minorities. It could almost look as though the seed of self-destruction had actually been implanted in the minds of the powers that be. And is not this precisely what this passage says with its words, "God hath put into their hearts"?

Excursus VIII: THE EXERCISE OF THE POWER OF GOD OVER THE HUMAN HEART

Those for whose eyes this exposition is primarily written are rightly suspicious of the approach to religious faith which seems to subjugate the human reason to the emotions of the heart. It is, we say, the business of a person to examine the evidence, accept that which is proved, do what is commanded, use his powers to the right end, and accept the blame for failures, and the responsibility to achieve success. We are to "work out our own salvation" (Philippians 2.12). We reject the existence of a mighty devil on to whom we might shift some of the blame for our failings, and we cast a critical look at any claims for a 'mystical' experience of the indwelling of God's Spirit which might seem to rob us of the initiative to discipline our own minds and bodies to God's service (or rob us of the credit for succeeding in doing so). In a proper defence of the freedom of man's will to obey or disobey God, the improper suggestion is sometimes made that for God to influence man's life from within his person would be an unacceptable interference with that will. Revelation 17.16 provides an excellent opportunity to examine that thesis.

We are not here considering the providential manipulation of events from without, though such manipulation by God does, of course, occur. A heathen king might employ enchantments to determine his military route, and God can so order the sign which arises that the king is actually sent on God's work. So, when "the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way to use divination", it was God who arranged it so that he went against Jerusalem (Ezekiel 21.21). Again, when God made Assyria the rod of His anger, and said, "I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge", the record adds that "he meaneth not so, but it is in his heart to destroy" (Isaiah 10.5-11). These are external influences only: God uses ideas already in the mind to ensure that men willingly fulfil His purposes, without in such instances influencing their thinking as such.

But He may do this too. The same king of Babylon who went of his own free will to do the work to which God directed him, also of his own free will spoke boastful words from his palace. It was then by no will of his that he became mad and was driven from men to live with the beasts of the field (Daniel 4.31-34). There could scarcely be more far-reaching intervention in a man's thinking than this. We can compare this, too, with "the evil spirit from the Lord" which affected Saul when he had freely chosen to disregard the commandments of God (1 Samuel 16.14; 18.10). In both cases God used men who had already made godless decisions, and manipulated their thinking to drive them further on the road they had chosen for themselves.

The classic case, of course, is that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. While it appears, in the main at all events, that this ruler wittingly went back on his word in the early stages of the Plagues,

we learn with increasing frequency as the plagues proceed that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart". Thus, following the Revised Version:

Exodus

4.21

Before the plagues

God will harden his heart (a promise)

7.13

Before the plagues

Pharaoh's heart was hardened

7.14

Before the plagues

Pharaoh's heart is stubborn

7.22

First plague

Pharaoh's heart was hardened

8.15

Second plague

Pharaoh hardened his heart

8.19

Third plague

Pharaoh's heart was hardened

8.32

Fourth plague

Pharaoh hardened his heart

9. 7

Fifth plague

The heart of Pharaoh was stubborn

9.12

Sixth plague

THE LORD HARDENED THE HEART OF PHARAOH

9.34

Seventh plague

Pharaoh hardened his heart

9.35

Seventh plague

The heart of Pharaoh was hardened

10. 1

Before the eighth plague

GOD HAS HARDENED HIS HEART AND THAT OF HIS SERVANTS

10.20

Eighth plague

THE LORD HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART

10.27

Ninth plague

THE LORD HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART

It is plain, therefore, that whereas Pharaoh was a deceitful and untrustworthy person, who could bring himself to go back on his word whenever he thought the peril was past, God had intended from the start that, on certain occasions, his freedom of choice should be denied him (4.21), and that on at least four of these He actually brought this about (9.12; 10.1; 10.20; 10.27). Scripture nowhere attempts to soften this fact, and when Paul refers to it he not only accepts that the hardening occurred, but even seems to generalize it: "For he saith to Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show thee My power... So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Romans 9.17-18. No doubt God confines this fatal intervention to "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" (9.22), and clearly no injustice is done in speeding to their destruction confirmed sinners who have no intention sincerely to repent. But the point is established at least in a negative way: God does influence the minds, at least of some evil people, in pursuance of His purpose.

If it is complained that in this event those concerned do not have freedom of will, the fact is unaltered even were this so; but strictly speaking it is not so. What God does is to confirm and fix in such persons the decisions which their free wills have already and deliberately taken, and so make insincere and time-serving repentance impossible for them. The examples given appear to be part of a more general policy, as Romans says again: "Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. . . wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their heart to uncleanness. . . for this cause God gave them up to vile passions. . . God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (1.21-28). Once instructed men and women get to the point where God knows that they have ruled out any willing response to His goodness. He may harden their hearts also, so that they may reap the consequences of their wilful folly. There is truth in the words of the proverb set in verse by Dryden:

For those whom God to ruin has designed, He fits for fate, and first destroys their mind.

It is this sober fact which is brought out by our passage in Revelation. What we now need to know is whether God will also intervene for good in the persons of those who truly desire to please Him. That the same providential possibilities exist is plain, and doubtless uncontested. Cornelius is told in a dream to send for Peter, and Peter in a vision to go when he is sent for (Acts 10.1-16). Jesus appears to Paul on the Damascus road, to provide the evidence which will complete the process of conversion in His chosen vessel (9.10-16). A vision directs Paul and Silas into Europe (16.9-10). In all cases, though, those receiving the call are free to go or to stay. As Paul himself puts it, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (26.19), making it very plain that it lay within his power to disobey if he chose.

But there is much more than this. When God "gave a new heart" to Saul ben Kish, Saul became for a time a better man and king than he otherwise showed any promise of being (1 Samuel 10.9). He retained the freedom to accept or not this inward strength and counsel, and enlarge its scope, and the latter choice is, in fact, the one he made. Again, when "the man after God's own heart" showed how easy it is for the heart to revert to baser things, in his dealings with Uriah's wife and Uriah himself, his earnest plea when he recovered his senses, and confessed that he had been "shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother bear" him was, "Create in me a new heart, and renew a right spirit within me", and also that God would not take away His presence from him, nor remove His Holy Spirit (Psalm 51.10-11). It would be utterly out of accord with the spirit of this prayer to suppose David to be asking mechanically

only for the continuance of inspiration, the power to receive revelations and compose God's hymns. Those blessings might be added also, but it is restoration to God's society, and the granting of grace to a repentant mind for which he is appealing. The R. V. references rightly relate this case to that of Saul discussed above.

It will be the same with Israel in the days of restoration to come. Those who reject the Lord Jesus when He returns will of course bear their punishment. But for those who repent there is the repeated promise that God will give them, as He did Saul, a "new heart" (Jeremiah 31.33; 32.39; Ezekiel 11.19; 18.31; 36.26). The new disposition will not be forced on them, but will be promoted in those who have already shown themselves willing to take the first steps, who "look on Me Whom they have pierced, and mourn" (Zechariah 12.10).

So far the positive evidence has been drawn only from natural Israel in past and future. Or, rather, this would be so had not the words of Jeremiah 31.33 been taken up in Hebrews 8.10, and applied to true believers in this present dispensation. And now the floodgates of evidence are open, for there is no gainsaying or resisting the overwhelming evidence that such help is precisely what God wishes and intends to give to His children in Christ. Here

are some results obtained simply by looking at Concordance-references under the word "heart":

1. God, Which knoweth the hearth, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did to us... CLEANSING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH" (Acts 15.8,9).

2. A certain woman named Lydia. . . one that worshipped God, heard us, WHOSE HEART THE LORD OPENED to give heed to the things that were spoken by Paul (16.14).

3. Ye are an epistle of Jesus Christ, ministered by us, WRITTEN not in ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but IN TABLETS THAT ARE THE HEARTS OF FLESH (2 Corinthians 3.3).

4. Thanks be to God, WHO PUTTETH THE SAME EARNEST CARE FOR YOU INTO THE HEART OF TITUS (2 Corinthians 8.16).

5. Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son INTO OUR HEARTS, crying Abba, Father (Galatians 4.6).

6. I bow my knees to the Father. . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that YE MAY BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN THE INWARD MAN, THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH . . . Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US, unto Him be glory (Ephesians 3.14-21).

7. Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father Which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, COMFORT YOUR HEARTS AND STABLISH YOU in every good work and word (2 Thessalonians 2.16-17).

Such a search using only one key word is necessarily only superficial. But it is decisive for all that. If, in pursuit of his free choice whether or not to conform to God's way, a person

should seek for help from God, these passages show that God will not deny him. He will in no way override the suppliant's freedom, but to the cry "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief (Mark 9.24), God will not be deaf. He can open the humble heart to receive; He can strengthen the obedient heart and comfort it, offering "the peace which passeth all understanding to fill it in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4.7-9). And, to complete a quotation left incomplete hitherto, if we do "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling", then on His part "It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to work, for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2.12-13).

God Himself, alone, can determine the extent of His inward influence, for good or ill, on His creatures. But their own conformity to His will, or lack of it, will determine the direction in which that influence will move. We are assured, though, that if by God's grace we have been brought to the knowledge of the faith, and have passed through the waters of baptism, it is not His will that we should then be left entirely to our own devices. Nor, having

given us the unique revelation to be found in the Bible and nowhere else, will He expect us to ignore or repudiate the plain promise that, having given up His Son Jesus Christ for our sins, He will "through Him freely give us all things" (Romans 8.32), as the Lord continues His constant intercession for us.

The Bible itself is the only valid witness in the case; and it is this Book which encourages us to pray for such help. It is only necessary, for example, to glance through the prayers of Paul in his Letters to see how committed we are to our need for God's active, inward help in the transformation of our lives, and how specifically this help is promised.

We see then how powerfully the Scriptures demonstrate that God can and will strengthen the resolve of His servants to be true to their calling; that He can and will help in their sincere and prayerful desire to become better people in His sight. It is not for this writer to attempt to define the manner in which such help is given. Nor need anyone who is dissatisfied with his own apprehension of that help from God lose heart on that account. It is one of the unhappy side-effects of an emotional 'evangelical' movement that it tends to flatter those whose emotions are easily aroused, and discourage the more phlegmatic because they cannot conjure up the same feelings. These notes are not concerned with promoting 'experiences' or advocating techniques for spiritual advancement. Ours is the humbler task of showing from the Scriptures themselves that the believer, however much or little he perceives it, will not be left to his own devices in working out his salvation.

One can understand why suspicion may be felt that to claim too much for God's inward operation is to take away spiritual initiative from the believer, and undervalue his need to have constant recourse to the Scriptures in order to learn more and more of God's will for him and God's purpose with the world. What is harder to understand is the misuse of Scriptural teaching which is sometimes encountered when these suspicions are rampant. An example of this is a newly developed advocacy of the part played by the angels in the life of the believer. It has been claimed, for example, that to stress the activities of God within the person of the believer is to revert to the error of Augustine, who is supposed to have replaced

A long list of such prayers is contained in my ACTS AND EPISTLES, pages 217 to 222. Here we merely reproduce some of the most relevant references, whose significance will be very plain as soon as they are turned up: Romans 1.7; 8.15; 15.33; 16.25; 1 Corinthians 1.3; 1.4; 1.8-9; 16.23; 2 Corinthians 1.2; 1.3; 8.16; 13.7; 14.14; Galatians 1.3; 6.18; Ephesians

1.2; 1.16; 3.14; 6.23; Philippians 1.2; 1.3; 1.9; 4.6; 4.19; 4.23; Colossians 1.2; 1.9; 2.1; 4.18; 1 Thessalonians 1.1; 3.11; 5.23; 5.28; 2 Thessalonians 1.2; 1.11; 2.16; 3.16; 1 Timothy 1.2; 6.21; 2 Timothy 1.2; 4.22; Titus 1.4; 3.15; Philemon 3; 4; 25; Hebrews 13.20; 13.25. In addition, related prayers from other Epistles may be added: James 1.5; 4.8; 1 Peter 1.2; 5.10; 5.14; 2 Peter 1.2; 1 John 5.14; 2John3; Jude 2.24; and, of course, parallel prayers in Revelation itself: 1.4; 2.20.

scriptural teaching on angelic operation by an unscriptural one involving the mystical indwelling of the believer by the Spirit of God. The present writer is no expert in the teaching of Augustine, but the statement does seem to be devoid of any historical foundation.

The facts are that, prominent though angels are in the records of Scripture, and particularly in the Apocalypse (in which 76 of the 188 occurrences of the word in the New Testament are found), there is no great stress laid on the part which they play in the lives of believers, whether in the Old Covenant or in the New. Nor is there in the writings of our well-respected authors. In *God's Way*, John Carter devotes pages 39-40 to the subject, and makes no reference to their providential activities among the saints. In *Ways of Providence*, Robert Roberts devotes pages 9 to 14 (Fifth Edition) to the same subject, taking up the same position, but adding, "The leading element in the operation of providence, where these operations really take place, consists of angelic interposition", a very moderate and unexceptionable observation. John Thomas (*Elpis Israel*, 14th Edition 1966) refers to the subject of angels on pages 11, 271, and 273. The first reference is devoted to a speculation as to the meaning of "the angels that sinned" (2 Peter 2.4; Jude 6); the second refers to angelic tutelage of Israel prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus, and also speaks of the angels as ministering to saints: "The providential direction of human affairs is committed to the Elohim, who are termed the angels of the little ones who believe in Jesus, because they minister to their profit, in causing all things among the nations to work together for their ultimate good". The

This point was made in our First Edition in 1977, and has not been refuted. What is certain is that the community which holds Augustine in the greatest regard has a very well developed doctrine of the veneration of angels (and saints too), and an old catechism contained in *The Catholic Instructor* (New York 1910) says that veneration is due to angels "because the angels of God are our guardians, tutors, and governors, as appears from many texts of Scripture: Psalm 91.11,12; Matthew 18.10; Hebrews 1.14. It is therefore evidently the will of God that we should have a religious veneration for these heavenly guardians". What is equally noteworthy is that the same volume contains no teaching whatever on the inward activities of the Spirit of God!

J.T. here means "the angels". The only occasion where 'e:l7>hiym is translated "angel" is Psalm 8.5, where LXX has *aggeloi*, and the translation is justified here by the quotation in Hebrews 2.7. It is *aggeloi* too, of course, in the passage referred to concerning the "little ones" (Matthew 18.10). If a Hebrew word were required here it should have been *mal:'S kiym*.

The only passages in the New Testament which speak of the angels' participation in the lives of the people of God now are: (i) Matthew 4.6 = Luke 4.10, in special relation to the Lord Jesus Himself; (ii) Matthew 4.11 = Mark 1.13; Luke 22.43 of actual angelic ministration to the Lord Jesus; (iii) Matthew 18.10 of "the angels who behold the face of God" and care for the "little ones" that believe on Jesus; (iv) Luke 15.10 of the rejoicing of the angels when

sinner's repent; (v) Acts 5.19; 8.26; 10.3,7,22; 11.13,12.8-11; 27.23 of various appearances of angels to disciples and prospective disciples; (vi) Acts 12.15 where disciples in the house say "It is his angel" of the report by Rhoda that she had seen Peter; (vii) 1 Corinthians 11.10, where a woman should wear a covering on her head "because of the angels"; (viii) Colossians 2.19 where "worshipping of angels" is condemned; (ix) 1 Timothy 5.21, where Timothy is charged in the sight of the "elect angels" to be faithful; (x) Hebrews 12.22, where the saints are in the presence of "an innumerable host of angels"; (xi) Hebrews 13.2, where one should show hospitality to strangers because by this some have entertained angels unawares; (xii) Hebrews 1.14, in which we are told that the angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation". This forms a quite adequate basis for being sure that angelic ministration does exist; though very few of the passages have much to do with their part in the lives of ordinary saints; and though the evidence is enough to be convincing, it is not enough to justify making angelic ministration a cardinal point of Christian teaching. And, when all has been said, this is a different and a supplementary ministry which has nothing to do with the inward work of God for the betterment of His saints, of which the abundant evidence already cited speaks so plainly. It should be added that at no point is the disciple bidden pray for angelic help. No doubt God uses angels as appropriate for this, as for all other relevant works, but the disciples' prayers are, as we have seen above, at least in the main to be directed to purposes which the angels cannot serve. When they approach the throne of grace to "obtain mercy, and grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4.16), they look for mercy at the mercy-seat, and the grace to help is needed for the infirmities of our sinning natures, which only the power of God can touch.

If literature of a catechetical kind, such as "The Declaration", "The Good Confession", and Statements of Faith, included in the survey the result is the same. The first of these does not appear to single out angels for special mention at all; the same is true of the second in all its 127 clauses. In the third we are told that "God was revealed 'by angelic manifestation and vision'. Finally "The Christadelphian Instructor" which gives the most detailed treatment, refers to the angels' duties their bodily nature and the saints' future participation in this, their appearances among men in the past, their names, and their having on some occasions borne the name of God. But there is no formal doctrine of angelic working laid down, and in any case the operations predicated are quite different from the ones discussed here.

So the harlot, apostate religious system is rejected by the powers she thought to control. Her short-lived dominion is terminated, and with it her very existence, for when she is robbed, stripped, her flesh devoured, and what remains "burnt utterly with fire", there is nothing that survives. The Beast will find itself another helper in the pseudo-spiritual field, but she, Babylon the great, is gone for ever. One power of evil, as has so often happened in the past, will have done God's work for Him by destroying another. It may well be that the Beast and its ten kings will not realise the harm they are doing to themselves when they destroy the harlot, for "the kings of the earth, which committed fornication with her shall weep and wail over her" (18.9; cf. 17.2,12), but that is the way of revolutions. It was the way in which things turned out in the French Revolution, when some of France's best brains were guillotined because "la Republique n'a pas besoin des savants", and the world was aghast at the wanton ruin caused to the culture and commerce of that country, from which it took long to recover. But have we not seen even more recently what self-inflicted damage can strike newly independent countries when they shake off the yoke of their oppressors and at the same time reject, or are denied, the advantages which their commerce and experience used to bring with it?

17.18: The woman whome thou sawest is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

If "reigneth" means "reigneth at the time when the vision was given to John", it would have to be Rome. If, on the other hand, as we have found good reason to suppose, it means "reigneth at the time when the harlot mounts the Beast", the interpretation is more open. The widespread international influence of the Vatican might favour Rome, though a Rome different both from that which John knew, and the one we know now. Currently Rome as the capital of Italy represents near-bankruptcy. Rome as the centre of the Catholic Church speaks with an ambiguous voice, with loosened doctrine, weakened hold on its people, some liberty of conscience for non-Catholics even in traditionally Catholic lands, bitter disputes over the abandonment of the Latin rite, open defiance in the matter of family limitation, rumblings about a marriageable priesthood, left-wing insurrection in Latin American countries against right-wing Catholic rulers, and communist domination over such traditional Catholic countries as Poland and Hungary. That situation could alter, and best-selling books about political machinations involving possible concordats with communist authorities leave the possibility that we are far from having seen the last of such a power. This would be particularly so

if the oecumenical movement should progress far enough to include Catholicism within its purview, so that a reunited 'Christendom' took the place of a merely partisan church, however large that church might be. Finally, Rome considered as a name attached to the "Treaty of Rome", which brought into being the 'Common Market', offers another facet of the problem for consideration. The organization is not particularly Roman at this stage, whether or not it will ever become so. Its headquarters are in Belgium, and its most influential members appear to be Germany and France. But something much bigger is depicted in Revelation 13 and 17 as the Beast on which the woman rides, and there is nothing to exclude the thought that this western European community might find itself outflanked and then absorbed in the coming world empire, with Rome, perhaps, astride it as its spiritual leader.

Whatever problems face us in an attempt to assess Rome's candidacy for the role of the great city, the other possible candidate seems currently even less likely. Israel has now declared Jerusalem to be its eternal capital, indeed, and has won notable victories over its Arab neighbours in several wars since 1948. But it is politically disunited, economically chaotic, internationally under heavy pressure in relation to Palestinian claims, and militarily extremely vulnerable as industrial states seek to strike the precarious balance between giving Israel the support which some would like to do (or feel the need to do in the face of communist near-east menace), and risking still further the supplies and costs of Arab oil. Yet this, too, is not the whole picture. As we have mentioned earlier, it is hard to know what kind of grip Israeli finance might get on the world were it to be turned to the political support of Israel as a nation. And there is no doubting the apostacy from its true faith of a nation which continues to reject the claims of its Messiah whom its forefathers crucified.

And, again to repeat an earlier point, in these days when negotiations behind the scenes can produce surprising political alignments, who is to say that they might not produce surprising spiritual ones too? Eucumenicalism speaks grand words about there being room for all faiths in our search for God, so why not a liaison in which both Rome and Jerusalem play their part, for as long as the nations of the Beast allow them? Whatever form this harlot power will take, it will have to emerge from desolation or something very near that, else how could it say, as it will, "I sit a queen and am no widow"? (18.7)

18.1: After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority, and the earth was lightened with his glory. 18.2: And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen,

fallen, is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird. For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness (18.3).

The actual event elaborated here is plainly that destruction of the harlot of which we have just been reading in Chapter 17, for 18.3 parallels 17.2; 18.6 parallels 17.4; 18.16 parallels 17.18. This is not a new and subsequent event, therefore, but a more detailed description of the event of which we read in the earlier chapter, itself the fulfilment of the outpouring of the Sixth Vial (16.12). Even so, the judgement in the hands of this angel of great authority shows that enormous significance attaches to the event. As in the Vials the drying up of the Euphrates was the essential prelude to the coming of the kings from the sun's rising, so here the fall of Babylon leads to the final conflict between the Lamb and the Beast. There is an interesting parallel between the language used here and in Ezekiel 43.2, in which "the glory of the God of Israel", which had forsaken Jerusalem before the city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 10.18), returns to the land "from the way of the east" and, as here, "the earth shined with His glory". In Ezekiel it is the restoration of the glory of physical Jerusalem which is under contemplation, when the iniquity of the former city shall have been purged: how fitting it is that the passage in Revelation should refer to the destruction of the old apostate system, before the New Jerusalem of the saints is revealed as "coming down from God out of heaven" (21.10).

The words "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great" have been met earlier in 14.8. The title "Babylon" is found again in 17.5, but the words originate in Isaiah 21.1,9: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen". This occurs in "the burden of the wilderness of the sea," apparently a reference to the marshes of Mesopotamia reclaimed by Nebuchadnezzar and made habitable and fertile. But there are more detailed parallels with Jeremiah 50-51 and with Ezekiel 26-27, as tabulated below:

Revelation

Jeremiah

18.2

Fallen, fallen is Babylon. A habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.

51.8 Babylon is utterly taken and destroyed.

50.39 The wild beasts of the desert with the wolves shall dwell there, and the ostriches shall

51.37 dwell therein. . . A dwelling place for jackals.

18.3

By the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen (cf. 14.8; 17.2).

51.7

Babylon hath been a golden cup. . . that made all nations drunken; the nations have drunk of her wine.

18.4

Come forth, My people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

50.8

Flee out of the midst of Babylon.

51.6

Be not cut off in her iniquity.

51.45

My people, go ye out of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of the Lord.

18.5

Her sins have reached even to heaven.

51.9

Her judgement reacheth to heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.

18.6

Render to her even as she rendered, and double to her double according to her works.

50.15

As she has done, do to her. . . According to all that

50.29

she has done, do to her. . . I will render to Babylon ... all

51.14

the evil that they have done.

Revelation

Ezekiel

18.22

The voice of hapers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee,

26.13

I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard.

18.13

(Merchandise of) the souls of men.

27.13

They traded the persons of men.

28.2

Thine heart is lifted up.

18.7

She glorified herself. . . in her heart.

18.19

They cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning.

27.30

They shall cause their voice to be heard over thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust on their heads.

18.18

What city is like the great city?

27.32

Who is there like Tyre?

No less than 17 of the items of merchandise in Ezekiel 27.12ff are repeated in Revelation 18, including silver, iron, brass, horses, war-drums (taken as equivalent to chariots), ivory, purple, fine linen, wheat, oil, balm (taken as ointment), wool, lambs (sheep), spices, precious stones, and gold. Allowing for uncertainties in the identification of Hebrew and Greek terms with each other, the list might be yet longer: thus LXX has frankincense in Ezekiel as in Revelation 18.13.

There is no doubt that the Spirit is deliberately drawing the parallel between ancient Tyre and spiritual Babylon and, as we

observed previously, this again directs attention to Israel in some form, in view of Solomon's ancient relations with Tyre, and the similarity of her merchant activities, and those in our chapter, to his (2 Chronicles 9.24; 1 Kings 10.10-29).

18.4: / heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: for her sins have reached even to

heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. (18.5).

The words are again drawn from the Old Testament, when natural Israel is called on to forsake the doomed city of Babylon in Isaiah 48.20; and there are parallels also with 52.11, Jeremiah 50.8 and 51.6,45 as shown above, and Zechariah 2.6-7. In the New Testament the words are no doubt intended to remind us of Paul's call to all saints of all ages, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Corinthians 6.17, itself quoted from Isaiah 52.11). The call is obviously to be heard before the destruction of 'Babylon' takes effect, just as the call of the Lord Jesus to His disciples to forsake the doomed Jerusalem (Luke 21.21) had to be heeded before the city was broken up. Like Sodom, the 'city' cannot be spared for the multitude of its iniquities but, like Lot (Genesis 19.16), the faithful have the opportunity to escape.

Who are they who are to come out, and when? Apart from the timeless call to those called on to join their Lord without the camp (Hebrews 13.13-14), having here no continuing city, the urgency grows as the day approaches in which "yet once more" the Lord will shake the world (Haggai 2.6; Hebrews 12.26-28). The Jewish believers needed to disentangle themselves from reliance on a doomed temple as the destruction of Jerusalem approached; and the disciples of a day soon to come may need to make a decision no less momentous and deliberate, as we near the time when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved in fervent heat" (2 Peter 3.10).

The enthronement of the Harlot on the Beast will be so obvious that the saint will see it and know, as surely as did the disciples of the first century, that "the desolation is nigh" of the systems they represent (Luke 21.20-23). The tribulations they will then suffer at the hands of the Harlot, and the Beast and his False Prophet, and the mark of slavery they will be called on to resist, will all serve to reinforce the lesson. These sufferings will themselves demand the choice: do the people of God cling to the things of this life at the cost of their faithfulness? Or do they keep faith at the expense of the loss of those things? This will be indeed coming out of Babylon, the drawing back of the hands from touching the unclean things.

At some stage, though, the saints will be taken away from the world's last travail. Noah needed to go physically into his ark; Lot must depart from Sodom; the disciples must leave Jerusalem. Before "one is taken and another left" (Luke 17.22-37), may not the Lord have then said to both of them, "Now is the time to leave: come with Me!" And will the one that is left say "I go sir," and go not? (Matthew 21.30). The world will have its fill of people like Lot's potential sons-in-law; but the congregation of the saints, and every one of its members, need the warning: "Remember Lot's wife!"

"Her sins have reached to heaven". Such was the primeval sin of Babylon, and it seems always to be linked with her name. Men sought to unite under its banner from the days of Nimrod, who "began to be a mighty one in the earth" (Genesis 10.8), the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel (18.10) in the land of Shinar. There it was that they commenced to build their tower to reach to heaven (11.4), without having counted the terrible cost. Thence arose the confusion of tongues which scattered them abroad. All the empire-builders have sought to gather the scattered people together again and build the tower anew, and all in one way or

another have said, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?"

This is the characteristic of Babylon, its unforgiveable sin. "Thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14.14). "She has been proud against the Lord, against the Holy One of Israel" (Jeremiah 50.29). "Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me shall spoilers come to her, saith the Lord" (51.53). Jeremiah actually saw to it that these terrible predictions should be sent to Babylon by the hand of Seraiah (51.59-64), that Babylon might be warned of its peril much as Jonah had warned Nineveh (Jonah 1.1 -2; 3.1 -4), but Nineveh, for the time, repented and Babylon did not. It is just the same with the Babylon of the Apocalypse.

That final witness to the nations of which we have written before, returns to the picture now:

The last witness will have been borne and rejected (10.8-11; 11.3-10; 14.6-7), and its bearers made to suffer for their testimony; and this, filling up all the iniquities of the past, will be the immediate ground of the punishment. There is a long history of sinfulness, indeed, when the final visitation comes, but when it does come it will at that time be fully warranted by the continued stiffnecked refusal to repent.

18.6: Render to her double even as she rendered, and double to her double according to her works; in the cup which she mingled, mingle to her double. How much soever she glorified herself and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning. Therefore in one day shall her plagues come: death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God Which judgeth her (-18.9).

This is an unmistakeable quotation from Psalm 137.8-9: "O daughter of Babylon that art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock; and, notwithstanding the apparently vindictive language, the message is plain: ancient Babylon had behaved cruelly and proudly, in full knowledge of the wickedness of its deeds, against ancient Israel, and the hard words were in warning as well as in expressions of Israel's hope. The deliverance would inevitably be accompanied by heavy afflictions to the ruthless aggressor, and he had been duly warned. There was and will be no place for pity in the ruin of those who had or have hardened their hearts like flint against God and His people.

It is the same in Isaiah 47.4-9, where the 'daughter of the Chaldeans' shall no more be called 'The Lady of Kingdoms'; Israel had been delivered to Babylon because of its own sins, but Babylon had shown no mercy. It had been warned but it did not "lay these things to its heart, neither remember the latter end thereof; it arrogated divine claims to itself, saying "I am, and there is none beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children". But all these things would come upon it, in spite of its sorceries and enchantments. As with the old Babylon, so with the new: each will have sinned with a high hand, and made blasphemous claims. Old Babylon did at least have the extenuation that it was carrying out God's judgements on an unfaithful race, but the new Babylon has no such excuse: those whom it injures are the "remnant of the seed" of the woman, "who keep the commandments of God" (Revelation 12.17).

18.9: The kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her when they look on the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city of Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour is thy judgement come. And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more (-18.11).

Though this apostate system is destroyed, not by the visible intervention of God, but by the nations over which it so fleetingly

rules, yet no good comes to its destroyers because of it. In the interlocked commercial world of our day, supposing that the message is at least partly literal, it is impossible to ruin any of its major components without bringing hardship to the rest. The world would not be better off if one of its great trading nations were ruined, nor if the western world suddenly disintegrated. Even the slow, if serious, recession against which these words are written, affects the whole world if it affects any major nation. The picture we have suggested of the economic power of the Harlot system means to us that, even when a resentful world brings it to ruin, it will but be hastening its own bankruptcy. It may not be fully relevant to point out the much lower standard of living endured by those countries which have destroyed their capitalist enterprises and set up 'Peoples' Democracies', but it is a fact.

18.20: Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets: for God hath judged your judgement on her.

The only people to find any satisfaction in this situation, while the rest of the world mourns, are the saints of God themselves. In just such terms did Moses sing of the victory of God on His people's behalf in the times of the Exodus, and in prophecy of the later victory also: "Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people: for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries." (Deuteronomy 32.43).

18.21: A strong angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon the great city be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman of whatsoever craft shall be found any more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain on the earth (-18.24).

There is still the same uncertainty as between apostate Jewry and apostate Christendom. For though saints have been persecuted both by Jews and by those professing the name of Christ, and though apostles, too, were victims of both, the prophets (in the dominant, Old Testament sense of the term) were slain by the Jews, and the generation which engineered the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus was held guilty in all respects, as we have clearly seen (Luke 13.34; Matthew 23.29-37; Luke 11.31; 1 Thessalonians 2.14-16). But unless the last days before the Lord returns see a large-scale deceit of the nations promoted by resurgent Jewry, certainly the prime candidate for that role is at present apostate Christianity. The time will reveal the truth when the situation arises, but for the present we need to remember again that any body which apostatizes from the truth is guilty in God's sight of prostituting its heritage, and therefore it may prove to be unnecessary to distinguish between the two fallen estates.

Each alike is contrary to the God who bought it, and each alike may turn against Him in the end.

To whatever extent the Book of Revelation may concern itself with the behaviour and fate of unfaithful natural Israel (as is plainly the case in, say, 2.9 and 11.8), it would be incongruous if a Book dealing with "all kindreds and nations and peoples and tongues" should be primarily concerned with Israel after the flesh, and the land to which it is returning. If more stress than usual has been laid in this work on the possible connection of Israel with the Harlot system in the last days, it is because this aspect has so often been neglected completely. And if cautionary notes have been struck from time to time, it is because it seems to this writer that in some writings the pendulum may have swung too far in the other direction, running the danger of contracting the gospel which was preached in Jerusalem, Judaea-, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world, and confining the scope of its last and broadest message within the shrunken boundaries of Canaan once more.

It is important, however, to note that even if natural Israel proves to be involved in the Harlot figure, the destruction can only refer to the temporary system she represents, and not to the nation as a whole, of which God has promised, "I will not make a full end of them."

Chapters 25, 26 Revelation 19 and 20

CHAPTER XXV

Chapter 19: THE DEFEAT AND DESTRUCTION OF THE BEAST

19.1: After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power belong to our God: for true and righteous are His judgements; for He hath judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornications, and He hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And a second time they say, Hallelujah. And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever. We have done with the Harlot power. This has been judged, and the blood of God's servants shed by it has been avenged. The fire whose smoke goes up eternally shows that we shall never meet this system again. It is strange and interesting, though, that the fate of the Harlot is contained entirely in the oblivion which the kings of the earth inflict on her. They strip, and devour, and burn her to destruction. The other enemies of God yet to be dealt with, the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Dragon itself, will all in due course come under direct judgement from above, and will all, together with those rejected at the judgement of the quick and the dead, end their activities in "The Lake of Fire" (19.20; 20.10, 14-15). This is the place of destruction of those who are judged directly by God or by His Son. The harlot has been dealt with by the earth.

But the removal of the Harlot is God's judgement nonetheless, for all the fact that He allowed earthly powers to carry it out for Him. That was the way God had dealt with harlot Israel, through the Assyrians and the Babylonians and Romans, and this will be the way in which He will deal with the Harlot of our epoch. It is a dog's death that the harlot died, like the death of Jezebel her prototype (1 Kings 21.23; 2 Kings 9.30-37).

19.4: The four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God that sitteth on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah. And a voice came forth from the throne, saying: Give praise to our God all ye His servants, ye that fear Him, the small and the great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth (-19.6).

The exultation of these verses must still be in anticipation. The Beast and his False Prophet are still at large, and their destruction is still to be spoken of later in this chapter. But the Harlot has gone; the saints have, it now seems nearly certain, been removed

from the scene; and only one more stage is needed. The heavenly powers are rejoicing in anticipation of the climax. Though there is, of course, the judgement seat to come which shall decide who are indeed the saints qualified to form the Bride of the Lamb, those saints are now safely out of reach of the malevolence of the Beast. Two alternative sequences are discussed below.

19.7: Let us rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should array herself in the fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he saith to me, Write, Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and he saith to me, These are the true words of God (-19.9).

It is true that the Bridegroom has one more act of war to complete before He is ready to return in peace, and 19.1 Iff will concern itself with this. But the potential Bride needs to be assured of the outlook so that she may see in proper perspective the events now being revealed. It is, of course, possible to view the chronology rather differently, and very likely that the Book is making it impossible for us proudly to suppose that we have unveiled the secrets of its sequences. We can set out the following two possibilities at least:

First sequence

- 1 The saints are caught away.
- 2 The Bridegroom defeats the Beast (19.11-20.3).,
- 3 The judgement takes place, and the saints receive the blessing of immortality (20.2-5).
- 4 The marriage of the Lamb, anticipated in 19.7-10, takes place, as described in 21.9ff.

Second sequence

- 1 The saints are caught away.
- 2 The judgement takes place, and the saints receive the blessing of immortality (20.2-5).
- 3 The marriage of the Lamb occurs as described in 19.7-9, to be elaborated in grater detail later in 21.9ff.
- 4 The Lamb defeats the Beast (19.11-20.3), assisted by the immortalized saints (19.14) who are, of course, the Bride.

Since we have to dislocate the sequences as it is given in the Book in either case, and since this is inevitable (for the Bride and Bridegroom are not married twice, and there is a description of her advent at the wedding scene in two places, one before and the other after the defeat of the Beast; and also one before and one

after the picture of the judgement), there is no issue of principle at stake in preferring the one solution or the other. In fact, however, since the "fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" of 19.8 in the wedding-scene, is immediately followed by the army following the Lamb being similarly arrayed (19.14), that would appear to be more than an accident, and it looks as though the second solution is to be preferred.

One thing is very clear: since the four Living Creatures and the twenty-four Elders and the great multitude are there to acclaim the coming marriage, and to rejoice in the revelation of the Bride in her purity and splendour, those Creatures and Elders and that Multitude are not the saints themselves. This point was made much earlier in this exposition when the same groups were encountered in 4.6-10; 5.11 (see pages 89-104), and was overwhelmingly probable even then. It has now become quite certain.

The Marriage of the Lamb

As in the rest of the New Testament, the figure of the Marriage of the Son of God and His Wedding Feast are not carried through with the consistency which a more pedantic age

expects of its figures of speech. Though the title of Bridegroom is always reserved for our Lord Jesus Christ, His saints appear in various guises. They are "the children of the bridechamber" in Mark 2.19, they are guests at the wedding feast in Matthew 22.1-10, Luke 14.16-24, Revelation 19.9; they are five wise virgins sent to meet the Bridegroom in Matthew 25.1-13; they are a chaste virgin espoused to Christ in 2 Corinthians 11.2; they are the wife-to-be whom the Lord loved so much that He died for her in Ephesians 5.25-32. They are even, leaving for the moment the figure of Bridegroom and Bride so as to concentrate more fully on the fact that "He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one" (Hebrews 2.11), members of the actual body of Christ, members in particular under the surveillance of the Head in Ephesians 2.15, to desecrate which by association with physical or spiritual unchastity is to defile the Lord Himself: "Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?" (1 Corinthians 6.12-20). In Revelation, though, the Bride-figure is dominant (as already anticipated in John 3.29) in 19.7-9 and later in greater detail in 21.2,10, we have the same mingling of figures, for those who are "invited to a wedding feast" are guests, and therefore those who are bidden as in Matthew 22 and Luke 14, and therefore the saints called to their Lord, and therefore the Bride! But is not this just as it should be? Vagrants in the highways and byways are invited as guests to a feast. They find, however, that they are also invited to accompany

their Lord as He repairs to the banqueting hall, as virgins chosen, and well-prepared. Yet when they come to the hall they find themselves, not merely guests at the lower tables, but the very Bride herself by the Lord's side. We have good reason to be glad of the mixed metaphors of Scripture.

19.10:1 fell down before his feet to worship him. And he saith to me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow servant with thee, and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

22.8: When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. And he said to me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this Book: worship God (-22.9).

This is presumably the angel entrusted with the revelation in the first place (1.1). He must have been a being of particular splendour, for despite the injunction given here, John repeats the gesture of worship and meets with the same response as the Revelation draws to its close in the last chapter. The involuntary prostration is characteristic of one in a dream, as natural and yet as unreasoning as John's fears when, earlier, no one was found worthy to open the Book in the hand of God (5.4). In his waking life as an apostle John knew perfectly well that angels were not to be worshipped, just as he knew perfectly well that all power had been given to Jesus in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28.19), and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (as illustrated in chapter 7). But in his vision he makes the mistake so as to bring out for us all the needed instruction. Angels are ministering spirits to them that shall be the heirs of salvation; they are fellow-servants with the prophets because, at least from time to time, it was through the ministration of angels that God's messages were communicated (see pages 296-298). Angels, too, are creatures, and, though in their different sphere, are pledged alike to minister to the honour of their Creator, and in no wise to usurp the worship due to Him. This angel was no exception, and in this respect differed profoundly from that angel in whom God's name was placed, to reject whom was to blaspheme against God Himself

(Exodus 23.20,23). There is no place for such an angel now that the Son of God has come, and has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1.4).

19.11:7 saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon was called Faithful and True: and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. And His eyes were as aflame of fire, and on His head were many diadems; and He hath a name written,

which no man knoweth but He Himself. And He was arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and His name was called The Word of God.

The white horse was the first to go out under the Seals (6.1-2). It has been making its conquests of men and women for the gospel through the ages, in season and out of season. But it went out "conquering and to conquer, and it is its ultimate conquest of the nations before which now we stand. On the former occasion its rider was not identified, but the fact that whoever it was — and every witness to the gospel through all the times that followed is in some way incorporate in that Rider, — was armed with a bow, which shoots arrows from a distance, represents well enough the thought that during all that long period the Lord has been working from afar, through His disciples on the earth. Now, though, the Rider is identified beyond any doubt.

First, He is called "Faithful and True", and those are the names of "the Faithful and True Witness" (3.14) to the congregation in Laodicea, the One like to the Son of man who walked among the congregations and now has mounted the horse which is to lead Him to victory. Then "In righteousness He doth judge", which is precisely what Paul said He would do on His return (Acts 17.31). Then "His eyes are as a flame of fire" and (19.15) "a sharp, two-edged sword proceeds from His mouth", both of which are taken from the description of that same One in 1.14, 16; 2.12,18. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and the very certainty of this identification confirms the exposition in chapter 1 that this was true there also.

19.14: The armies which are in heaven followed Him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His garment and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (-19.16).

The titles of the Rider of the horse are many, and not free from a certain complexity. That He is Faithful and True presents no problems. That He is King of kings and Lord of lords has already been said of Him in 17.14, and depicts His power and plan to subdue all nations so that the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of God and of His Christ (11.15), also symbolized by the "many diadems" of authority, which He is now about to remove from the heads of the Beast and the Dragon and take to Himself (12.3; 13.1). There remain "a name which no-one knoweth but He Himself, and "His name is called the Word of God". Are these two names, in which case what would be the

purpose of mentioning the ineffable one, or are they the same? In which event, how are they unknowable?

There are evident parallels. The Lord promises just such a name on the stone to be given to "him that overcometh", bearing "a new name, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth

it" (2.17); and the redeemed are to sing "a new song, which no-one can learn save the 144,000 purchased out of the earth". What was said about the former on page 71, and about the latter on page 263, applies here also. It is not that the term 'The Word of God' cannot be learned: it obviously can, by anyone whatever: but rather that the inward meaning of it can only be apprehended by the One to Whom it belongs. Only Jesus could know what it was to be the embodiment of the eternal purpose of God (John 1.1ff), what it was to enjoy the fellowship with God even in His mortal days which that relationship conveyed to Him, and what it was to be "that life, the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifest to us" (1 John 1.1-4). The Lord will return in the fulness of the power of His Father, to complete His Father's will; He will be uniquely the Father's representative, and until they share His nature — and only as spectators even then — no man, no sain-teeven, will know what it is to bear that Name.

Excursus IX: THE WORD OF GOD

One of the most characteristic expressions among conservative believers is, "The Bible is the word of God". What it means is quite clear: the Scriptures are given by inspiration of God, Who is the guarantor of all that they contain. But if each of the terms is supposed to be the equivalent of the other, then to say "the Bible is the word of God", and "the word of God is the Bible" would be the same thing. If that in its turn were true whenever we meet the expression the Bible in ordinary speech, we could substitute the word of God without changing its meaning or its import; and whenever we meet the word of God, we could substitute the Bible without making any difference in substance.

Now the former substitution affords no problem. We can read the word of God instead of the Bible without changing the meaning at all. If we have done anything, we have stressed that the Bible is not to be treated as an ordinary book might be, but is to be respected as being God's message to us: and nothing but good can come from that. But the case is not the same with the converse substitution, as we have in effect already seen. The name of Jesus (Revelation 19.13) is called the Word of God, but no-one could suggest the Bible would be relevant here.

In this passage, and in John 1.14, and in 1 John 1.1-4, Jesus our Lord is the Word, the Word become flesh. The expression the word of God, therefore is more comprehensive, and can mean other things, than 'the Scriptures'. The thought is pursued further in such passages as: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11.3), or, "By the word of God

the heavens were of old, and the earth" (2 Peter 3), though only the second of these uses the word *logos*, with which we are here concerned. Here we are not talking about the inspired record in the Scriptures which tells us that this was so, though of course that record does exist, but with the edict of God which brought creation about. These two passages sum up what is conveyed in the repeated words "God said, Let there be light", etc. of Genesis 1, and do so in terms of a quotation from Psalm 33.6-9: "By the word of God were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the word of His mouth . . . for He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast". This is as much as to say that, with God, to determine a thing is to ensure its accomplishment, and so His word becomes synonymous with His purpose and intention.

Those Hebrews who have received Christ might "fall after the same example of disobedience" (4.11), together with the fact that any such falling away must be infallibly known to God. The message is that the disciple must not think to escape detection if he forsakes the faith, followed by the invitation to take full advantage of his position, and "draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need" (4.16). The Word which is powerful to discern is also powerful to help, when the suppliant goes in prayer before the throne of grace to seek the mediation of the Word which became flesh.

Indeed this Letter practically approaches the topic of the living and active Word of God in its opening verse, where it contrasts the way in which God formerly "spoke to the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners" with that in which He has since "spoken to us in His Son" (1.1). For it does not discuss what the Son actually said in God's name, but rather what He did. God made the world with Him in mind (just as in John 1.1-3); God appointed Him Heir of all that He had made; and then the Son set about the task of "making purification of sins" by His spotless life and death, leading to His "sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1.3). All this is action, rather than words as we understand them. It is the living and personal Word which spoke to us by what God did through prophets and through His Son, and it is the same Word which discerns our hearts and can provide help in time of need.

The same thought is developed in two passages where the saint is said to have come to his new birth by the agency of the Word. James 1.18 tells us that "God of His own will brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruit of His creatures"; and 1 Peter 1.23 speaks of saints as "having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God which liveth and abideth". It is true that the message which proffers this is contained in the preaching of the gospel in words, and is now recorded in Holy Scripture, the source from which the opportunity of regeneration is learned. But it is also the true that "The word in Hebrews 11.3 is *rKema*, which, more often than *Logos*, means a saying or speech, but in fact on many occasions is used just about synonymously.

both James and Peter speak of God as playing a living and active part in the matter. In comparing the spiritual begetting of the believer with his natural birth Peter, like the Lord Jesus in John 3.1-6, effectually compares the natural birth, which resulted from the initiative

of our natural parents, with the corresponding initiative taken by God to bring us to the spiritual birth.

There is nothing inevitable about this. The potential child of God can refuse the rebirth offered to him. The one who has gone through the motions of receiving it by accepting the burial of baptism may neglect to go on learning from the Scriptures, and his opportunities of access to God in prayer, and may be false in the event to the birth he professes. This is why John emphasizes the importance of seeking victory over sin by striving to ensure that "His seed may abide in us", and by allowing "Him that was begotten of God" to keep us (1 John 3.9; 5.18). He is not saying that the children of God are perfect and beyond the reach of sinful acts, for he denies this in 1 John 1.8-10, but that when we do yield to sin we are to be blamed for it; had we been truer to our rebirth we would have sinned the less readily. It is the acceptance of the living and abiding Word which underlies the progress in righteousness of the saint of God.

The precious Holy Scriptures, which alone are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3.15), and alone are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for instruction which is in righteousness (3.16), themselves bear this witness to the

living and abiding Word Who came and died, and now ever liveth, .and "Who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8.34).

19.11: In righteousness He doth judge and make war. The writer was once asked by a member of 'The Church of Christ' in public debate whether he dare advocate the view that the Lord Jesus would conquer the world by 'military force', rather than by the gentle persuasion of the gospel. The unwelcome fact has to be stated here, as it had to be stated then, that though the Lord "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3.9), ultimately He must reach an end of the longsuffering of which Peter writes, and overcome by force those who will not yield to His persuasion. It is the world itself which refuses God's salvation. Those who can bring themselves to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry" (Psalm 2.12), will not arouse His anger and may secure His smile of blessing. But if, as it will, the world resolves to "make war against the Lamb" (17.14), then the only choice is that the Lamb should react by accepting their challenge and overcoming them. If "the kings of the earth rise up against the LORD and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2.2),

John does not say that the believer "keeps himself, as A.V. suggests, but that the Redeemer, He that was begotten of God, keeps the believer, as R.V. correctly brings out.

then unavoidably, if sadly and reluctantly, the Anointed will "break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (2.9).

19.13: Arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood.

The blood with which the garment is to be sprinkled is yet to be shed, as is appropriate in a vision, for this will occur when the Rider of the horse gains His victory over the Beast. The picture is drawn from Isaiah 63.2:

Who is This that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? — This that is glorious in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garment

like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me. . . Their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I have stained all My raiment (Isaiah 63.1-6).

The Lord confronts the world alone in that the worldly power (as we would expect from our own intimate knowledge of the heart of man) is wholly arrayed against Him. Yet, alone though He may be with regard to the nations of the world, He is plainly not totally alone, because:

19.14: The armies which are in heaven followed Him.

These words could perfectly reasonably be understood as referring to angelic hosts, now placed under the control of the Son of God; for we know that there is a time foretold when, "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power" He will be found "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God" (2 Thessalonians 1.8). This passage can hardly lose sight of this. But all the same, since in this very Book the Lord has promised to His faithful saints that they shall "rule them (the nations) with a rod of iron... as the vessels of a potter are broken in shivers", it would be foolish to allow subjective attitudes to blind us to the strong Scriptural possibilities that immortalized saints will participate in the subjugation of the Beast when the Lord returns. But neither should we overlook the other factor of angelic participation; apart from the powerful evidence of the passage quoted from 2 Thessalonians 1.8ff, the angels are also concerned with the Lord's coming in such passages as Matthew 13.39, 41, 49; 24.31; Mark 8.38. It is true that these are concerned with gathering the saints for judgement, but expressions like, "the angels shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend" seem to imply a wider duty also.

19.15: Out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God.

The reference to Isaiah 11.4 is unmistakeable: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked". It is not acceptable to argue that, because the sword is in His mouth rather than His hand, no use of real force is intended. Rather the case is that it is only necessary for the Lord to give the word of command, and what He wills must come about. For the One to Whom all power is given, it will be needful only to speak, and it shall be done. Ruling with a rod of iron, in its turn, points positively to Psalm 2.9, as we have already seen in connection with Revelation 2.27 and 12.5 as to the winepress we have considered this in connection with 14.19,20, but the Old Testament connection is quite plainly with Isaiah 63 as cited above.

19.17:7 saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, Come, and be gathered together to the great supper of God, that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great (-19.18).

This is the fate which God called down through Ezekiel on the hosts of Egypt, fulfilled at the hands of Babylon and Persia (Ezekiel 29.5). Jeremiah uses the same terrible figure of the desolation of unfaithful Israel (Jeremiah 7.33), following the prophecy to this effect already

given by Moses (Deuteronomy 28.26). The same metaphor is employed in 1 Kings 4.11; 16.4; 21.24 (of the houses of Jeroboam, Baasha, and Ahab); Psalm 79.2 (of Jerusalem); Jeremiah 15.3; 16.4; 19.7; 34.2 (of Judah); and Ezekiel 32.4 (again of Egypt). But by far the most relevant is Ezekiel 39.4,17-19, of the destruction of the hosts of 'Gog' when they invade God's land, which is quoted nearly verbatim. Here are the two passages side by side:

Ezekiel 39

Revelation 19

17

Son of man, speak to the birds of every sort, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves and come; gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you.

17

An angel said to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven: Come, and be gathered together to the great supper of God.

18

That ye may eat flesh and drink blood; ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth.

18

that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty

20

Ye shall be filled at m\ table with horses and with chariots, with mighty men and with all men of war.

men and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.

The resemblances are close and detailed. Such differences as there are are the ones we might have expected: Ezekiel is primarily concerned with the physical land of Israel and the deliverance of its people, and then (from chapter 40) with the restoration of the true worship of God among the restored people. Revelation is broader in its compass. The Beast is in control of all the kings of the earth (19.19), and the overcoming of the Beast introduces the reign of Christ over the same broad territory (20.8). But the close parallels seem to show that the rebellion of Gog and the rebellion of the Beast are the same rebellion, and the victory over both the same victory. The carnage with which it will unavoidably be associated would seem to be the fulfilment of the sign which the Lord Jesus gave in the Olivet Prophecy: "Whosoever the carcase is, thither will the vultures be gathered together" (Matthew 24.48; also Luke 17.37).

19.19:7 saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image: they twain were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and the rest were killed with the sword of Him that sat on the horse, even the sword which came forth out of His mouth; and all the birds were filled with their flesh (-19.21).

The "gathering together" corresponds to 16.16, and shows again that we are in the period of the Sixth and Seventh Vials. That the Beast and its associates are the ones which commit the aggression is again made clear (see on 17.14). This is the decisive battle, which marks the end of human control of the earth (save for that brief interval in the far future to be disclosed in 20.7ff). The political authority which has master-minded the insurrection against God and His anointed King, together with the religious puppet which established its hold over the peoples of the earth, is now at last to be "slain by the breath of the Lord Jesus' mouth, and brought to nothing by the manifestation of His coming — even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness for them that are perishing" (2 Thessalonians 2.8-10), just as it is written here: "he deceived them that had received the mark of the Beast, and them that worshipped his image".

A distinction is drawn between the Beast and the False Prophet, on the one hand, who are "cast alive into the Lake of Fire" (19.20), and their followers, who are slain by the sword and devoured by the scavengers. This is the first reference to the Lake-of Fire (the others being in 20.10, 14, 15; 21.8). It is exactly equivalent to the Eternal Fire of Matthew 25.41, and to the Gehenna of Fire of Matthew 5.22, 29, 30; 18.9; Mark 9.43, 45, 47; Luke 12.5. All these represent the permanent destruction of people and things offensive to God, and no doubt the thought of being "cast alive" into such a fate is that those wilfully sinful leaders of rebellion against the Lord, who will be destroyed when the Lord has overcome them, will go to their end bitterly conscious of what they have lost as they are condemned before His face.

But the ringleaders and the company they lead are handled differently. The one are punished with ignominy and shame, not unlike that "weeping and gnashing of teeth" with which, the Lord Jesus warned, rebellious members of natural Israel would go into their outer darkness as

they saw "many from the east and from the west" come to join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8.12; 13.42, 50; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30; Luke 13.28). The others suffer a violent end to their lives, but that is all. And of the fact that such a slaughter must occur, little pleasing as it is, there is no double (Isaiah 66.15-24; Joel 3.1-16; Zechariah 14.1-4, 13-14).

CHAPTER XXVI

Chapter 20: THE BINDING OF THE DRAGON, THE JUDGEMENTS, THE THOUSAND YEARS

20.1: / saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time (-20.3).

The dragon has already been recognized as the supreme opponent of God, the embodiment of organized sin. It has been described already as "the old serpent, called the devil and Satan" (12.9), the power which gave the authority to the Beast, having failed to destroy the Son of God. Its titles, and the fact that this power takes no part in the war against the Lamb, together with the fact that it is not destroyed when the Beast and False prophet are, all combine to establish the view that here we are dealing with sin itself, which will not finally be abolished until no single mortal sinner survives as such on the earth. Sinners of our fallen race can only be removed either by conversion to righteousness and the ultimate transformation of their nature, or by removal from the scene when this reform is not effected. From the many Old Testament passages which speak of the Lord in His kingdom ruling over peoples which need to be taught His ways (such as Isaiah 2.1-4; Zechariah 14.16ff.) it is plain that the world will continue for some time to be peopled by mortal survivors of the war of the great day of God Almighty, over whom the Lord will rule with blessing.

The power of sin to organize nations of the world against the Lord will be restrained during this period, but since these survivors will still have unredeemed mortal natures, the disposition to sin which they then, as we now, inherit from the same first parents, will continue to afflict them, and require both instruction and discipline, and where appropriate punishment. Their Satan, that is to say, can be held in check and denied the freedom to engage in corporate rebellion, but it will continue to exist until the last enemy is destroyed. It is so firmly locked and sealed into the abyss of nations that it will at this time have no opportunity of emerging, as the Beast did, and waging war against the Lamb (11.7; 13.1). But it will be there, and the time will arise when the problems it presents must be faced and solved.

The remainder of this chapter involves problems of quite a different kind from those which have occupied us in the earlier part of the Book. We are no longer asking whether there is, or is not, a more-or-less continuous picture of future events which we must try to trace, as we have repeatedly been compelled to do in chapters 1 to 19. Indeed, the acute cleavage of views based on 'ideological' differences in interpretation give place, now, to problems about whether there are, or are not, to be two judgements, what is the length of the 'thousand years,' and whether there will be a rebellion among the nations at the end of it, in which some, at least, of those who differed from each other in the earlier phases are now drawn together.

We should, of course, have been able to discuss even the previous differences in a calm and friendly spirit, which desires only that truth shall prevail, and pays no regard to either vested interpretations or the urge for novelty. But this is doubly appropriate now, for since those who will be interested in the events of this and the two remaining chapters will be those only who stand approved before the judgement seat of Christ, and who will witness with their own eyes whether what they said was true or false, modesty before they are put to the test is specially becoming.

20.2: He laid hold on the dragon. . . and bound him for a thousand years and cast him into the abyss. . . that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be finished: after this he should be loosed for a little time.

20.4: / saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them, and I saw the souls. . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

20.5: The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished.

20.6: He that hath part in the first resurrection, over these the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

20.7: When the thousand years shall be finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations.

The first question is, How long is 'a thousand years'? If no question of symbolic time had arisen, we might have said quite naively that it is just what it says, 1000x365.23 days, a thousand normal, literal years, ten centuries. But even those who are convinced that in some parts of the Book one day stands for a year (so that, to name the most obvious example, SVa times = 42 months

= 1260 days = 1260 years), find that the application of the same 'principle' here would give an unacceptably long period if it were to be regarded as 365,230 years. To imagine that sin, having had its way on the earth for only a few thousand years up to the return of the Lord, should then remain without being extinguished for 60 or so times that length, is to forsake all sense of proportion. So it is. But if the supposed principle is to be repealed for this occasion (having already been treated with some liberty on at least three previous occasions), this weakens the standing of the 'principle' still further, besides raising the question, What is to take its place, and on what grounds?

In favour of a literal reading of the number, it is often said that a 1000-year reign of Jesus would neatly finish off the antitypical creation-week, so that six thousand years of human history would be terminated by a thousand-day sabbath of millennial rest. But there are important reasons why this view should be treated with reserve:

1 We do not know for sure whether there will have been 6000 years precisely, or even approximately, of human history between the Fall and the Second Advent:

11 It is not certain that Usher's chronology, giving -4004 as the date of creation, can be regarded as valid. Many hold the view that the Scriptures leave out unessential generations in the genealogies.

12. The Septuagint gives considerably longer times between the Creation and the Flood and from the Flood to Abraham than does the Hebrew (Genesis 5 and 10). This is usually because the age at the birth of the firstborn in LXX is 100 years later than in Hebrew, and in view of the great ages to which the patriarchs lived there is nothing inherently improbable in this. It has the effect of adding about 1466 years on to the antiquity of Creation, and would completely dislocate the 6000 year-picture were it shown to be correct. It is, incidentally, LXX which gives the additional generation of Cainan quoted in Luke 3.36, but absent from the Hebrew of Genesis 10.24.

2 The assumption that the "sabbath rest that remaineth" for the people of God in Hebrews 4.9 is the Millennium is highly questionable. It is the rest which belongs to the saints, and if it applies to the future it must go on to infinity beyond the "thousand years", and it seems in any case to have application to the present state of the true believer as well as to the future.

3 There is nothing in Scripture which invites us to compare the seven days of the creation narrative with seven thousand years

of history. Peter's words that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3.8) certainly do not do so. For Peter is quoting Psalm 90.4, "a thousand ages in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night", and is certainly not enunciating a 'day-for-a-thousand-year' principle.

4 It may be in fact that Peter's quotation provides us with our answer in another way: may Jesus not have been saying through John to us that He will reign for a period called 1000 years, which is all the same with God as one day, and therefore it is not defined and is not intended to be? Jesus will reign for as long as is deemed appropriate until the intended goal is achieved? After all, this is all we need to know, is it not?, and any more minute definition of the length of the time would leave us effectively no wiser. So, certainly let us continue to speak of "the thousand years" and "the Millennium", for these are Scriptural expressions: but let us not be too demanding as to the actual length of time involved.

How many "Thousand years" are there?

In an attempt to eliminate the idea that the nations, after 1000 years of Jesus' righteous reign, could really entertain the thought of rebelling against Him, it has been suggested that more than one 1000-year period is before us in these verses: one of them before the return of the Lord Jesus, and the other subsequently. In answer to this it must be said that, unless it was the intention of the Spirit deliberately to confuse us (which we reject) this simply cannot be so. All the 'thousand year' periods in these passages must, quite without argument, be the same. The saints reign over the world for the same period as that in which 'Satan' is bound, however long or short that period may prove to be. In the list of the thousand-year passages on page 321 the term occurs twice without the article (20.2,4), and four times with: "the thousand years". This leads naturally to the understanding that the dragon is bound for a thousand years, and is allowed to deceive the nations no more until that thousand years is over. The saints reign for a thousand years, but no others join them until that thousand years are over. During their reign for that thousand years evil will be restrained, but when that thousand years are over, 'Satan' shall be released. Beyond all reasonable doubt, the 1000 years of the saints' reign with Christ is identical with the 1000 years of the dragon's confinement.

"Finished" or "accomplished"?

Another suggestion, also concerned with the elimination of a rebellion at the end of the 1000 years is that the word "finished"

in 20.3,5,7 would be better rendered "accomplished" or "fulfilled", in the sense of being brought about in its full completeness. The passage on this understanding would then say that the Dragon will be released and defeated at the time when the Kingdom of Christ is set up in its fulness. The victory of the Lord over the nations which rebel against Him would then be the last phase in establishing His authority over all the earth, and no further uprising would occur.

The following examples are given of occasions when the verb here translated "finished", *teleo*, is rendered in the ways preferred: (a) Luke 22.37 (what is written must be accomplished); (b) Galatians 5.16 (walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfil the lust of the flesh); (c) James 2.8 (if ye fulfil the royal law ye shall do well); (d) Romans 2.27 (shall not uncircumcision, if it fulfil the law judge thee?); (e) Ruth 3.18 LXX (Boaz will not rest until he have finished = fulfilled the thing this day); (f) Isaiah 55.11 LXX (My word shall accomplish that to which I have sent it); (g) Daniel 4.30 LXX (Is not this great Babylon which I have built?) . These are seven examples, and even of these (a) and (e) do not support the thesis. The former refers to the bringing to an end of certain prophetic events, and the latter to bringing certain marriage-negotiations to a termination.

But there are more serious objections. The word occurs 24 times in N.T., and about 17 times in O.T., and on nearly every relevant occasion in N.T. where the matter can be put to the test, the sense of the verb is simply "finish", bringing the thing referred to to an end, so that it continues no longer. Here is the evidence:

1 When Jesus had made an end of commanding His disciples (Matthew 11.1).

2 When Jesus had finished these parables (13.53). 3. When Jesus had finished these sayings (19.1).

4 When Jesus had finished all these sayings (26.1).

5 When they had performed all things (Luke 2.39)

6 How am I straitened till it be accomplished (12.50, meaning until His sufferings will be at an end, and their purposes achieved. The same is true in 18.3; John 19.28,30; Acts 13.29; 2 Timothy 4.7, these are numbered 7-11 in our list).

H.A.W., pages 228-233. What follows is based on the case there presented.

I cannot find the verb in (g) either in the text or in Bagster's Concordance under Daniel 4.30 (4.27 LXX). Both give the verb as *oikodomeo*.

13 When they shall have finished their testimony (11.7).

14 Till the seven plagues were fulfilled (that is, had come to an end) (15.8).

15 Until the words of God shall be fulfilled (17.17).

The evidence from the Septuagint is less unfavourable, but more complex. The word is used in Ruth 2.21, as we have said, for finishing the reaping; in Ezra 1.1 for the fulfilment of a prophecy; in 10.17 for making an end of the divorcing of foreign wives; in Daniel 11.16 for the consuming of his enemies by the 'king of the north'.

However, it is used of finishing buildings in Ezra 5.16; 6.15; Nehemiah 6.16; and in a similar sense in Ezra 7.12; 9.1. There is a very special use, though, in Numbers 25.3,5; Deuteronomy 23.17; Psalm 106.28; Hosea 4.14, in all of which the idea appears to be that of being "consecrated", even "abandoned" to idolatry. Certainly this would mean "having entered into an idolatrous condition", and could be taken to support the idea of "accomplished", but it is not of sufficient weight to overthrow the New Testament evidence.

Again, even when the word is used of something being completed, the sense is normally that the work required to reach this point has now come to an end.

Again, the 1000 years, whatever its actual length, is a period of time. We may speak of the Millennium as an institution, but in Revelation 20 it is a period, and language would cease to have any meaning if a word which on all comparable occasions means the end of a period or event, here should suddenly prove, six times in a row in a Book which has already used it in its natural sense four times, to refer to the beginning of a period or event. We have only to ask whether any reader of this chapter, save under the conviction on other grounds that the word must not be allowed to mean "finish", would ever have come to the conclusion that it meant something like "establish and begin to come into operation", to know that the answer must be No.

Lastly, if we suppose that the word might refer to the establishing of the Millennium, which thereupon proceeds on its way, are we not then deprived of any reference in this Book to its ending, and would not that be very surprising? A problem which is faced and met in 1 Corinthians 15.24-25 needs even more pressingly to be met here. There Paul tells us that the reign of the Lord Jesus will come to a point when all enemies, the last of them death, will have been overcome. At this point He will "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father". This passage, in other words, tells us to what perfect conclusion the reign of Jesus will come. Now there is no doubt that death is destroyed in the events predicted in Revelation 20 also, for "death and hades are cast into the lake of fire" (20.14). This cannot be at the beginning of the 1000 years, and so must be at its end. Yet unless *teleo* does mean "finish" here in its normal sense, Revelation fails to tell us so.

Whatever the pressures may be leading to the wish to deny the rebellion at the end of the Millennium, it has to be regarded as a desperate expedient to seek to get rid of it in this way. We might well feel that, expositively at least, the remedy is worse than the disease.

Can a post-Millennial revolt be contemplated?

First let us face the objections raised against it:

1 The kingdom of Christ is to produce lasting peace and godliness. If there is a rebellion it will have failed to do so. It is true that without this passage we might have thought that the reign of the Lord would progressively promote these things, and it may be an unwelcome thought to be told otherwise. But the objection is in no way decisive. If the Lord is to "reign until He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15.25), then enemies do exist

which have to deal with during this period, and "putting under feet" is not the language of peaceful attainment. Zechariah 14.16-18, however unhappy the reading of it may be, does speak of men with rebellious hearts who will need to be coerced into rendering to God the worship He demands. The point may not be easy, but in essence it is one which appeals to emotion rather than to evidence.

2 Rebellion against immortal powers is silly. Of course it is. But then rebellion against the immortal Creator by Adam and Eve was silly, and yet the Fall occurred. To make a golden calf after the manifestations at Sinai was silly, but it was done. It is hard to see anything sensible about crucifying the Lord Jesus, after He had brought miraculous benefits which could only be interpreted as due to the power of God. We sinners are silly people, and if sinners survive into the Kingdom of God, then silliness will survive too. And if God could withdraw from evident presence to leave Eve to face her tempter as though He were out of earshot, may He not — by whatever means He chooses — leave the silly sinners at the end of the Millennium to face the serpent's counterpart, and find themselves willingly beguiled by its subtlety?

3 Where will the rebels get their weapons from? This is a puzzling point, but nothing more. War can be waged with fists, and sticks and stones. Even pruning hooks could be used as

weapons of offence. And what other great powers might be disclosed to the peoples of the world during that wondrous reign which might seem to grasping minds, if the opportunity were apparently offered, to be available for use against the righteous potentates whose righteousness and whose power might both alike be resented?

4 A massive rebellion would stamp the reign of Christ as a failure. This is not self-evident. The Fall in Eden would have stamped Creation a failure on the same standards. Is it any more wonderful that sinners with the consequences of the Fall bred into them should sin, however stupidly, than that the innocent people of Eden should sin for the first time? Eve was taught in righteousness; the manifestation of God kept her company, and there was abundance of everything. Yet she ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and gave to her equally unspoiled husband, and he ate also. If there are sinners left at the end of the Millennium, and if it please God to give them liberty to follow their own whims, there is every reason to believe that they would conspire together in their sinning. Sinners can only be converted to righteousness with their own consent, and even the history of the most righteous reigns in Scripture — those of David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah — shows that their godliness only succeeded in imposing a veneer of righteousness on the nation as a whole, through which the native wickedness would erupt as soon as the accession of a bad king provided the opportunity.

5 Such a rebellion would require lengthy planning, of which the Lord would not be ignorant. The first statement may be true, and the second is certainly so. But who supposed it to be otherwise? When has God ever been ignorant of the designs of evil men and nations? If the alternative of "pretending to ignore" what is going on is then forced on us, what is there immoral about that? If such rebels are to exist, and to pursue their evil designs despite plain warnings (of which Revelation 20 would be one), they will already have been told that God knows their plans and their outcome. That in spite of this they should then choose to fall into a trap of their own making would be no reflexion on the One Who would judge them.

6 Does Scripture teach that divine rule will be withdrawn?

It is certainly implicit in the view that there will be a post-Millennial revolt that authority will be relaxed, but it is well-nigh explicit in Revelation 20 itself: "Satan loosed out of his prison" (20.7) is a deliberate and programmed release of the force of evil by the divine powers themselves which confined it (20.3), carrying with it liberty to "deceive the nations" again. How can this be other than a relaxation of authority, to whatever time it refers?

7 The coincidence of the names Gog and Magog with Eze-kiel 38-39 The coincidence is unquestionable, and not without its embarrassment. But the point has been made several times in this work that the national prophecies of Ezekiel are given a second and wider significance in the Apocalypse. This could well be such another occasion. "What Gog and Magog do in Israel when the Lord comes back, worldwide forces will seek to do again at the end of His Millennial reign".

8 "The wrath of God is finished" in the Vials (15.1), and there should therefore be no further outpouring of His wrath. It is most strange to find the word "finish" used here in its natural sense when it has previously been suggested that it really should mean "fully established". But the point is of no real substance in any case. If Revelation is primarily concerned with events leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus, then this end has been achieved by the time we reach chapter 20. Subsequent events would not come under that heading.

9 Is it right to base a major belief on one passage only? It is

right to be restrained about the use to which such a single passage is put, and one has sympathy with the view that the belief in a revolt at the end of the Millennium should be held with moderation, and without bitterness towards those who see the matter otherwise. Perhaps it were better not to speak of such a view as a 'doctrine' at all, but rather to see it as a reasoned conclusion from the evidence available. It is certainly in this way that it is considered here. But this is not the only teaching which rests on a single verse. The teaching that Jesus will give up the kingdom to the Father at some point rests only on 1 Corinthians 15.25-28. That there was a resurrection of saints shortly after that of Jesus rests only on Matthew 27.51-53. That a certain form of address is appropriate to female worshippers at the assemblies of the congregations of God rests only on 1 Corinthians 11.1-16. The commonly employed baptismal formula is found only in Matthew 28.20.

20.4:1 saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them; and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark on their foreheads and upon their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Who were they who sat on the thrones, and to whom was judgement given? Since we are about to hear of the saints who will live and reign with Christ 1000 years, we might think that it is they who sit on the thrones. But this is not the import here, for the

saints are described in a different way: they are the souls slain for the witness of Jesus, for the word of God, and for refusing to bow the knee to the Beast. The occupants of the thrones are the judges themselves, the Lord Jesus Christ with His angelic tribunal (Matthew 25.31; Mark 8.38; Luke 9.26; 12.8,9; 1 Timothy 5.21).

The two principal words rendered 'judgement' in N.T. are *krima*, and *knsis*, both derived from the verb *krino*. The nouns occur as follows:

Krima: Matthew 7.2; 23.14; Mark 12.40; Luke 20.47; 23.40; 24.20; John 9.39; Acts 24.25; Romans 2.2,3; 3.8; 5.16; 11.33; 13.2; 1 Corinthians 6.7; 11.29,34; Galatians 5.10; 1 Timothy 3.6; 5.12; Hebrews 6.2; James 3.1; 1 Peter 4.17; 2 Peter 2.3; Jude 4; Revelation 17.1; 18.20; 20.4.

Krisis: Matthew 5.21,22; 10.15; 11.22,24; 12.18,20,36,41,42; 23.23,33; Mark 3.29; 6.11; Luke 1.0.14; 11.31,32,42; John 3.19; 5.22,24,27,29,30; 7.24; 8.16; 12.31; 16.8,11; Acts 8.33; 2 Thes-salonians 1.5; 1 Timothy 5.24; Hebrews 9.27; 10.27; James 2.13,13; 2 Peter 2.4,9,11; 3.7; 1 John 4.17; Jude 6, 9, 15; Revelation 14.7; 16.7; 18.10; 19.2.

The distinction in meaning between the two words is not always sharp, but in general terms krisis refers to the act of passing judgement, krima to the verdict. As Vine writes:

KRISIS primarily denotes a separating, then a decision, judgement, most frequently in a forensic sense, and especially of divine judgement. KRIMA denotes the result of the action signified by the verb krino, to judge.

In the present passage this would mean that those sitting on the thrones are empowered to give a verdict on the lives and deaths of those standing before them, and do so in their favour. The saints are told in effect that they may "enter into the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25.34).

The plurality of the judgement thrones is the result of a quotation from Daniel 7.9, where "the thrones were placed, and One that was Ancient of Days did sit; His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth before Him: thousand thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgement (kriterion, LXX) was set and the books were opened". The scene is the same; only the chief Judge is mentioned, yet it seems plain that others are occupying the other thrones. The task of those sitting on the thrones, is to exercise

'Kriterion occurs in N.T. in 1 Corinthians 6.2,4; James 2.6, none of these greatly illuminating our present passage.

judgement, not to experience it, confirming the view we have formed of Revelation 14.4; and one of the tasks of this tribunal is to pass sentence on the Beast (Daniel 7.11), again confirming that the occupants of the thrones are the judges and not the judged. The Occupant of the chief throne in Daniel 7 has characteristics of the One like the Son of man in Revelation 1, including eyes as flames, yet the overall picture is in the spirit of Revelation 4, where the Father sits on the throne awaiting His crucified and risen Son. It seems plain, too, that when there "came in the clouds of heaven one like unto a Son of man", to receive from Him everlasting dominion and the allegiance of all nations (Daniel 7.13-14), this must refer to the conferment of the actual kingship over the world on the Lord Jesus Himself, since He describes His own return to the earth in just such terms (Matthew 24.30; 26.64). Yet even here the saints are not left out of the picture, for Daniel is told that they, too, shall "take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (7.18).

In fact Daniel 7.22 is also effectively quoted in Revelation 20.6, for "the Ancient of Days came, and judgement (krima, as in Revelation) was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom". This again shows convincingly that the

judgement is a verdict in favour of the saints, so that they are judged worthy to reign in the kingdom of God established by their Lord. It is, however, possible to understand the personnel in Daniel somewhat differently, and in view of the fact that the Lord Jesus has already been given all power in heaven and in earth, see Him as the Ancient of Days seated on the central judgement throne, and then the One like a son of man as the embodiment of His saints. This would be in harmony with the fact that, since the eternal purposes of God find their focus in Jesus Christ, He is called the One "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5.2). But it makes little difference. Even though all power has in principle been given to Jesus already, He will not exercise it in fact until His return, and since God says to Him in prophecy, "Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool" (Psalm 110.1), it will in fact be at His return that God will have given Him the kingdom, and even though He is the one Who will sit on the judgement throne (2 Timothy 4.1), it will be His Father's judgements which He dispenses, and His Father's rewards that He bestows: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25.34).

EXCURSUS X: THE ULTIMATE SUBJECTION OF THE SON TO THE FATHER

Just as Revelation 20 presents us, inter alia, with problems about the behaviour at the end of the Millennium of the mortal nations,

so does 1 Corinthians 15, which is in an important sense a parallel record, offer difficulties about the position of the Son of God Himself at that time. The passage in issue is:

Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For "He put all things under His feet." But when He saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is excepted Who did subject all things under Him. And when all things have been subjected under Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things to Him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15.24-28).

A naive understanding of these verses could seem to suggest that Jesus will reign over the earth only for a limited period, sufficient to get the enemies of God out of the way, that He will achieve the final triumph over death itself, and will then abdicate, ceasing to be King at all.

But it is hard to find the idea of abdication in Daniel 7: "There was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (7.14), words which precisely parallel those used of God Himself in 4.34. The same applies to the words, "His name shall endure for ever; His name shall continue as long as the sun" (Psalm 72.17), and, "They shall fear Thee while the sun endureth, and so long as the moon, throughout all generations" (72.5). One can, indeed, trace the nervousness to which the words of 1 Corinthians 15 have given rise, when the original words of a well-known hymn, -

His kingdom stretch from shore to shore

Till moons shall wax and wane no more

which are thoroughly in harmony with the Psalm - were amended to read,

His kingdom stretch from shore to shore Till sin shall curse the earth no more.

The change was evidently based on the view that, since Jesus will hand over the kingdom to the Father when He has destroyed the last enemy, which is death, and since that will only happen when the last of sin has been eliminated (Revelation 20.14-15), then the reign of Jesus will be terminated when sin has been conquered.

But the passages quoted are merely samples of the abundant scriptural evidence that the kingdom of Christ will have no end, thus we have, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1.33), with the passage from which this is tantamount to a quotation, "I will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever. . . thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7.16). Then we have, "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David and on his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever" (Isaiah 9.7). There has been much playing about, to dubious profit, with the Hebrew word 'owlam, and the Greek word, awn, to suggest that they refer to long but finite periods rather than to eternity. But though in particular cases this is probably the case, it is not possible to make this limitation when the word is also coupled with "no end", or "as long as the sun". The simple problem has therefore to be faced: whereas 1 Corinthians 15 appears to speak of an abdication at the time when death is abolished, and Revelation puts this point as the end of the Millennium, the rest of Scripture appears to know of no termination to Messiah's reign, but regards it as continuing indefinitely.

The solution to the problem is to be found in a few very simple propositions, all of which are well-nigh indisputable:

1 It is unthinkable that the Lord Jesus Christ in His millennial glory, to Whom "all power is given in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28.19), should ever be relegated to the rank of an ordinary citizen in the kingdom of God.

2 It is no less unthinkable that the Uncreate, Almighty God should ever surrender His power permanently to any other, however exalted and worthy that Other might be.

3 The Lord Jesus Christ, throughout His ministry, made it His goal to fulfil His Father's will: "I do always those things which are pleasing to My Father" (John 8.29). During His present heavenly sojourn the same is true, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2.11). It must continue to be so when He returns. His whole mission and desire was, is, and will be, to cause men to live to the glory of God.

4 For this reason, the Lord Jesus' supreme happiness will be attained when, having returned to the earth and subdued the nations, reigned righteously during the 1000 years, and abolished sin and death. He is able to offer a perfected kingdom to His Father, with all its saved and immortal inhabitants, as the sublime accomplishment of His labours.

5 In short, He who said, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day" (John 9.4), and, on the verge of His crucifixion, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (17.14), and on the cross as He was about to draw His last mortal breath, "It is finished"

(19.30), will at the end of the Millennium take the last step in fulfilling that work, and hand over the completed result to the Father Who sent Him.

But this is not abdication. The Lord Jesus, in presenting the kingdom to His Father, is not going into retirement. The kingdom is no less His after He has made the offering than it was before. He simply announces that His task has been brought to completion,

but the Book of Revelation continues to the last to regard Him as being in a position of the highest exaltation. In the New Jerusalem He is the Husband of the Bride (21.2). When it descends in symbol to the earth, its perpetual day is owed to the fact that "the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb" (22.1); there is no curse any more "because the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein" (22.3).

Then it will be the fact, what has all along been the objective, that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," and then as always it will be "to the glory of God, the Father"; and the Lord's completion of this task will be His greatest triumph and culminating glory (Phillip-pians 2.9-10).

20.4:7 saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them; and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast neither his image, and received not the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 20.5.: The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. 20.6: Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

The first thing to be looked at in these verses is the confirmation they give to the view expressed about the Fifth Seal (6.9-11; pages 122-126. The parallels drawn out on page 126 show clearly that the same two classes are referred to in both passages: those who had suffered for their faith in the period prior to the Fifth Seal - or throughout all the ages until the persecution which was to come in the last days - and those who were to suffer in that last persecution itself. Those who had been faithful during what proved to be the long-drawn-out period of the four horsemen have now been joined by those who have resisted the Beast of the last days, and the two groups of fellow-servants have come together to receive their reward.

The next thing is that there is no reference to the presence of any unworthy persons among those raised and blessed at this time. All those who are said to "have part in" the First Resurrection are, as far as this passage is concerned, treated as entitled to the blessings of living and reigning in the kingdom of Christ. From this fact it has been concluded that the unworthy ones do not emerge for judgement until the end of the Millennium, and since this is a view with major doctrinal implications it must now be examined in some detail.

Note: Pursuing his view of two fulfilments of the Apocalypse, the first in the period around 70 and the second at the return of Jesus, H.A.W. (pages 233-236) considers that this passage concentrates on the "outstanding martyrs" for Christ, because of its reference to their being "beheaded". In view of the rarity of beheading as a capital punishment for early Christians, he sees in this a special reference to Paul, who as a Roman citizen must have suffered martyrdom in this way. He sees in this scene a special and prior bestowal of rewards on such

outstanding servants, and then considers that the resurrection of the remainder of the responsible dead is referred to under the "great white throne" of 20.11-15. The latter point will be examined further below, but the former can be briefly mentioned now. It is true that we must not object to this idea of a prior resurrection of those particularly worthy, if Scripture teaches this, and certainly true that we must not do so on the ground that it would be "undemocratic" to proceed in this way. But the fact that the word "holy" is used additionally to "blessed" in 20.6 is not a sufficient reason for reading this to mean, "holy in relation to other saints raised a little later". Nor is there any good reason to single this class out as those on whom "the second death hath no power", which must surely be true of all accepted at judgement, whoever they may be. No Scriptures from elsewhere are cited to support this view of two categories of saints at the return of the Lord, and the conclusion must be judged unlikely. It seems to represent a spin-off from the view that there will be no revolt at the end of the Millennium, for if that revolt had been accepted, the great white throne would have been regarded as post-millennial.

EXCURSUS XI: 'IMMORTAL EMERGENCE', or, WHEN WILL THE UNWORTHY BE JUDGED?

A widely accepted view among conservative expositors takes the following form:

- 1 When the Lord Jesus returns, only the truly faithful will be raised from the grave.
- 2 They will emerge immediately in a deathless condition, joined to their living fellow-faithful, and caused to inherit their reward without undergoing any judgement.
- 3 The unworthy will not be brought from the grave until the end of the '1000 years', when they will be raised, together with the worthy dead who have died during this period, and all the unworthy will be judged and rejected, while the worthy who died during that period will be received into eternal blessedness.

This view, which is here described as 'Immortal Emergence' is, it is claimed, supported by the following texts:

a Revelation 20.5: Since the worthy saints are rewarded at the beginning of the Millennium, they are raised immortal; the unworthy have no part in the 'First resurrection', and are not raised until the postmillennial era of the Great White Throne (20.11).

b 1 Corinthians 15.52: Here we learn that at the return of the

Lord "the dead shall be raised incorruptible". This is regarded as immortal emergence, and it is said to follow that the unworthy are not raised at that time.

c Luke 20.35: "They that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection of the dead . . . are equal to the angels, and are the sons of God, being the sons of the resurrection". Hence all who take part in that resurrection become immortal, from which it is said to follow that the unworthy cannot be among those who attain to this resurrection.

d 1 Thessalonians 4.14: "Them that are fallen asleep in Christ Jesus will God bring with Him . . . for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we that are

alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the cloud . . . and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Since it appears that those who are raised enjoy eternal fellowship with their Lord, does it not follow that they cannot include the unworthy?

e A number of passages which state that the believer will not come into judgement, such as John 3:18;5.4; Romans 8.1.

Now were this the only evidence available, and were we quite sure that all the passages had been cited with due regard to context, then it would be reasonable to conclude that the unworthy are not raised until the end of the Millennium (though only a would actually appear to say so specifically), and that the worthy do not have to pass through the experience of being judged, but are granted their reward immediately on emerging from their graves. It is not so much that the case in connection with the unworthy is actually stated, as that it is ignored: in other words, this is a classic case of arguing from silence. Should other evidence point the other way, the alternative case would be established immediately.

Now it is certainly the case that b, c, and d do not have judgement as their topic. They are concerned to offer hope and comfort in face of adversity to those seeking to please God, and it would be inappropriate in such a context to digress into a consideration of the fate of the unworthy. If the remaining Scriptural evidence should point to the unworthy being truly involved in the events of the resurrection at the Lord's return, there would be little or nothing in these passages which could reasonably be adduced against that view.

Evidence that worthy and unworthy are raised together at the return of the Lord Jesus.

If there is such evidence, it would show that the major postulate of the 'immortal emergence' thesis is simply wrong. We consider first a catena of relevant passages:

f Daniel 12.2: "There shall be a time of trouble... At that time shall thy people be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to< shame and everlasting contempt.

g Matthew 12.36-37: Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

h Matthew 8.10-12: Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness. (Compare Luke 13.28).

j Matthew 13.30,40-43: In the end of the world the Son of man

shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire . . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

k Matthew 13.47-50: The kingdom of heaven is like to a net... So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.

m Matthew 25.1-30: After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh. He that received the five talents came. . . His Lord said to him, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord... He that received the one talent came. . . His Lord answered . . . Cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. (Compare Luke 19.11-27).

n Matthew 25.31-46: When the Son of man shall come in His glory. .. before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another. . . To them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... To them on His left hand, Depart from Me ye cursed, into the everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. . . These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

p John 5.28-29: The hour cometh in the which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill to the resurrection of judgement.

q Acts 25,15,25: There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust... As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix was terrified.

r Romans 2.5-11: The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, Who will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour and incorruption, eternal life, but to them that are factious and obey not the truth. . . wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.

s 2 Corinthians 5.10: We must all appear before the judgement-seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the

body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

t 2 Timothy 4.1: I charge thee in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus, Who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom. Preach the word. . .

u Hebrews 6.2: Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement.

v Hebrews 9.27: Inasmuch as it is appointed to men once to die, and after this cometh judgement; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, to salvation.

w 1 Peter 4.4: "They shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For this cause was the gospel preached to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. x Ijohn4.17: Herein is our love made perfect, thatwemay have

boldness in the day of judgement.

y Revelation 11.18: The nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, the small and the great, and that Thou shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth. Now all these passages suggest that the resurrection of righteous

and wicked will be simultaneous, and some of them say so categorically. It is at a certain time (f) that sleepers will awaken from death, either to life or to contempt; it is in the day of judgement (g) that men will either be justified or condemned by the words they have used; when faithful Gentiles are received into the kingdom (h), then will rejected unbelievers be cast out; it will be when Jesus sends out His angels (j) that offenders will be cast out, and the righteous shine forth as the sun; at that time (k) the angels will separate good from bad; when the men with the talents are evaluated (m) the rejected servant will see the accepted ones blessed; Jesus on His throne of judgement (n) will separate sheep from goats, for the kingdom or for rejection; it will be at a single resurrection (p) that life and adverse judgement will be given, a single resurrection will comprehend both just and unjust (q); it will be a single day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgements of God (r); it is a simultaneous appearance before the judgement seat (s) where good and bad deeds alike will be revealed. Even leaving out of account verses where alternatives are just possible, however unlikely, the case is overwhelming.

The most searching examination of these passages for possible loopholes is of no avail. To suggest, for example, that the judgement of Matthew 25.31-46 is of nations as a whole, rather than of individuals, leaves the body of evidence scarcely scratched. It is in any case unacceptable, for these are clearly people from the nations who have been given the opportunity of ministering to the Lord and His disciples, and whose rewards and punishments (the kingdom of God or the destroying fire) are appropriate to re-

sponsible persons and not to mass-communities, and they enter into that position as a result of the apostles and their followers having "gone and made disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28.19).

The passages in dispute

In general these fit easily into the picture. If, in d, dead and living alike are taken to meet their Lord "in the air", there is no problem in supposing that, between being caught away and being for ever with the Lord, there intervenes a judgement which eliminates the unworthy. If, in c, those "attaining to the resurrection of the dead" are to be like the angels, it is because the phrase is used here as equivalent to "the resurrection of life" in p. It is not the mere coming out of the ground which is the attainment, but the state of those who, having come from their graves, are freed from the power of the grave for ever more. The remainder attain to nothing: there is no attainment in being raised to condemnation.

The same in essence is true of b, of those "raised incorruptible". Paul is not concerned with the manner in which incorruptibility is attained, nor yet at this point with those who will fail to attain it. All he means to affirm is that "saints will be raised to an incorruptible nature", and if he drops any hint at all as to how this will come about, it is in the words, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15.51-52). If sleeper and waker need alike to be changed, why should not this take place as they stand approved before the judgement? This, more than anything else, would harmonize with the words which follow: "for this mortal must put on immortality, and this corruptible must put on incorruption" (15.53-54), which is just the same in spirit as Paul's later words, "In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5.2), and especially with yet later words, "We look for the Lord Jesus, who shall change the body of our humiliation, and fashion it anew like to His

own glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself' (Philippians 3.21).

The change to immortality

The immortal-emergence view would only be conceivable if there were to be no realjudgement. Only if the unworthy are out of the picture at the return of the Lord, while the worthy emerge in a state of immortality, could we dispense with a tribunal at which lives are reviewed and the verdict pronounced. As soon as the force of the passages actually produced here is realised, it becomes plain that men and women will emerge from the grave still with natures upon which either verdict could be made effective. If they are judged unworthy, they can be consigned to "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25.41,46). If they are judged worthy, they can be admitted to the kingdom when their natures have been appropriately changed.

So the faithful, as in Philippians 3.21 above, look for the return of their Lord when, as they stand before Him to receive His approval, they await the change He will produce in their nature, to make it like that which He received from the Father when He rose

from the dead to become "the first fruit of them that sleep" (1 Corinthians 15.20,23).

An acted parable

Nowhere is the truth brought out above more effectively illustrated than in the comparison of the records in John's Gospel of the resurrections of Lazarus and of the Lord Jesus:

Lazarus: Jesus cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, Come forth! He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith to them, "Loose him, and let him go!" (John 11.43-44).

The Lord Jesus: Simon Peter therefore cometh, following John, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was on His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but enwrapped in a place by itself (20.5-7).

The Lord Jesus left all the tokens of mortality behind Him in the tomb. At whatever point He enjoyed the transition to immortality, those graveclothes left behind in the tomb are there to show us that the process had already occurred before the first mortal eyes beheld their risen Lord. The napkin, "wrapped together" according to A.V., "rolled up" according to R. V., was really "enwrapped", entetuligmenon, a term more usually applied to the object inside the wrapping than to the wrapper itself, as though the napkin were in the shape it would have been had the head been still inside it (E. H. Philips, "The Outcast Christ" 1930, page 149). The resurrection of the Lord was not only miraculous in itself, but seems to have involved a miraculous emergence from the shackles of mortality, to leave those graveclothes in the condition in which they were found.

The resurrection of Lazarus was typical of that of all saints who will ultimately receive their blessing before the judgement seat of Christ, Lazarus came from his grave with the bands of his mortality strong upon him, "bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face bound about with a napkin". Not until the Lord gave the command, "Loose him, and let him go!" was Lazarus brought into fulness of life. So it will be at the resurrection of the dead. Saints

will come forth as they died, weak and mortal. For those worthy to receive blessing, the Lord will look on them, still shackled as they will be in the shroud of mortality, and command that the bodies of their humiliation should be refashioned like His own: "Loose them, and let them go!"

20.5: The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. 20.6: Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

It should now have become clear that once the resurrection at the return of the Lord has been accomplished, there will be no further resurrection until the end of the 1000 years. The Book has already told us of the judgement of the wicked at the same

time, in 11.18; it now tells us that the blessed will never lose their blessing. They have nothing left to fear. Those who, during the present dispensation have lived faithfully and have now realized their reward, are beyond the reach of death. But there are others, who survive or are born into the new epoch, who have still to make their choice of obedience or the opposite, in the knowledge that they, too, will one day have to stand before the Lord, and only then will, if they have lived faithfully, escape "the second death". We know that the second death does not apply exclusively to the end of the Millennium, for the Beast and the False Prophet have already been cast into the Lake of Fire, and we are told, "This is the second death, even the Lake of Fire" (20.14).

20.7: When the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 20.8: and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 20.9: and they went out over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came out of heaven and devoured them.

We review briefly what has already been discussed in detail. The power of evil will be allowed to have its brief independence again before being hustled to its ultimate quietus. As in Ezekiel 38-39, Gog of the land of Magog gathers together hosts from many nations (ten of whom are mentioned by their ancient names in Ezekiel 38.1-6). Numbers as the sand of the sea were the abundance promised to Israel and to Abraham's seed (Genesis 22.17; 32.12; 1 Kings 4.20,29; Isaiah 10.22; 48.19; Jeremiah 33.22; Hosea 1.10); but it is also used of the overwhelming numbers of their enemies (Joshua 11.4; Judges 7.12; 1 Samuel 13.5, so that we have here the familiar picture of the saints of God being besieged by numbers which, if they stood alone on an equal footing, would be irresistible. Compared with these the "camp of the saints and the beloved city" is tiny (20.9). As in many other places, the term rendered "earth" could also be rendered "land", like its parallel expression in Hebrew. But we have again the necessary expansion from the affairs of natural Israel and its land to those of spiritual Israel and its world. The "holy city" we are to meet in the next chapter is "the New Jerusalem" (21.2), and this is the true camp of the saints; and what better adjective could be used than "beloved" for a city which is "prepared as a Bride adorned for her Husband"?

It has sometimes been supposed that, because we do not meet the New Jerusalem under that name until after the description of the millennial period in Revelation 20, it must represent a post-millennial state of affairs. But it is involved in the marriage of the

Lamb, which is certainly not post-millennial, and therefore this cannot be so. Rather, the New Jerusalem represents the condition of the immortal saints in association with their Lord, which, during the 1000 years, distinguishes them from the other inhabitants of the earth, and subsequently includes the whole of the surviving, now glorified and immortalized, creation.

This time the rebellion is not the subject of the complex events by which the nations were defeated at the time of the Lord's return to the earth. Judgement is sudden and swift, and direct from above. As it was in the days of the folly of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10.2), or in the punishment of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16.35), and as Elijah was able to withstand the companies of fifty sent against him (1 Kings 18.38); as the Two Witnesses were able to withstand the overwhelming forces of their enemies during the days of their prophecy (11.5), and surpassing utterly the counterfeit miracles of the former False Prophet (13.13): so will the power of God destroy the insurgents.

20.10: The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and the false prophet are; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Once the 'devil' has been destroyed there will be nothing to prevent perfection being achieved. The lesser, political and pseudo-religious powers of evil were dealt with at the beginning of the Millennium: the Beast and the False Prophet are already consigned to the place whence no-one and nothing returns (19.20). Now the old Serpent is to follow to the fate prepared for it. As truly as the kingdom of God was prepared before the foundation of the world for the happiness of God's servants, so truly was the endless destruction foreseen for the sin which stood in the way of the glory of God filling the earth: "the eternal fire" was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25.41). There is an evident awareness of this verse in the present passage, for it has "the devil and his angels", just as we found them in 12.7,9; and it is perhaps the only other place in Scripture which foresees that the condemnation of the wicked at the time when the Lord returns will not immediately be followed by the abolition of sin in its entirety. The sinners are sent from the judgement seat to the Lake of Fire (where the Beast and the False Prophet are), but the devil, the dragon, sin in its last stronghold, is not to follow until later. The place is prepared for it, but as yet it has not arrived there at the time of which Matthew speaks. It is Revelation 20.10 which shows us when it does so.

We have already discussed the meaning of being "tormented day and night for ever and ever" in connection with 14.10-11

(page 263). That it cannot here be interpreted of actual physical torture of real human beings is quite plain from the fact that none of the entities involved are in fact real human beings: Beast, False Prophet, and above all Dragon, represent human behaviour, and the organizations which give substance to that behaviour, political and personal. That all these things are cast into the Lake of Fire means that such organisations and such behaviour will never arise again. They are gone for ever, and with them (20.14) go death and the grave. The memory of them may remain, so as to show from what evil men have been recovered, but the things themselves will never recur.

Chapters 27,28 Revelation 20:11-21:8

CHAPTER XXVII

Chapter 20.11-15: THE JUDGEMENT OF THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

This brings us almost to the last of the major controversial situations in connection with the conservative interpretation of the Apocalypse. When does the judgement represented by these verses take place? If the results accepted in the last few pages are correct, it would not seem that there can be much doubt. The earth by this stage will have enjoyed the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ for '1000 years'; the saints will have reigned with Him, and 'Satan' will have been bound, during the same period. The revolt will have taken place and will have been crushed; the power of sin will have been consigned to the Lake of Fire. The abolition of death and the grave are about to occur (20.14). Where else can this judgement be located than at the end of the Millennium, and therefore how can it fail to be additional to, and later than, the judgement of the saints who reign with Christ during the Millennium itself (20.4ff)?

It really does seem that these points are irresistible: and yet they should not be allowed to override completely the ones made by those who come to a different conclusion. Thus, the parallels between the language used here, and that used in some other places in Scripture, is too striking to be ignored:

20.11:7 saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose Face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

Daniel 7.9: I beheld till thrones •were placed, and One that was ancient of days did sit: His raiment was white as snow . . .

Daniel 2.35: The iron, clay, brass, silver, and gold, were broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, and no place was found for them.

20.12: Books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life.

Daniel 7.10: The judgement was set, and the books were opened.

19.20: The beast. . . was cast into the lake of fire.

Daniel 7.11: The beast was taken, and his body destroyed.

20.12: The dead were judged. . . according to their works.

Romans 2.5: God will render to every man according to his works.

There is thus a strong correspondence between the terms used in Revelation 20.11-12 for the judgement before the great white throne, and those used in Daniel and in Romans for the judgement at the return of the Lord, while Daniel's scene pictures the destruction of the Beast in terms used in Revelation 19, a scene which is certainly not postmillennial. This similarity has led one recent writer to express himself in this way:

The proposition submitted here is that the. . . judgement scene associated with the great white throne is, in fact, the judgement seat of Christ. The resurrection that is connected with this judgement is therefore the resurrection that takes place when the Lord returns to the earth. Here is a summary of the evidence:

1 The fact that sequences are sometimes reversed in the Apocalypse has already been established. A big step back in time would thus be introduced by the words "And I saw. . ." in 20.11.

2 The words of 20.10 concerning the dead being tormented ... do not seem to lead on to the great white throne scene of 20.11. There is a break in the subject matter.

3 The words of 20.11, "... from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them" invite comparison with those of 6.14, "the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together..." The verbal link between the two passages, obviously designed, would be pointless if this were a post-millennial scene.

4 ... With Daniel 7.10, . . . An occasion of judgement in which "the books were opened" is common to both. The occasion is manifestly the same, and. . . Daniel 7. . . cannot be post-millennial—in terms of Revelation, this is the judgement of the Beast, and he is certainly destroyed before the end of the millennium. Observe that the rebels at the end of the millennium are cast into the lake of fire "where the beast and the false prophet are" (20.10). The(y). . . have been cast into the lake of fire earlier.

5 In... Revelation 20 the book of life is opened. . . concerned with the destiny of those whose probation will end with the Lord's return. It is unthinkable that the only reference to the opening of the book of destiny concerns the end of the p millennium. . . This is the judgement seat of Christ. It is a white throne, a symbol of righteous judgement.

Now the case is well-stated, but it is far from impregnable. There are, of course, movements back and forth in time in the Apocalypse, but the link between the great white throne and the

P.W., pages 187-193. The omissions made for brevity do not distort the evidence there offered, and the only other alterations made have been to bring the spelling and manner of representing Scripture-references into line with the system used in the present book.

destruction of the dragon, and between the casting of the latter into the lake of fire and the same fate for the rejected persons, and for "death and hell", most strongly suggests that this is not one of those dislocations. This deals with point 1. As to point 2, this is simply incorrect. There is the best possible connection between the destruction of the dragon and his followers in 20.10 and that of the dead rejected at this judgement in 20.14-15.

We are in the middle of a cleaning-up operation. God has dealt with the rebels; He will now deal with any others who must be rejected, and then with death and hell themselves, casting all alike into the Lake of Fire. This argument is strongly in favour of a postmillennial judgement. As to 3, there is certainly a correspondence between the language of 20.11 and that of 6.14. But no one at all could claim that 6.14 was fulfilled immediately on the opening of the Sixth Seal: it was portended then, but the actual fulfilment had to wait at least until all the trumpets had been sounded and all the Vials poured out. This Seal tells us that the time when God will begin the abolition of earthly rule and authority is about to start. If its ultimate completion must await the perfection of the end of the Millennium — and surely it must — then this objection loses its force.

Turning to 4, it is certainly true that Daniel 7.10 with its destruction of the Beast cannot be postmillennial. But is also true that Revelation 19.20 and 20.10 conspire together to tell us that the destruction of the Beast had already occurred before the dragon was cast into the Lake of Fire. This point actually seems to have been conceded, and becomes rather evidence for the post-millennial view than otherwise.

Point 5 is the most telling. It would be surprising if the Book of Life had no relevance to the first judgement, or if no reference to its relevance were made. This point cannot, however be sufficient to override the fact that it is at this point that death and hell are finally abolished; for since the writer of the notes above did believe that there would be a postmillennial revolt, he could clearly not have believed that mortality would be abolished at the beginning of the millennial reign of the Lord.

A suggested reconciliation is this: There is no need to distinguish between the appearances of the throne of judgement, at the beginning and end of the 1000 years. It is the same Lord Who is judging on the same canons, and with the same glory and righteousness. There is no need, either, to distinguish between the 'books' used in record on the two occasions. So what applies to one applies equally to the other. John has passed rather quickly over the judgement which leads to the enthronement of the saints at the beginning of the Millennium (20.4-6), the primary object

CHAPTER XXVIII

Chapter 21.1-8: THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

21.1: / saw anew heaven and anew earth, for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away, and the sea is no more. 21.2: And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her Husband. 21.3: And I heard a great voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them and be their God; 21.4: and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more: the first things are passed away.

Up to the end of Revelation 20 we have been constantly concerned with a world in which the things of God exist side by side with the still-continuing things of man. While the Lord is at the right hand of His Father in heaven, His kingdom is represented on earth only by those "strangers and pilgrims" in a world ruled by the Gentiles who are faithful to their calling in Him (1 Peter 2.11); and as for the rest, "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5.19; The Christian witness during this epoch is a minority witness in an unbelieving world. With such a world we are concerned in the Apocalypse up to the closing verses of chapter 19. Up to then we have only had glimpses of what the new world of God's glory would be like.

When the Lord Jesus returns the situation will be dramatically altered. He will Himself now rule, and the power of sin will be under crippling restraint. Thus the earth at that time will consist effectively of two camps. First there will be the Lord and His saints; and, second, there will be the mortal population of the earth. No doubt there will be intimate contact between the two, but the difference between immortality and mortality is fundamental, and complete intermingling there cannot be. Indeed, among the mortal population there will evidently be those who chafe at subordination to the divine rule, and, given the opportunity, would and will rebel against it, as we have seen.

When that rebellion has been suppressed, however, and all causes of such rebellions finally extinguished, righteousness and its associated deathlessness will be universal, and it is this picture which is introduced in 21.1-4.

But it is not something totally new. We met the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and her marriage to the Lamb Himself in 19.7.

Those for whom the Lord suffered and died, that He might present them to Himself collectively as "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5.27), will enjoy that experience of union with their Lord as soon as they are admitted to His kingdom. The promise, "he that overcometh shall eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (2.7), is fulfilled in the immortal saints at that point, even though we do not hear again of that tree until 22.2. Thus the New Jerusalem, of which we do not hear until 21.2,10, must nevertheless have been co-existing with the remaining sinful world, as representing those saints thus far glorified. It already exists in their aspirations, since they have already come to the "heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12.22; Galatians 4.26) by faith in Christ, and so John can write to all the faithful, and say, "Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie" (22.15).

21.9: There came one of the seven angels who had the seven vials, who were laden with the seven last plagues: and he spake with me saying, Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. 21.10: and he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Thus there is a heavenly fellowship belonging to the disciple which begins with baptism; it survives in the record of the heavenly Book of Life even should the disciple die; it is restored to him at judgement when the Lord returns to the earth; it is enjoyed together with the Lord, and in the presence of the mortal people of the earth, during the Millennial period; and it triumphs and becomes universal when the last enemy is destroyed, and the earth is truly filled with the lasting glory of God among the now-universal immortal population of the world.

Both the expressions, "new heaven and new earth" and "new Jerusalem" contribute to our understanding of this relationship, as we shall see.

The concept of a new heaven and earth is well-based in both the Testaments

1 Isaiah 65.17-19: I create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered nor come into mind ... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy. And I will rejoice with Jerusalem, and joy in My people".

2 Isaiah 66.22: As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain.

3 2 Peter 3.7, 13: The heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men . . . According to His promise we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

So, in the New Testament, is the idea of heavenly fellowship, culminating in the picture of the heavenly Jerusalem.

4 Galatians 4.26: The Jerusalem which is above is free, which is our mother.

5 Ephesians 2.6: God hath raised us up with Jesus, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

6 Philippians 3.20-21: Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the image of His glory.

7 Colossians 3.3,4: Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.

8 Hebrews 12.22,26: Ye are come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now He hath promised, saying: Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word. . . signifieth the removing of those things which are shaken.

These, together with the anticipatory picture in the Apocalypse itself (14.1) of the Lamb on Mount Zion with the blessed, show us the saints in their present life, bodily on the earth, but in fellowship with God and His Son in heaven (compare John 14.1,23), where their treasure is, and where the Lord Jesus guards their lives. Then the heavenly Jerusalem, hitherto represented on earth only by these pilgrims, itself comes down for those who at His coming are admitted into the kingdom then established. Finally, when all rule and authority and power have been put down, the whole earth is comprehended within it. The passing of the old heavens and earth, and the advent of the new Jerusalem, are parallel concepts. Each takes place in the same stages, and as the old order disappears completely, so all that is left is the New Jerusalem, and the new heavens and earth of the perfect new creation.

Excursus XIII: WILL THE HEAVENLY BODIES BE ABOLISHED?

The recent powerful revival in the creationist approach to the creation-narratives of Genesis 1-2 and the subsequent accounts of the Flood in Genesis 6.9 have produced some interesting supplementary points. It is argued in the writings and talks of J. D. Whitcombe and H. M. Morris, on the most literal of interpretations of Genesis 1, that:

1 As a result of the work of the First Creation-Day, light directly from the Almighty Himself illuminated the earth, which was alone in space, and had its day and night simply by rotating around its own axis, presenting first one side and then another in the direction of God's light.

2 This situation was changed on the Fourth Creation-Day, when God created the heavenly bodies, so that the earth subsequently received its light from these, and the direct divine light no longer shone upon it.

3 The old situation will be restored during the post-Millennial period, for then the old heavens will have passed away (as in the passages just quoted), and the New Jerusalem will not be lit up by sun or moon, but once again by the direct light from God. This will now shine from the throne of God and Lamb, and therefore there will be no night. Once more the earth will be alone in space, and the heavenly bodies will cease to exist.

The view has been taken up nearer home, and while we must always acknowledge that our limited knowledge of the ways of God scarcely qualifies us to speak with assurance of what the situation will be like when God makes all things new, it does seem to be of interest to examine whether the views mentioned above are well-founded, for it affects our attitude to the interpretation of Scripture as a whole if such conclusions are adopted.

In the first place, the view is founded upon a very literal interpretation of highly symbolic books. If we assume the correctness of the view that Genesis 1.3,16 does tell us that the light which reached the earth on the First Day was not that of the sun, what we then have as simple facts are the following:

4 A number of Bible passages speak of the abolition of the present heavens and earth. They include Psalm 102.25-26 (cited in Hebrews 1.10-12); Isaiah 34.4; 51.6; 65.17; 66.22; Matthew 5.18; 24.35; Hebrews 12.26-27 (citing Haggai 2.6); 2 Peter 3.7-13; Revelation 21.1.

5 Revelation 21.23 does say that the New Jerusalem will have no need of sun or moon to give it light, which will come instead from the glory of God. The words are quoted from Isaiah 60.19. (see page 211). Neither of these passages, however, speaks of any abolition of sun or moon (still less of stars), nor do those cited under 4 specifically.

6 In Psalm 72.5,7 we read, "They shall fear Thee while the sun endureth, and so long as the moon throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth, in His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon be no more"; and in 72.17, "His name shall

endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun". It is hard to see how these can in any way be reconciled with the notion that the heavenly bodies will be abolished and the earth be alone in space.

7 The same applies to Psalm 89.36; 113.1-3; 136.8-9; 148.1-6; perhaps Isaiah 59.19; Malachi 1.11.

8 The same passages which speak of the 'abolition' of the heavens speak of the earth in the same way. Yet this is not the view of those who tell us that sun and moon will be no more. The earth is to remain, on their teaching, and remain alone. It is true that it will be so transformed, particularly as the Millennium comes to its close, that it can rightly be called a "new earth", but it is unwarrantable to use the same language to convey the physical abolition of the heavenly bodies, and the mere transformation of a surviving earth.

9 It is, of course, right to preserve the earth from destruction. "God formed it not in vain: He formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45.18); He "hath given it to the children of men", in contradistinction to the heavens which He has reserved for Himself (Psalm 115.26).

10 If anything were needed to show that a literal interpretation of these passages about the abolition of the heavens and earth is not to be sought, it would be supplied in Peter's words that we look for a new heaven and earth "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3.13). For is it not written of the present heaven that God's will is done there, as a model for what shall be on the earth when the Lord has finished His work? "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10).

There is no escaping the drift of this evidence. The Bible does not teach the abolition of the heavens as we know them when God's righteousness is finally established on the earth.

On the contrary, the passages in the Scriptures which bear a literal interpretation rather teach their permanence. The symbolic writings in Isaiah, the Psalms, Revelation, 2 Peter, and elsewhere, speak of the total, abolition of the existing order of things, and of the establishment among the saints of God of so intimate a relationship that a light is theirs with which the light of the natural sun does not compare.

The holy city. We met this expression first in 11.2 where, because the angel is bidden measure the temple within it, we must again conclude that it represents the congregation of the saints: though in the state of affairs which then existed it was very much a city under siege, the saints of God under the thralldom of a wicked and persecuting world. The term recurs in 21.10 and 22.19 of this same "new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven". The combined thought of the Lord returning to reign literally in geographical Jerusalem, "the city of the great King" (Matthew 5.35; Psalm 48.2), and yet bringing with Him from heaven the symbolic New Jerusalem in which are preserved the lives of all His saints, can usefully be taken further by comparing the following passages, where 'holy', and 'Jerusalem', or cognate terms, occur together: Psalm 2.6; 15.1; 24-3; 43.3; 99.9; 138.2; Isaiah 52.1-23; 56.7; 65.25; 66.20; Daniel 9.16; Joel 3.17. It is remarkable that in Matthew 27.53 the expression 'holy city' is of the physical Jerusalem, which had already rejected the Lord and crucified Him, as the place into which the bodies of saints raised from the dead at the time of the resurrection of Jesus entered and made their appearance to many. Here we see how that firstfruits-resurrection typified the great rising from the dead which will occur at the Lord's second coming: the Jerusalem which witnessed this is typical of the true 'holy city' which was to be established when the harvest-resurrection should take place.

The tabernacle of God is with men. The tabernacle of God has been with men before: in the Wilderness (Exodus 25ff), and in Shiloh (Joshua 18.1), finishing up its chequered existence, deprived of its Ark, at Gibeon (1 Kings 3.4; 1 Chronicles 16.39), and perhaps at last enjoying honourable retirement in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8.4) as Solomon built the Temple which was to replace it. But the presence of God among His people in Tabernacle or subsequent Temples

was temporary, precarious, and dependent on His forbearance in the face of the constant backsliding of His people. In the days of Zedekiah the glory of God forsook Solomon's temple (Ezekiel 1; 3.23; 8.4; 10.4,18; 11.22-25), and was not fully to return until the time of the restored Temple of the future age (43.2-51; 44.4). God had been pleased to accept the temple of Zerubbabel (Haggai 2), and even to regard that built under the patronage of Herod the Great as "My house" (Matthew 21.13; John 2.16) until the Jews finally rejected Jesus, when it became necessary to pronounce sentence against it: "Your house is left to you desolate" (Luke 13.35).

Since that time God, Who could never in any case be contained within "temples made with hands" (Acts 7.48; 17.24; Isaiah 66.1-2), has for the time abandoned such temples completely. It was always necessary, even where a temple was authorized, to worship God in spirit and in truth, but from the time of the abandonment of the temple of Herod men must do so without the help of any temple on earth, whether in Gerizim (as the Samaritans had preferred), or in Jerusalem, or anywhere else (John 4.20-24).

This is far from meaning that, since 70, God has had no temple at all. The Lord's promise of abiding places in "My Father's house" for those who love God and keep His Commandments (John 14.1-23), shows this plainly. So does John's reference to "the temple of His body" which should be raised after the Jews had destroyed their own temple by murdering Him (John 2.19-21). So do the references to the disciples as constituting the temple of the living God in the Epistles (1 Corinthians 3.16-17; 6.19; 2 Corinthians' 6.16; Ephesians 2.21). The promised presence of God with the believer keeps alive the immanence of God in the world, however little it is recognized.

But, for all that, this witness to the present activity of God is local and limited. What is promised in 21.1 is a recognizable, personal, evident presence of God in the new world which the Lord Jesus will bring into being through His return. The words, "God Himself shall be with them and be their God" (21.3) are practically a repetition of 2 Corinthians 6.16, showing that the concern which God feels for the present wellbeing of His saints is the same in kind as, though much smaller in scale than, that which He will show to them when the Lord Jesus has returned.

21.3: He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.

This promise has already been made, in 7.17 (pages 143-145). It applies specially, in both places, to the weeping caused to the disciples by the suffering they have had to endure at the hands of the enemies of the gospel. Disciples have been sustained with spiritual food during their tribulations, and in their bodily sufferings the Lord's grace has been sufficient for them. Now the fulfilment of the promises of Isaiah 49.10 and Psalm 23.2 is theirs. But of course the promise goes as far back as the curse, when by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin (Genesis 2.17; 3.17-19; Romans 5.12); the travail which that transgression brought on the whole creation will be relieved permanently when the children of God are manifest in their fulness (Romans 8.18-22).

21.3: He that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things

new. And He saith, Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to Him that is athirst of the fountain of life freely.

All things have already become new to the new creature in anticipation (2 Corinthians 5.17): but now in realization. For the saint of this age at the return of the Lord, and for the faithful of the Millennium at the last session of the great white throne, He that sitteth on the throne pronounces the passing of the past. The Lord is fulfilling for them all His own promise: those who ask drink of the Lord are given living water (John 4.10; 7.37) in the living things of the gospel. Now the promise is achieved that they shall never thirst (4.14). They that hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5.6) will now be filled never to want again. "Ho! everyone that thirsteth! Come ye to the waters!" (Isaiah 55.1), the prophet had called. Now they that heeded shall thirst no more. One sometimes hears of those who speak of their pleasure at being thirsty, for the joy it brings them in slaking their parched throats. And they are right: it is not so much that it is good to know no want that cannot be satisfied; it is also good to feel an appetite that can, and this is the condition of the saint of God, now, and even then: "Like as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul, thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42.1-2). So in that joy of wanting and receiving, the Apocalypse comes to its end with the words, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! and he that heareth, let him say, Come! And he that is athirst, let him come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (22.17).

So runs the constant message of the New Testament. The Lord Jesus is to us not merely history and prophecy. He is for the present also. He died that we, crucified with Him, might live to God. He was raised from the dead that, by the issue from God through Him of the power which raised Him, His saints might grow in grace ready for the time when God would quicken their mortal bodies (Romans 8.11). Then, when that time comes, the Lord will make permanent His work of grace among His saints, purging out the last remnant of their unworthiness (1 Corinthians 3.10-15), and changing the body of their humiliation like to His own glorious body (Philippians 3.21).

"I am Alpha and Omega" has already been commented on (pages 32-35). It is spoken here by "Him that sitteth on the throne", which is the Father, but, as we showed, is in process of fulfilment through Him who has now been granted the name which is above every name, as is made very plain in 22.13.

21.7: He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.

The expression "he that overcometh" is found in each of the Seven Letters (2.7,11,17,26; 3.5,12,21). In this Book the overcoming relates primarily to the evil forces in the world, but in 1 John the victory contemplated is over "the evil one" or "the world" (2.13,14; 4.4; 5.4,4,5), and though no doubt this also includes withstanding persecution, it is there first of all concerned with repelling the assaults of wickedness within. What is plain in all contexts, however, is that the victory is not that of the saint's own personal stamina against the forces of evil, for if "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5.4), the battle is transferred from the ground of our own self-reliance to that of our reliance on God: because the saint trusts in God, he is assured that he will not be tested above that which (in His strength) he is able to bear (1 Corinthians 10.13).

"I will be his God, and he shall be My son". The believer is a child of God because he believes: "As many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become children of God (John 1.12); and, "Now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him, even as He is (1 John 3.2). Even in the case of the Lord Jesus, Son of God by birth as He unquestionably was, His Sonship was reaffirmed as His baptism and was given a final establishment at His resurrection, when He "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by His resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1.4). It is even more essentially the case with His brethren in faith: for during the days of our pilgrimage we might prove false to our adoption as children, and it is only after the successful overcoming that it can finally be said, "They are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20.36). There are both present and future regenerations: already we have been begotten again through "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3.5), but there is to come "the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 19.28;). Then will membership of the family of God be confirmed for all who are worthy of it, permanently and inalienably.

21.8: But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

No doubt this fate awaits those rejected both at the beginning

and at the ending of the 1000 years. The second death is the inflicted death after condemnation at judgement. The list is not unlike the list of sins given in Gospels and Epistles which would exclude from the kingdom of God, such as:

1 Corinthians 6.9: Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5.19: The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wrath, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they which practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5.5: This ye know, of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.

Mark 7.21: From within, out of the heart of man, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man.

All these categories except the last (and this, too, by implication), list offences which, if impenitently indulged in, will exclude from participation in the kingdom of God. All the categories give cause for anxious thought, for those in the Gospels and Epistles include

offences (like covetousness, enmities, strife, envyings, pride, and foolishness — to name only a few) from which few of us could claim to be free. But the list before us varies from those which we might almost call obvious (like murder, fornication, and idolatry), through others which sound bad but are not easy to define (like being abominable, and sorcery), and on to one which though it might seem obvious (unbelieving) has far-reaching implications; and finally one which is very obvious indeed, and for which we might earnestly wish to see an exception made. This one is fearful, and, however reluctantly, must be faced.

Sorcerers might seem an outdated class, defined as they are as those "devoted to magical arts... especially using drugs, potions, spells, enchantments"; but having regard to the current plague of hallucinogenic drugs, and other forms of practice designed to promote escape from reality, the dangers are in fact particularly acute in our age. The word is *pharmakeia*, the origin of the term

used in the legitimate rather than the irregular drugs-industry nowadays, and it or its derivatives are found in 9.21; 18.23; 21.8; 22.15, and also among the sins listed in Galatians 5.20.

Abominable is derived from the verb *bdelussomai*, and, with related words, occurs in Romans 2.22 (thou that abhorrest idols); Matthew 24.15; Mark 13.14 (abomination of desolation); Luke 16.15 (abomination in the sight of God); Titus 1.16 (unruly disciples are abominable, disobedient and reprobate); and Revelation 17.4,5 (cup full of, and mother of, abominations), as well as in the present verse. It is not easy to attach a specific meaning to the offence: apart from revealing the existence of disgusting and detestable practices, associated with the nastier side of idolatry and, no doubt, public sexual abuses, we are left to our own imagination. But prevailing licentiousness, and the all-too common delight in the filthy which goes with it, give a general idea of the frame of mind which, wallowing as it does in the revolting, is fundamentally unfitted for inheritance in the kingdom of God.

That the unbelieving have no place among the blessed might almost seem a truism. The word is *apistos*, and is found in Matthew 17.17; Mark 9.19; Luke 9.41; 12.46; John 20.27; Acts 26.8; 1 Corinthians 6.6; 7.12-15; 10.27; 14.22-24; 2 Corinthians 4.4; 6.14-15; 1 Timothy 5.8; Titus 1.15, and the present passage. In the Bible, to "believe not" is not invariably, perhaps not even commonly, to be unconvinced that something is true. It is rather to refuse belief, to decline to exercise faith, turning one's back on the evidence provided and refusing to entertain the credentials of the message. It is a kind of mental rebellion against God's way, and the related verb, *apisteuo*, in the famous "he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16.16), plainly means that those who receive the message of the gospel, and wilfully refuse to submit themselves to it, come within the scope of the judgements of God.

Liars. Here, and in 2.2 and Acts 6.13, the word is the adjective *pseudes*; the corresponding noun, *pseustes*, occurs in John 8.44, 45; Romans 3.4; 1 Timothy 1.10; Titus 1.12; and 1 John 1.10; 2.4,22; 4.20; 5.10. The prefix *pseudo* - is used of anything counterfeiting the genuine article or office which follows (as in 'false prophet'), while the verb, *pseudomai*, found in Matthew 5.11; Acts 5.3, 4; Romans 9.1; 2 Corinthians 11.31; Galatians 1.20; Colossians 3.9; 1 Timothy 2.7; Hebrews 6.18; James 3.14; 1 John 1.6; Revelation 3.9, speaks of telling untruths with the intention of deliberately deceiving the hearers on matters of serious substance, as Paul's repeated defence of himself against the charge of lying in his relations with the churches he founded shows. Even false witness is not far from the meaning of the word, and general and deliberate insincerity underlies it.

The most painful of all the words to examine, though, is fearful. The other faults have about them the air of deliberate transgression, but this one pricks the hearts of any who must confess to physical or mental timidity. The adjective used, *deilos*, occurs here and (in connection with the disciples' fear of the storm on the lake) in Matthew 8.26; Mark 4.40; the related noun is found in 2 Timothy 1.7 ("God has not given us a spirit of fear"), and the related verb occurs in John 14.27 ("let not your heart be afraid"). This group of words is far less common than the ordinary word for fear, *phobos*, and its derivatives, and refers to a cravenness which will not bring itself to trust in God, but draws back from the path of salvation rather than face the harm that men might do. In days when, for a long period, we have been free from serious threats to our lives and liberties, it may well be that this is the peril which afflicts many of us most, and which we should most earnestly pray for help to overcome. For it seems that the Lord provides no exemption for those who, through weakness of the flesh, deny His name in times of extreme trial. The promise is always there, as we have seen, that "God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10.13). This is coupled with a salutary warning to the self-confident, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (10.12), and it is painfully clear that it is not a merely human capacity to endure of which Paul is writing. The basic ingredient in the overcoming is trust in God, not trust in oneself. We are not told that God will adjust the hardships to the capacity of His servants, but that He will adjust His help to their need.

There is a startling transition in the list of faithful people in Hebrews II, which brings out this lesson disconcertingly well. Some by faith triumphed over their enemies and their adversities: such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah (11.32). Some were kept secure from raging lions (11.33; Daniel 6.22), or were uninjured by the fiery furnace (11.34; Daniel 3.25), or, among many other blessings, secured the resurrection from the dead of those they had lost (11.35; 1 Kings 17.22). And yet, in the middle of a verse, in the middle of a thought even, other faithful people are named who received no such deliverance, but were tortured (11.35), and endured unbelievable sufferings which they withstood in the same faith (11.35-38). There is no guarantee that faith will make life easy, and we could not understand the Apocalypse at all if we sustained such an illusion. The only guarantee is that faith will make the hardships, whatever they may be, endurable. "There shall not an hair of your head perish"; "He

that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10.22; 24.13; Mark 13.13).

There has never been a harder passage for this writer to compose. A conviction that the Apocalypse speaks of a time of severe trial for saints before the Lord returns has been simply forced on him as he has read its pages with tremulous, but he hopes honest, gaze. Those silly people who suggest that such expositions as this one arise from a desire to temporize with apostacy simply do not understand the anguish with which timid and sensitive minds contemplate the possibility that they or others might be called on to witness with their safety, and even their lives; at stake; that they belong to the Lord Who redeemed them: and that all the hands of "the apostacy" itself.

BE STRONG IN THE LORD, AND IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS MIGHT. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD THAT YE MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL . . . THAT YE MAY BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND IN THE EVIL DAY AND, HAVING DONE ALL TO STAND, THEREFORE, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, AND HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HAVING SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; WITHAL TAKING UP THE SHIELD OF FAITH
WHEREWITH YE SHALL BE ABLE TO QUENCH ALL THE FIERY DARTS OF THE
WICKED. AND TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION, AND THE SWORD OF THE
SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD: WITH ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION
PRAYING AT ALL SEASONS IN THE SPIRIT, AND WATCHING THERETO IN ALL
PERSERVERANCE AND SUPPLICATION FOR ALL THE SAINTS. (Ephesians 6.10-18).

Chapter 29 The New Jerusalem

CHAPTER XXIX

Chapter 21: THE NEW JERUSALEM

21.9: There came one of the seven angels who had the seven vials, who were laden with the seven last plagues, and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.

The new heavens and the new earth come into being for the saints of 20.4-6 at the beginning of the Millennium. The New Jerusalem becomes their spiritual home at the same time. They are the Bride with whom the Lamb enters into marriage in 19.7-9. As so often, though, to press the figures too far in terms of their literal content would only produce confusion. The saints raised to glory at the end of the Millennium, too, then become part of the system of the new heavens and the new earth. They enter into the New Jerusalem. And they, too, are incorporate in the Bride of the Lamb. That John is meant to understand this is shown by the fact that it is one of the angels charged with the Vials who takes him to see the vision of the Bride, which must mean that the pouring out of these has not long ceased. There is nothing lacking in the blessings of the saints whom the Lord glorifies on His return. All they await as the 1000 years runs its course is the completion of their numbers which the end of that period will bring.

21.10: He carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God (-21.1 la).

On just such an eminence did Ezekiel stand (Ezekiel 40.2) to behold "the frame of a city to the south", and see visions relating to the future restoration of his people after the flesh, natural Israel; and from that height he saw the culmination when "the glory of God", which had forsaken the city so long ago, returns to its temple (43.2-5). On such a mountain, too, stood the Lord Jesus to behold "all the kingdoms of the world and glory of them" during His temptations (Matthew 4.8). The Lord Jesus' vision was of the whole world over which He would rule, and, fittingly, this Lord is to be the Bridegroom of a Bride drawn from all nations, which this New Jerusalem represents. This is "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" as they will really be when the Lord, Who resisted the temptations to take them in all their tawdry worldly splendour, will transform them into the place where God's glory can truly dwell. So it will be when the city which all the saints since Abraham have been looking for, "which

hath foundations, whose builder and Maker is God", is set up on the earth (Hebrews 11.10,16; 12.22).

Of course no-literal city descends from heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ, "Who is our life" is He Who appears, bringing with Him the lives of the saints He guards (Colossians 3.4); them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him (1 Thessalonians 4.13). The saints have, though they lived on earth, been spiritually in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1.3; 2.6), so it is their abiding reality which is revealed when He returns, and what He brings with Him is their "house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens", with which they earnestly desire

to be clothed (2 Corinthians 4.16-5.4). This is the incorporation of "the hope laid up in heaven" (1 Peter 1.4). In short, all that is treasured up in the keeping of the Lord, Who is "able to guard that we have committed to Him against that day" (2 Timothy 1.12) then comes down and assumes reality.

21.11: Her light was like to a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 21.13: On the east three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. 21.14: And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The jasper stone represented the brightness of God Himself in 4.3,6, once more emphasizing the presence of God in the blessed estate of His children. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" will then be seen, not as now in a glass darkly, but face to face (1 Corinthians 13.12; 2 Corinthians 3.8). Jasper is said to be the material of which the wall is constructed (21.18), as well as constituting the first of the twelve foundation stones (21.19). The "wall great and high" was, according to 21.17, 144 cubits high, or somewhere around 216-250 feet, or 66-76 meters, "according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel". This "cubit of man" is drawn from Deuteronomy 3.11, in connection with the size of the bed occupied by Og the giant. The cubit is normally taken as the distance in a normal adult from elbow to finger-tip (though the unit in Ezekiel 43.5ff is larger by a hand-breadth, or something around two feet or 60 cm.) The need to define the cubit of a man in Deuteronomy presumably arises from the fact that Og, as a very tall man, would probably have had forearms in proportion, and his bed in terms of his own 'cubit' might not have sounded very large. If the same reason applies in our present passage, it would mean that the angel was of normal dimensions, which supports all that we have learned from the

appearances of angels in other places. The wall, therefore, is very high, as high as a 20-25 storey building. But it is not the wall of giants' cities (1 Kings 20,30) where men of gigantic stature live. It represents superlative protection for people of normal height, within which those who live are safe from any assault, not of people only, but also of sin and death. No doubt it is for this reason that the size is given as the perfect multiple of a perfect number, on the lines of the symbolic total number of the saints themselves (7.4ff).

The words "twelve gates on which are the names of the twelve tribes" are taken directly from Ezekiel (48.31-34), where the names and directions of the twelve tribes are given: Reuben, Judah and Levi northwards; Joseph, Benjamin and Dan eastwards; Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun southwards; Gad, Asher, and Naphtali westwards. This arrangement corresponds neither to the camp in the Wilderness (where additionally Levi is omitted because of its special place round the Tabernacle), nor to the listing in Revelation 7 (from which, as we have seen, Dan is omitted); nor does it correspond to the strips allocated to the tribes in Ezekiel 48.1-29. These loose ends are not easily tied up, but we should in any case expect the twelve tribes in Revelation to be understood as they are in chapter 7, of the redeemed of all nations, for this new Jerusalem is no city of natural Israel.

There were twelve angels at the gates. We are no longer concerned with seven angels pouring out their deadly Vials in vengeance, but with attendants at each of the gates, emphasizing the sanctity and security of the city they watch, seeing that no intruder enters, but ensuring the free passage of those with the right to enter. How different this is from the cherubim with the

flaming sword, which barred the way into the old Eden to Adam and to us all, until the day of regeneration should come (Genesis 3.23-24).

The city had twelve foundations, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles, an evident reference to Ephesians 2.20, in which the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone". There is no value in trying to identify whose names precisely stood on those stones, whether Judas Iscariot's name has been deleted, and whether that of Matthias or of Paul takes its place. What is perhaps more to the point is that, if in this city the twelve gates bear the names of the twelve tribes, and the twelve foundations bear those of the twelve apostles, some connection is to be looked for between the two: and immediately there spring to mind the words to of Jesus to His followers, "Ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19.28; Luke 22.30). It was the same Lord who revealed both truths: what conclusions was He inviting us to draw? Could it be that, real though the second coming, the restoration of natural Israel, and the resurrection of the apostles and saints will be, something different from a literal connection is to be looked for between the apostles and the tribes? In view of the evident mortality of the prince over the whole land in Ezekiel (for he has sons, and needs instructions in fair dealing when he gives them possessions by inheritance (46.16-18), it would be strange if the apostles were to occupy positions over twelfth-parts of his domain, presumably as his subordinates. There is evidently much to learn about the structure of the administration of the kingdom of God which we can hardly expect to apprehend unless and until we see it put into operation.

21.15: He that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof and the wall thereof. 21.16: And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. 21.17: And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

Ezekiel 40.3,5 still provides the general pattern on which this picture is based. The golden reed replaces the "reed like to a rod" of 11.1. There the 'rod' was a rhabdos, a term used for an ordinary traveling staff (Matthew 10.10 ; Hebrews 11.21; 9.4); a sceptre pertaining to a king (Hebrews 1.8,8), and also of correction and chastisement, particularly in this Book (2.27; 12.5; 19.15; 1 Corinthians 4.21; the related verb is also used in Acts 16.22 and 2 Corinthians 11.25 of beatings suffered by Paul, and the serjeants of the magistrates bear the name rhabdoukhos in Acts 16.35,38). Too much should not be made of this, for no other name for 'rod' is found in N.T., and there is no element of chastisement in measuring "the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (11.1). It might be at least as appropriate to think of the rod as belonging to a travelling man, a stranger and pilgrim, who has not yet reached his settled abode, which is very typical of the situation in chapter 11, and then to draw the contrast with the elegant and rich symbol of permanence and glory with which the New Jerusalem is evaluated.

The whole structure, gates and all, was measured in detail before the eyes of John (11.15), as in Ezekiel, but none of the figures save the overall dimensions of the city and the height of the walls are given to us. God knew to the tiniest detail what went to the make up of this holy city, but it is not important that we

should know. If all is plain in the mind of our Maker, that is all we need to be concerned with.

The square structure of the city is like that of Ezekiel's Jerusalem, but the dimensions of the New Jerusalem are incomparably greater. Ezekiel's city is 4500 reeds square, or about 10 miles, or 16 kilometres, square. That of John is 12,000 stadia square. It was stated on page 267 that a stadium and an English furlong were roughly equivalent, but we may need more precise figures, so we commence with the statement of The Shorter English Dictionary that a Roman mile of 8 furlongs was 1618 English yards. That being so the furlong would be 0.115 of an English mile, and the edge of the city would thus be $0.115 \times 1500 = 1380$ English miles. If this were a real city, it would occupy about half the area of the United States of America, or 20 times that of the United Kingdom, and if anyone were perched on a tower at one corner of it, and with excellent eyesight wished to see the opposite corner, that tower would need to be 450 miles high, compared with the highest mountain on earth, which is less than 6 miles high!

This is quite enough to show that the city is not literal. But there is one measurement which could possibly be significant, and even if it is not it is certainly an exciting coincidence. That is that the distance between Jerusalem (the city of the Great King), and Rome (the capital of the Empire which then controlled Jerusalem and the world) is somewhere very close to 1400 miles.

Now this is most extraordinary, if coincidence it is. The two figures, for the side of the city and the distance from Jerusalem to Rome, cannot differ by more than a couple of percent. No round figure in furlongs could have been chosen which would have expressed it more accurately. This discovery was so exciting that an immediate search was made in the available commentaries to see whether the point had been noted. It was not in Alford, who capriciously makes the 12,000 furlongs the entire distance round the city. It was not in Speaker's Commentary, though this came in with the interesting observation that the figure is exactly 100 times the dimensions of ancient Babylon as described by Herodotus, who also called it 'four-square'. Any substantive comment whatever is conspicuously absent from Adam Clarke and from Ellicott. It really does look as though the possibility has been missed.

But how appropriate it is. The city which John sees has a length which extends from the one most important capital city to the other. What better picture of universality could be offered? This is a world-wide kingdom taking in both of its predecessors, not unlike a picture of the kingdom in O.T., where "a highway from Egypt to Assyria" unites the ancient rivals in the harmony of a divine rulership (Isaiah 19.23-25).

"The length and breadth and height are equal". In this case the city is a cube, which presents the double problem: how could any city be 1400 miles high? and how could a cubic city have a wall of 144 cubits round it, and for what purpose? To the mind of this writer the best answer is the humblest: we do not know and we cannot picture it. God is not obliged to talk in three-dimensional terms as though there was nothing in His universe other than that which our puny minds can comprehend. The city represents a divine structure reaching out into the experiences to be enjoyed by immortalized beings, and 'there are more things in' the new heaven and the new earth 'than ever were dreamt of in our philosophy.' We have the same problem in drawing pictures of that picture of the heavenly splendour shown us in terms of the cherubim of Ezekiel 1.4-28.

If the three main dimensions are equal, then this corresponds on a hugely enhanced scale to the cubic shape of the Most Holy place (Exodus 26.33), and would emphasize that the communication between God and His saints in the coming age would eclipse the few moments which the old high priests, once a year, were permitted to spend in the symbolic presence of the Almighty under the old covenant (Hebrews 9.7). And since 'height' moves upwards to God, the equality of vertical and horizontal measurements would show that the tabernacle of God is indeed with men, and that God now dwells with His children in a way He never has before (21.3). When that time comes, how much truer than ever before will it be that the saints will be "strong to apprehend what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know the love of God that passeth knowledge," being "filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3.18-19). Were things like this some of the "visions and revelations of the Lord", which Paul saw and heard, and which it "was not lawful" at that time "for a man to utter?" (2 Corinthians 12.1-10).

21.18: The building of the wall thereof was jasper, and the city was pure gold, like to pure glass. 21.19: The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third chalcedony; the fourth emerald; 21.20: the fifth sardonyx; the sixth sardius; the seventh chrysolite; the eighth beryl; the ninth topaz; the tenth chryso-prase; the eleventh jacinth; the twelfth amethyst.

The walls are of jasper. The city as a whole will display the glory of God, so that those who live outside, for as long as there is any outside world, will see the glory which has become manifest among men, and which awaits those who will yet respond. "Pure gold, like pure glass" seems to combine the opaque and the transparent in one. Yet if the gold is refined of all its dross, and polished to a mirror smoothness, its very reflected images will be so clear as to suggest transparency. The word employed, *hualos* (as also in 21.21), certainly does refer to a transparent object rather than to a mirror, but that might be the right expression to use for this mirror. Men will no longer be seeing "through a glass darkly", but seeing face to face, knowing as they are known (1

Corinthians 13.12).

The identification, and therefore the interpretation, of the precious stones presents a major problem, which the table below will illustrate:

Revelation 21

Exodus 28

LXX

1

Jasper

1

Sardius

2 3

Sapphire (RVm lapis lazuli) Chalcedony

2 3

Topaz Carbuncle (RVm emerald)

Emerald

4

Emerald

4

Emerald (RVm carbuncle)

Carbuncle

5

Sardonyx

5

Sapphire

6

Sardius

6

Diamond (RVm sardonyx)

Jasper

7

Chrysolite

7

Jacinth (RVm amber)

Ligure

Beryl

8

Agate

9

Topaz

9

Amethyst

10

Chrysoprase

10

Beryl (RVm chalcedony)

Chrysolite

11

Jacinth (RVm sapphire)

11

Onyx (RVm beryl)

Beryl

12

Amethyst

12

Jasper

Onyx

This is altogether too confused a picture to permit even of confident identification, to say nothing of interpretation. Only 8 of the 12 names correspond, even using AV and RV text, and these are not in sequence. Marginal modifications occur in 9 of the 24 places, and LXX adds 5 more. In Exodus the stones are to be "according to the names of the children of Israel" (28.21), which is plainly quoted in Revelation 21.12. But in default of any precise and unequivocal identification we can certainly note that the city is adorned with "every precious stone" (21.19), which can be compared with "all manner of precious stones" such as David prepared for the temple (1 Chronicles 29.2). These were the merchandise of ancient Tyre (Ezekiel 27.22), which formed the model for the adornment of the false religious system of Revelation 17.4; 18.16. The idolatrous merchandise and jewellery of the harlot is turned over to the beautification of the city of the saints. With a truer instinct than the disciples showed on Olivet, the saints of the future will be able to exclaim to their Lord, "Behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings!" (Mark 13.2; Luke 21.5).

21.21: The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

The gates are 'portals', vestibules or gate-towers for a walled town, or porches for fine houses, *pulon*, found in Matthew 26.71; Luke 16.20; Acts 10.17; 12.13-14; 14.13; Revelation 21.12-25; 22.14), as distinct from a mere closure to a road or premises, *pule*, found in Matthew 7.13-14; 16.18; Luke 7.2; 13.24; Acts 3.10 — rather an exception, this one! — 9.24; 12.10; Hebrews 13.12). Even in the symbolism the pearls must have been for ornamentation only, for "the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day, for there shall be no night there" (21.25). It is doubtful whether the

word 'pearl' occurs in O.T., for the word so translated in Job 28.18, *gabish*, which occurs only once, is simply transliterated in LXX. In N.T. it symbolizes the precious message of the gospel (Matthew 7.6; 13.45-46), is once used of actual adornment of the person (1 Timothy 2.9), and, as with the other precious stones, is found on the clothing of the Harlot in 17.4; 18.12,16,21. Each of the true apostles was concerned with proffering the pearl of great price to the world, and it is fitting that the open entry of every saint through the gates of salvation should be so symbolized.

The street is of pure gold. Then the saints will walk the road to their rewarded faith, and can look down at the pavement beneath their feet, and see a reflection so clear that it is as though the real person walked foot-to-foot beneath, showing nothing displeasing to the eye.

21.22:7 saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine on it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb (-21.23).

In view of the many parallels with Ezekiel 40-48, already noted and yet to come, this is a remarkable statement. John's eyes had evidently been searching the city as it descended from heaven, looking for its temple, and it simply was not there! The contrast with Ezekiel is plainly intentional, and intended to provoke our thought. For the O.T. prophet describes the future temple minutely, with its ministry for a repentant Israel (43.1-12), its offerings (43.18ff), its altar for which atonement must be made, as in the original Tabernacle (43.20), its gate closed to all, even the Prince who would reign there (44.1-3); its priesthood of the house of Zadok, plainly mortal in that they must not wear "anything that causeth sweat" (44.18), nor incur the risk of going drunk to the service of their God (44.21; cf. Leviticus

10.1-11), and in that they may marry and be given in marriage (44.22; contrast Luke 20.34-36), and have mortal parents, children, and brothers and sisters (44.25). In all these particulars the city of John is contrasted with the city and temple of Ezekiel, and now there comes this most dramatic of all: "I saw no temple!" Yet it is consistent. The change in no way reflects on the literality of Ezekiel's prophecy in relation to the natural Israel which it concerns. There are problems in that field too, but they are unaffected by the taking over of the language of Ezekiel by the Lord Jesus in Revelation. What Ezekiel's Jerusalem is to natural Israel (and through them to the rest of the mortal world), so is John's New Jerusalem to spiritual Israel. Those who enter into this city

are the redeemed by the Lord; for them the sacrifice for sins has been offered once and for all. Even while they lived as mortals they had free access to the throne of grace in the heavenly Most Holy at all times: and now all this holy city is their holy place. It does not have a temple because it is a temple. They are in the constant company of their Redeemer and their God.

For them, too, there is no darkness, as the elaborate quotation from Isaiah 60 which now follows shows convincingly:

Isaiah 60

Revelation 21

60.2

The LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.

21.11:

Having the glory of God.

21.23:

The glory of God did lighten it.

60.3:

Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

21.24:

The nations (of them that are saved) shall walk amidst the light thereof.

60.11:

Thy gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night.

21.25:

The gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there).

60.11:

That men may bring to thee the wealth of the nations.

21.26:

They shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it.

60.19:

The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light to thee; but the LORD shall be to thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.

21.23:

The city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof.

Since the passage in Isaiah relates primarily to the restoration of natural Israel, the references to sun and moon not shining mean that God will not forsake His penitent people. The same will be true in redoubled measure of the saints, whose New Jerusalem enshrines life that shall

never end, and such a presence of God and His Son in their midst as might indeed, despite the symbolic character of the words, cause them to experience a light which man has not known before. The God Who said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1.3), and Who has shined in the believers' hearts through the gospel (2 Corinthians 4.6), has doubtless greater and more glorious light, which mortal eyes cannot bear, yet to display in the time of blessedness to come. If the face of Jesus did "shine as the sun" at His Transfiguration (Matthew 17.2), then His glory can hardly be less when that fleeting glimpse of the kingdom of God coming with power is translated into permanent reality.

21.24: The nations (of them that are saved) shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. 21.25: And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it (-21.26).

It does appear that the words "of them that are saved" ought not to be there, as though the scribe who might have inserted them was asking what mortal nations were doing, having free access to the new Jerusalem, which is the province of the immortal saints. And of course this is true. When the Lord judges "all nations" in the sense of Matthew 25.31, it will be the accountable of those 'all nations' to whom the worldwide preaching has been carried out, as described in 28.19-20, thus will "the nations of them that believe" be selected. Yet there is a sense in which even the subject nations will be involved, as 21.26 shows, for it is the "glory and honour of the nations" which will be used to adorn the city of the saints. We have already seen in Isaiah 60.11 that the wealth of the nations will be used to beautify the Jerusalem of restored natural Israel, and the same theme recurs elsewhere in the prophets. The reading of Haggai 2.7-8 in A.V., "the desire of all nations shall come", so temptingly ascribed to Messiah in Handel's oratorio, should really be understood as in R.V.: "The desirable things of all nations shall come. . . The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the LORD of hosts." The splendour which was brought to Jerusalem by the navies of Solomon will be eclipsed by the ornaments to be presented to the Great King by the adoring nations of the coming day; and in that glory of His, the saints who live and reign with Him will surely share, so that their exalted state represented by their city of New Jerusalem will also be garnished and garlanded with their praises.

21.27: There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie; but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

We have considered this under 20.15 and 21.8. It is the fulfilment of the Scriptures quoted on page 357 concerning those sins, the continued practice of which will exclude from the kingdom of God. It is the final demonstration that in the New Jerusalem we are concerned solely with those who are blessed with immortality, first at the Lord's return (when the survivors of the nations will bring their tributes to His gates), and finally when the blessing of the remaining faithful at the second judgement completes the redeeming work of God in the earth.

Chapters 30,31 Revelation 22

CHAPTER XXX

Chapter 22.1-5: THE NEW EDEN

22.1: He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, 22.2: In the midst of the street thereof, and on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 22.3: And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein; and His servants shall do Him service. 22.4: And they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 21.5: And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Old Testament sources mingle luxuriously together here. There was a river which went out from that Eden (Genesis 2.10) in which was found the Tree of Life (2.9). "Living waters" are to go forth from Jerusalem when the Lord returns (Zechariah 14. 8). "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of our God" (Psalm 46.4), when the Lord breaks as under the chariots of the nations, and brings peace to the world. But far and away the most detailed sources are again to be found in Ezekiel, as the following table will show:

Revelation

Ezekiel

22.1:

A river of water of life out of the throne of God and of the Lamb

47.1:

Waters from under the threshold of the house eastward

22.2:

On this side of the river and on that was there the tree of life

47.7:

On the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other,

22.2:

bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month.

47.7:

Every tree . . . shall bring forth new fruit every month

22.2:

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

47.12:

The fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for healing.

It is possible to read the record in Ezekiel almost naturally. Around the waters of the river which flows from the temple in Jerusalem, trees will be found in sufficient variety to offer fruit at all seasons, and their leaves will have therapeutic properties. It is a little difficult, to be sure, to see how a river which apparently starts as a mere trickle (47.2), and after $\frac{1}{4}$ km reaches merely to the ankles (47.3), and after repeated similar distances to knees, loins, and full body-height (47.4,5), without any reference to tributaries, could do this without being torrentially fast at its shallow beginning, or practically stagnant after a mere 2 km: a stream which at the beginning, say, was 7 cm high, and after 2 km had risen to 175 cm, and whose width increased in proportion to its depth, would need to be flowing 1000 times faster at the beginning than at the end. There are some other problems, too, in applying the prophecies in Ezekiel purely literally, but the overall framework is literal nevertheless.

In Revelation, however, though the same material is used, the application is unashamedly symbolic. The Tree of Life offers deathlessness to those privileged to partake of it. The "healing of the nations" is a far more ambitious project than merely "healing", and looks to the time when the nations will be fully healed of all their ills. Such healing is needful, though, until the Millennium has reached its climax, another indication that the blessedness of Revelation 21 and 22 co-exists with a mortal world until that time is reached.

The Tree of Life was discussed under 2.7 on pages 63-64, when its significant relationship with the Cross of Christ was brought out. In Eden the original Tree was put out of reach when man sinned, for it was not right (indeed, perhaps not conceivable) that a sinner should live for ever. Genesis does not say whether the Tree, with its conspicuous position in the Garden, was ever partaken of by Adam and Eve in their innocence. It certainly does not say that they were forbidden to do so. It might be thought a matter of little importance to decide whether it was a Tree, to eat once of whose fruit was to become immortal, or one which would sustain life without corruption for as long as it was accessible; but in fact the picture in Revelation is based on the latter possibility. The Tree is always there in the new Eden; it bears twelve manner of fruit and so is always attractive with its varied diet. Those who overcome are offered the right to partake of it, evidently not just once but perpetually. Its perpetual availability to those allowed to walk in this garden is itself a symbol of their continuing life of fellowship with God. The saint of those happy days will not be disposed to boast: "I have partaken of the Tree (that is, I have been given the gift of immortality), and therefore I shall never die!" Will he not rather, more humbly and more gratefully, say, "I have been granted the right to live constantly in the society of the God who walks in the garden (Genesis 3.8), to go no more out, and therefore I shall always share His life"? There is the same import in another figure in the Letters to the Congregations: "I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, to go no more out" (Revelation 3.12), and in the promise, "To him that over-

cometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame and am sat down with My Father in His throne" (3.21).

The meat of life and the water of life (22.1) are always available. And so they will "hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them" (7.16-17; 21.6).

This is Eden restored, now beyond the perils which changed the first Eden into a wilderness. "There shall be no curse any more" (22.3) directly reverses the curse imposed after the Fall (Genesis 3.17-19). The word in T.R. is katanathema, though the shorter form with the same meaning, katathema, is now preferred. It means "anything cursed", so that the significance is "Nothing will any longer bear a curse". In either form it occurs only here: only the related verb is found in Peter's terrible lapse in the high priest's judgement hall, where he cursed and swore in his denial of his Master. But the Lord's surrender to the will of His Father in His own sad garden of tears had provided such a way of forgiveness that, on whomsoever Peter called down his curses, that curse need not fall. As for him, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fall not" (Luke 22.32); as for them, "Repent and be converted" — this from the lips of this same Peter — "That your sins may be blotted out, and that there may come seasons of refreshing" (Acts 3.19-21). Now the seasons of refreshing have come, and no more within that city will anyone or anything be cursed, "for the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein."

"His servants shall do Him service". Neither A.V. nor R.V. has succeeded in avoiding the appearance of banality here: but the truth is anything but banal. R.S.V. does better with "His servants shall worship Him". For the servants are, as commonly, *douloi*, the ordinary word for bondservants or slaves; but the verb is, *latreuo*, and although this word is rendered in A.V. 'serve' 16x and 'do service' once, it is also rendered by 'worship' or a related word 6x; and the corresponding noun, *latreia*, is rendered 'service' 4x and 'divine service' once. Though the secular use of this word concerns working for hire rather than as a slave, in the Scriptures it becomes practically synonymous with 'worship', or at least the rendering of divine service. So

here we have the spectacle of the slaves of the Lord Jesus elevated to the rank of priests, rendering divine service in the intimate presence of their Lord, "for they shall see His face" (22.4), in fulfilment of the promise, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3.2). Or, as we read earlier, "They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (20.6) — and in some sense beyond this period also.

His name shall be in their foreheads. They have already been sealed in their foreheads (7.3-17; 14.1) against the tribulation they had to endure. But the Lord had promised long ago that He would write on them "the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is the new Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from My God, and Mine own new name" (3.12). This name, which embodies the whole ground of their presence in this city at all, is Ye:kowah TsidKenuw, "the LORD our righteousness" (see pages 34-37, 71).

They shall reign for ever and ever. Hitherto we have been told of the saints of the first resurrection, who reign 1000 years (20.4,6). But just as we found it impossible to imagine the Lord Jesus abdicating His kingly authority when He should deliver up the kingdom to God (pages 331-333), now we find the same to be true of His saints. What is meant by reigning after the Millennium comes to its end, and there is no more sin, we may not know, but that is cannot result in loss of dignity or station for those who serve the Lord day and night in His temple we can be quite sure. Even had we not already shown that to play with the Greek expression "unto the ages of the ages" (RVm) is an unprofitable exercise (pages 25-27), there would be no point in seeking a finite duration here, for by this time all the ages that ever were in the redemptive programme are coming to their end: and still the saints 'reign' on into the times beyond, when all things have been made new.

CHAPTER XXXI

Chapter 22.6-21: EPILOGUE

22.6: He saith to me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His servants the things which must shortly come to pass. 22.7: And, behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.

The Almighty Himself speaks for a moment. He had given the revelation to Jesus Christ (1.1), Who had sent the angel to John. But the initiative, here as always, had come from God, His Father. God is "the God of the spirits of the prophets", Who hath "in these last days spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1.1). All valid revelation comes from Him through His Spirit, and this is the last, at least in its subject matter. Disciples were taught to "try the spirits", the men claiming to have these "spirits of the prophets", whether they are of God (1 John 4.1), and they who made such claims were taught by Paul to behave in such a way that their claims were not disallowed by their behaviour (1 Corinthians 14.32). But here there was no doubt: John was seeing before his eyes that God was speaking to him nigh at hand — directly in the fulness of His authority.

Still, at the very end of this Book, we are told that it concerns "the things which must shortly come to pass" (1.1), and this must surely settle for ever the idea that is only the earliest prophecies, say those of the opening seals, which would commence shortly after John's revelation was received. What proves to have been meant, in practice, is that the long drawn-out period of the first four seals would be succeeded, after an unspecified interval, by the

crowded events of the last days, for which everyone must be kept on his toes, and of which, therefore, no one could be given a timetable. But to those who would be living in those days, the Lord repeats again the message which He gave at the very beginning, "Behold, I come quickly" (3.11; 22.12,20). To them, too, He repeats the urgency of giving attention to what has now been revealed: "Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book" (22.7).

22.8; I, John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. 22.9: And he saith to me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them which keep the words of this book: worship God.

John had done this before (19.10), and the verse was commented on at that point (page 311). The remonstrance of the angel contains an interesting comment on the angels' attitude to their office. He is a fellow servant of faithful servants of God at all times, whose common characteristic is that they "keep the words" of God, including those in this Book of Revelation.

22.10: He saith to me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 22.11: He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. 22.12: Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to each man according as his work is.

The instruction to leave unsealed the prophecy of the Apocalypse is in sharp contrast with Daniel 12.4,9, where that prophet's words were to be sealed "even to the time of the end". Once more the indication is that Revelation is concerned first and foremost with the events of the times very close to the Lord's second coming, passing quickly through the intervening ages to the very last days, and speaking with a voice which, (no matter how mistakenly — and how beneficially — earlier ages might have thought it addressed itself to their day) only acquires its true historical significance when the time is truly at hand. Revelation brings into current perspective the events dimly foreseen in Daniel — which does give its panorama of the intervening periods, so that in the last days the unmistakeable message may be clearly seen and acted on by those who must endure their sufferings, and wait with patience for the glory so soon to be revealed.

In the intervening period, those who will not repent must be allowed to continue to seal their fates by persisting in the way of life to which they have given themselves: the unjust digging his own grave, or speeding his path to the Lake of Fire, with his continuing unjust deeds, and the abandoned giving himself Over to the reprobate mind to which God has left him. The righteous, on the other hand, must to the very end not be weary in well-doing, and those set apart to their Lord not turn longing glances to the world they have left behind them. By this time the door into the Ark will be closing, and saints must be within, or they will be locked out and cease to be saints; and those who have refused to repent will no longer be allowed to do so.

To give to every man according to his work. The Lord has said this before about His second coming, for "The Son of man shall

to me in the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then shall He render to every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 10.27); but (his has also heroine something of a retrain throughout the New Testament, related substantially in Romans 2.0; 14.12; 2 Corinthians 5.10; 1 Peter 1.7; and (bund in this Hook in 2.23; 20.12. It is an Old Testament chorus too, (bund at least in Psalm 2H.4; 62.12; Job M.I I (Klihu); Jeremi:m 25.14; Laminations 3.h'4; Imverhs 24.12,19; Psalm 2H.4; Jeremiah 25.14. Not all these passages refer to judgement on the Day of Judgement, but they do all emphasize, what is so easily forgotten by those who rightly insist on the primacy of faith in making us acceptable to God, that only the existence of sup)oi ling deeds can show (hat the faith is real. This is the theme of James in 2.14-2H. The works can be of all kinds: letting a disobedient brother take one's life (Abel), building an Ark on dry land before mocking contemporaries (Noah); letting events take their course until the promised child should be born out of due time (Abraham); working mighty deliverance against a dominant enemy (Gideon); letting oneself be confined in a den of lions (Daniel) — in short, doing, waiting when there is nothing to do but wait, suffering or daring to suffer: all these are works of faith which shall stand as witness to the faith itself. On the opposite side, in addition to the obvious deeds of unrighteousness, there stand the pride, the evil-speaking, the boasting even in one's apparent spiritual achievements which so evidently left the Lord out of account that "I never knew you I" must be His only answer. The works are witnesses to what kind of faith there is, but it is the candidate for rejection who says, "You must receive me because of what I have done!" The men of the right hand say only, "In your strength we tried. To You be the glory!"

There is a profound contrast between the words "Blessed are they that do His commandments" of A.V. and "Blessed are they that wash their robes" of R.V. The Greek of these two expressions is confusingly similar, as is shown in the tabulated comparison below:

R.V. makariot hot plunotes (as s(olas autnn

A.V. makariot hoi poiontes (as entolax autou

R.V. does not so much as mention the possibility that A.V. might be right. R.S.V.m does comment, "Other ancient authorities read do His commandments", and AB give 'IV probability to the A.V. reading. The layman cannot possibly decide between them, but they illustrate effectively the matter of salvation by faith and by works discussed above. The Book provides adequate precedents for both readings, for 7.14 refers to those sealed as those who have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"; while the keeping of the commandments of God is the theme in 12.17 and 14.12. On the ground of congruity only, it would seem that A.V. should be preferred. But both thoughts are right. The saints have not come clean in their own right: they came to be cleansed, and the "blood of the Lamb" is the means whereby that cleansing has been secured to them. This is the submission of faith. But they have been required to order their lives thenceforth in accordance with the precepts given to them. So "keeping His commandments" (and seeking forgiveness and restitution when they fall) is their duty also. One could almost wish that both readings could be combined, for they combine together complementary truths.

The question of access to the Tree of Life has been dealt with on pages 64-65 and 374, and of entering into the gates on pages 368-370 "Without are dogs" and the following words have in principle been dealt with on page 357-358. The word 'dogs' in this context seems to have the connotation of unnatural sexual vices, a matter of particular relevance in the world of today, in which the entire foundation of Biblical morality is being rejected.

22.16:1 Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify to you these things for

the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright,

the morning Star.

See on 1.1; 22.K-9. The word translated 'churches' is (bund in this verse for the first time outside Chapters 1-3, and the omission of 'seven' here may be significant. The same omission occurs also in 2.7,11, etc., but the object of both may be to assure us that the message reaches far beyond the original Seven Congregations in Asia to the saints of all ages since. The lampstands of the Seven in Asia have long since been "removed out of their place" (2.5), but the witness of this Book has survived for the exhortation and warning of their successors.

On "the Root and the Offspring of David" see notes on 3.7 and 5.5. The purpose of God in bringing about redemption caused Him to select David, foreseeing that of his race Messiah should be born: so the plan to bring the Christ to the world makes Him the Root of David. Though, therefore, He is in flesh the Descendant of David, He is His precursor in God's purpose, and

therefore also his Lord (Psalm 110.1). He is the "bright, the morning Star", for which see 2.28, where the Lord Jesus promises 'the morning star' as the reward for him who overcomes. The star in the east announced the Lord's birth (Matthew 2.1-23); the true Star Himself will return to complete the work then begun. The Lord Jesus will come in triumph, to fulfil the ancient prophecy of Balaam that "a Star shall come forth from Jacob" (Numbers 24.17).

22.17: The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let Him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come. He that will, let him take the water of life freely.

The Spirit speaks still through the message of this and every other Book of the Scriptures. "Come unto Me!" is the constant call of our Lord (Matthew 11.28; 16.24; John 6.45, etc.). But the Lord also, throughout the ages since He ascended from the earth, speaks through His servants, and therefore also, "The Bride says, Come!". Of course the Bride is not complete until the Lord Jesus returns and makes His saints His own, but all the faithful saints in their pilgrimage constitute the Bride in the making, and so the worthy cannot fail to speak the things which (like John in 22.8) they have seen and heard (Acts 4.20). And if it seems mere repetition to add, "and let him that heareth say, Come!", that addition serves to remind us that it is only they who do respond to this duty who can be regarded as truly participating in the Bride. There are, of course, more ways than publicly prophesying in His name of bearing witness that we are His, but in one way or another, the disciple individually and the congregations of "disciples collectively must ensure that their lamp is where it belongs: on the lampstand (Matthew 5.15 ; Revelation 1.12). "Freely ye have received: freely give!" (Matthew 10.8). The Lord is reminding us of these words when He says here. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

22.18:7 testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add to them, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, even from the things which are written in this book (-22.19).

No doubt this applies first of all to the Apocalypse itself, but the words are parallel with similar ones in Deuteronomy 4.2 and 12.32 in relation to the Law, and in Proverbs 30.5-6: "Every word of God is tried: He is a shield to them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not to His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." And standing where it does at the end of the Bible as we have it, it is tempting to think that it was providentially

located at this point, as a general warning that the Scriptures as a whole are not to be trifled with. Those to whom the Sacred Writings have been committed have them in their hands as the oracles of God of which they are stewards (1 Corinthians 4.1-2), and of which the meaning must not be suppressed or overlaid with baseless additions. In the light of words like these it is hard to imagine that any professed believer in the Christian gospel could ever have been so foolhardy as to propose additional Scriptures given through himself or herself.

It has been no part of the purpose of this work to abuse those with whom the writer or his community do not agree. Throughout we have tried to keep in mind that "the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2.24-25); yet there are some matters on which plain seeking should not be shunned. Among these are tamperings with the Holy Scriptures, whether they are done by destructive criticism which denies or disputes their divine authority, or by wanton claims to inspiration by later leaders which compromises their uniqueness. It surpasses belief that anyone could have dared to put his or her own standing before God in direct peril by transgressing the plain instruction here given.

But it has happened none the less. "Science and Health, and Key to the Scriptures", by Mary Baker Eddy, imposes a positively alien teaching on that of the Bible, and asks for and receives from her followers in the 'Christian Science' Church a standing which makes her book the standard of what the gospel teaches. "The Book of Mormon", "Pearl of Great Price", "Doctrine and Covenants", and other writings of Joseph Smith and his successors do the same even more boldly within the 'Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints', and to this offence is added the continuing sin of claiming inspiration for the 'apostles', 'prophets', and 'priests' of this church. Even a community as full of good works as the Seventh Day Adventists is saddled with a doctrine of the inspiration of Mrs. Ellen White and her voluminous writings which, even if it embarrasses that church to-day, has not been repudiated. Even the 'Jehovah's Witnesses,' though they acknowledge no other Scriptures than the Bible, show, by the rigidity with which day-to-day conformity with the changing teachings of that body is inculcated and required, that it is what headquarters says the Bible means which must bind the minds and consciences of the 'publishers' and 'Kingdom-Hall' congregations. The autocratic determination of the Roman Catholic Church that its Pope is in certain circumstances infallible, and the decrees of its Councils to be received without demur, takes a different form but is little different in principle: and this has become even more unreasonable since that church effectively abandoned the pretence that its teaching to-day is what it has always been.

This is not a danger to such churches alone. It can infect those who lay such emphasis on the 'inner light' that they dispense, wholly or in part, with the authority of the Scriptures, and make the way they feel the judge of what is right, forgetting how deceitful is the human heart when it weighs anchor and sails away at the dictates of every wind of doctrine. But it is no less infectious in the minds of any who fasten on to what a person, or school, may have committed to writing, and hold so firmly to this that the Scriptures have no voice of their own. "It is written" can then mean little more than, "An honoured expositor tells us that this is the meaning of what is written, and we are content to abide by his judgement." It may well be

that an injustice is done to the expositor himself by this attitude: any pioneer in thinking for oneself about the Bible is ill-served by any who deny similar freedom to others; and the Scriptures themselves are not honoured by such a policy.

It is the hope and expectation of the present writer that no school of thought committed to his opinions should arise around the present work. If the work can open up avenues of approach which allow the Scriptures to speak their unfettered message to us, and bring some hope of understanding to a wider public, he will feel well-rewarded.

The punishments threatened by 22.18-19 on any who tamper with the Scriptures as they have been given to us are grave. Both the infliction of the plagues there described, and the denial of any part in the Holy City or in the Tree of Life, mean that those judged by God to be guilty of such acts will be regarded as having joined the ranks of the rebels against Him, and will lose their part in the way of salvation. This does not, of course, mean those who fail innocently in their understanding of Scripture, or those who without rebellious intent find themselves accepting interpretations which, in the end, will be found to be incorrect: but it stands nonetheless as a timely invitation to take stock, to any of us whose approach to Scripture as the unique guide to the understanding of God's purpose may give ground for concern.

22.20: He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly.

Amen: come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with the saints. Amen.

We all believe that the time is far advanced. From whatever Starting point, believers in the Scriptures, and observers of the critical state of the world around, can see that the world will be

unable to surmount its own problems, quite apart from its outlook on the will of God. The time may not be far away when an anguished world will be staring its own dissolution in the face, and when saints at present comfortably at home in a tolerant society will face situations for themselves which will make this closing promise really seem to be what it is, the only hope, for world and saint alike. As one sees the day approaching, what can one say except what John says for all of us here:

AMEN! COME, LORD JESUS!

And fitting it is that in this anxious contemplation of the future with all its perils and uncertainties, we should be brought gently and tenderly to the present, and our ever-present need for the unbroken flow of the grace of God, given through the Lamb of God, our Lord and Saviour, with the seer's own prayer:

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH THE SAINTS.

AMEN.

