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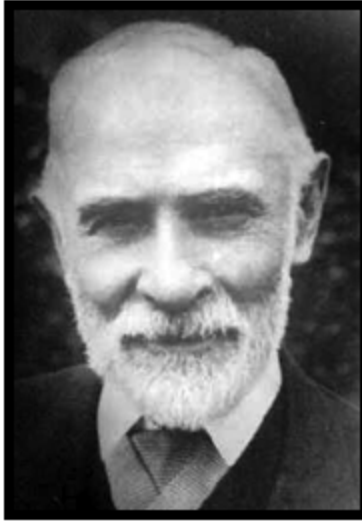
V13 Outline of "The
Revelation"

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REVELATION 1

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This part of the Holy Scriptures has a peculiar and touching claim on the attention of every Christian. No other part of Scripture comes to us in quite the same way. It is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him". God gave this revelation to the glorious anointed Man at His own right hand; it is His revelation. It treats of matters which are thus manifestly of interest to God and to Jesus Christ, and which therefore cannot fail to be of profound interest to His servants. For it is in the character of servants, or bondmen, that we are here shewn "what must shortly take place". This book is for saints viewed as in responsible service, caring for the interests of their Lord.

This may well raise the question with each one as to how far we are truly in this character. The indisposition of many to consider this book is probably traceable to the fact that we are so little in the true attitude and spirit of bondmen. There is a tendency with us all to seek our own things, not the things of Jesus Christ, and when this is so we are hardly true bondmen.

John refers to himself here, not as an apostle, but as a bondman and a brother. He was one of a suffering company: "your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus". It was to a man suffering for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus that this revelation was communicated, and he made it known to those who were partakers — at any rate, in measure — of the same kind of suffering. If there were more fidelity there would be more suffering, and this book would be more appreciated. It has been observed that in periods of the church's history when there have been special pressures or persecutions, as in times of martyrdom, the saints have turned with peculiar interest to this book, and have derived distinct comfort and support from it.

Where there is a desire to connect Christianity with this world, and to think that things here are improving, one can understand there would be a lack of interest in this Revelation. Persons having such desires would not care to face the fact that the world system is coming under judgment. The whole course of things here is wrong, and must be set aside to make room for something else. The churches (assemblies) have failed, and departed from the character in which they would have been true light-bearers, in suffering witness to a rejected Christ; and the world in every phase is a scene of moral disorder. This is the true character of things here, and it is clearly set forth, with all its consequences, in this book. To look at such things in the fear of God involves

serious exercises, which many are reluctant to face, and this may be one reason why this book has been so neglected.

But, in truth, it is a most encouraging book for all who fear God and who love our Lord Jesus Christ. For it shews the ultimate triumph of God over every form of the power of evil. It shews the character of that power, and all that it will issue in, but it shews it broken and set aside to make room for "the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ" (Revelation 12: 10). Its scope is very wide, for it shews how all things in the moral universe are to be dealt with so as to establish eternally the glory of God, and the full blessing of man, recovered through redemption — whether it be the church or other families of the redeemed.

In this book we are taken into the divine confidence at a peculiar moment. Christ has been manifested in flesh; He has been to the cross to accomplish redemption; and now as a risen Man He has gone back to heaven. The church — left here to be His witness in the time of His rejection — has failed. Now what will happen? We are told here "what must shortly take place", and if we aspire to be confidential servants we shall take the deepest interest in the communications. Hearts touched by the love of Jesus Christ, and by the way that love expressed itself in death, and by the consciousness of the wonderful position in which that love has set us as priests to His God and Father, must take a deep and intelligent interest in all that He has to communicate.

"The time is near". We are apt to put these things off in our minds to a somewhat distant future, but the Lord would have them near, and in reading this book the Spirit brings them near to us. Then the reading and hearing the words of this prophecy are in view of the things written in it being *kept*. The things written are of great value and are to be treasured; they are not matters for idle curiosity. Special blessing is attached to reading, hearing, and keeping them. And for those who find themselves, as we do, in the conditions of the last days it is essential that we should have the serious exercise which such a book produces, and also the comfort and establishment which it affords. These are days when nothing but a good and divine foundation will preserve us from being shaken. Amidst the insecurity of things here, this book would connect our faith with the stability of the throne in heaven and of Him who sits upon it, the One "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty". This gives security from perturbation of mind in the midst of all the tremblings and shakings here.

One important object of this book is to preserve saints from becoming earth-dwellers by connecting all their hopes and expectations with heaven, and by leading them there in spirit even now. There is much here for the heart as well

as the conscience. What could be more encouraging than to see the possibility of being an overcomer even in the midst of assembly failure and departure? And then, as we pass on through the book, to see different families of saints coming into view, called by divine grace and sustained in divine witness amidst terrible and appalling conditions, is most stimulating to faith and love.

John is very interesting as a representative man. The Lord said of him, "If I will that he tarry till I come", and he represents what remains to the end. The first phase of the church's history stood connected with Jerusalem and Peter's ministry; the second phase was connected with the results of Paul's labours and ministry; and the third with John's. In the early chapters of the Acts Jerusalem was the centre, but the seventh chapter brings into view what has been called "the new metropolis". Jesus was at the right hand of God, and from thence He called another apostle and gave him a distinctive mission, and the result of Paul's ministry was that local assemblies were formed far and wide in the Gentile world. What this phase of things resulted in historically we may see in the second epistle to Timothy, and in Revelation 2, Revelation 3, we also see the failure of the assemblies as set here in local responsibility. But after all the failure John looks up with undimmed freshness of affection at the end, and says, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus". He shews how the Spirit and the bride say, "Come", and how the heavenly city will descend having the glory of God. He represents those holy and living affections which can be sustained all through in spite of church failure, and which can be found at the end in full response to the love of Christ — the Coming One. I trust we cherish the thought of being found here in such affections. They will not secure us a great place in this world; instead of expanding here we shall probably get more and more circumscribed. We may have to be content with a Patmos, but we shall be happy there if, like John, we have clear vision of all that is shortly to be brought in by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This book is addressed to "the seven assemblies which are in Asia", and those assemblies are seen as seven golden lamps in the midst of which "one like the Son of man" walks. These assemblies are viewed as representing all the assemblies, seven being a number suggestive of completeness. But it is the assemblies viewed in their responsibility as light-bearers, and as subject to the scrutiny of the One who is seen and heard as taking account of their moral state, commending all that of which He can approve, and expressing His judgment of that which is displeasing to Him.

In the first chapter we have conditions which, if maintained, would have preserved the assemblies from failure. Keeping the things written would have marked true bondmen. Every needed divine support and consolation would

have been found in the rich supply of grace and peace from the eternally existing One upon the throne, and from the seven Spirits, and from Jesus Christ. The dependent affections of the saints would have been connected with divine fulness of resource, and engaged with a supremely worthy and blessed Object. One, too, who awakens by the sense of what He has done for us in love the responsive affections and praises of every heart that knows Him. "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father: to him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen".

It may be noted that the Spirit is not seen here as the one Spirit in relation to the one body, but as "seven Spirits"; that is, He is presented in the diversity and completeness of His actings for the effectuation of God's sovereign will.

The vision of the One in the midst of the lamps was such that it caused John to fall at His feet as dead. In the service of such an One there could be no power or ability of any kind save what came from the strengthening touch of His right hand. All else had to find itself in the place of death. There would then be material suited for divine witness. The seven lamps are "golden", which suggests what is divine in character — the fruit of divine grace and working; no other kind of material would be suited to sustain divine light in witness here. Then to realize the nearness of the Lord as walking in the midst of the seven lamps, with His eye constantly upon them, would preserve the holy sense of responsibility to Him who, though unseen, is near to take account at every moment of how that responsibility is being carried out. Had these things been maintained in power in the souls of the saints they would have been preserved from the elements of defection.

The Lord Himself is seen as "the faithful witness" in verse 5. There could be no true thought of witness save as seeing it first in Him, and we see it there without flaw or failure. How perfectly did He witness to all that God was in grace to man, and to all that Man was as entirely according to the mind and pleasure of God! Now He is "the first-born from the dead" — the Risen One, outside everything here. And He will soon be manifested as "the prince of the kings of the earth". We confess Him as "King and Sovereign even now"; we confess His title while He is still the rejected One.

The moment this great and glorious Person is mentioned it calls forth an outburst of praise from every heart that knows Him. "To him who loves us", etc. There is an overflow of praise *to* Him, and then a solemn testimony *about* Him. "Behold, he comes with the clouds", etc. The world has not done with Him; they may think they have got rid of Him, and act as if they had, but they have not. "God ... now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent,

because he has set a day in which he is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed, giving the proof of it to all in having raised him from among the dead" (Acts 17: 30, 31).

The position in which John was found is very suggestive of the place in which true testimony is found at the present time — that is, during the church period. He was a prisoner in a bleak and sterile island "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus". The testimony of Jesus is found in suffering and reproach, and in an outwardly restricted place. We may see the same thing in the case of Paul; his most mature years were spent in prison, and it was when there that the testimony came out most distinctively, and the ministry was richest. Both Paul and John were very much restricted outwardly. If things are popular it is a pretty sure sign that there is a large proportion of the human element in them. It is wholesome for us to consider this. And opposition to the testimony, and reproach in connection with it, are now found within; that is, from those who bear the name of Christians. Those who do not value, and move with, light which God may give, become adversaries to it, and there is a good deal of opposition of a subtle character.

But in the restricted place John got compensation in the way of divine communications, and we should be exercised not to miss these. It is through conflict and difficulty that the truth is brought out; every spiritual gain has to be fought for and suffered for. Everything that has been recovered in the church has been won through conflict and suffering. Take the Reformation: we have the fruit of it now, but it was a great battle. And the truth of Christ and the assembly, which was restored during the last century, came out in the face of tremendous opposition. The truth has always to be bought; and when bought there is the danger that it may be sold for something much less valuable.

The kingdom is marked at the present time by tribulation and the exercise of patience. Those who will live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution. By-and-by we shall serve God in a scene of glory, but now we are called to serve Him in tribulation and patience. We cannot expect to avoid suffering if we realize that the whole tide of things here is opposed to the character and rule of the kingdom in which we are partakers. When saints are bright they get tribulation in some way, and it tends to make them brighter still. The more you rub good metal the brighter it shines, and opposition and difficulty bring out the reality of divine witness in saints.

John "became in the Spirit on the Lord's day". He was entirely abstracted from what was merely natural, or of the mind and thought of man, and absorbed in a special way with spiritual things. It is interesting to see that, though he was

alone so far as we know, the Lord's day was marked by this abstraction, which would imply some peculiar enjoyment of spiritual privilege. The Lord's day here spoken of is the first day of the week — a very special day in Christianity. The week is a divinely marked period of time; it goes back to creation, and has its place in all dispensations; it is part of the original divine ordering of things. The sabbath was the last day of the week; God blessed it and hallowed it, because that on it He rested from all the work of creation, and He would have it hallowed by His people; one great controversy which He had with them was that they did not keep it. But the hallowed day now is the first day of the week; that day has been marked off from all the other days as the one on which the Lord rose from the dead, and He claims it for Himself. Hence we find that on two succeeding first days of the week the disciples came together, and the Lord came into their midst (John 20), and at a later period the saints came together to break bread on that day (Acts 20: 7). It is a day peculiarly characteristic of Christianity, and marked by special spiritual privilege, and its being the *first* day suggests that it is intended to give character to the six days that follow.

Though John was probably isolated from his brethren he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day", and engaged with spiritual realities outside the whole course of things here. But while in this state of abstraction he heard behind him "a great voice as of a trumpet". He was called back, as it were, for a time from the peculiar spiritual privileges which lie in the Spirit, and which would normally be in his thoughts as connected with "the first day of the week". He was called back from these things to view the assemblies as set here in responsibility to give light for God. And to see in their midst One who was taking account of their state, and expressing His judgment as to it.

The light would shine as God was really known in grace, and as the saints were in the shining of Christ. Their relations with one another as walking together in truth and love and holiness and unity, in complete separation from the world, would be such as to support the testimony of divine grace, and to preserve true witness to a rejected Christ. And the Lord is in the midst of the lamps to see how this character is maintained or in what it is departed from. How solemn is the thought! He is seen in judgment — judgment in the sense of discernment — discerning everything according to God. He is "girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle"; His affections are under restraint; they cannot flow freely in nourishing and cherishing, for much that is under His eye calls for rebuke and discipline. He is considering what is due to Himself and to God. "His head and hair white like white wool, as snow", suggests maturity in judgment. "His eyes as a flame of fire", speak of penetrating discernment; nothing in the inmost depths of our being can escape the scrutiny of those

eyes. "His feet like fine brass, as burning in a furnace"; wherever He treads, as He walks in the midst of the golden lamps, everything is tested according to what "our God" is as "a consuming fire". How searching the heat of that holy fire! Who can abide such a test? "His voice as the voice of many waters"; a voice, indeed, "full of majesty". "And having in his right hand seven stars"; He asserts His title and ability to hold every responsible element in the assemblies in His right hand; only as being there can it be rightly directed or sustained. "Out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword going forth"; every convicting word in prophetic ministry which brings home to us our true condition is the action of that sword. "His countenance as the sun shines in its power"; the full revelation of God, effulgent in Him, is the light in which the church is blessed, as viewed on the line of privilege. But it is also the light by which the assemblies are judged on the line of their responsibility. The effulgence of God has shone forth in the Son, and the church's privilege is to be "filled even to all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3: 19), so as to set Him forth adequately here. And if the Lord takes the place of judging amidst the assemblies He must judge according to the full divine thought of the assembly, and what it is here for.

It would be well for every Christian to see the Lord in this character. John had known Him in other ways; in the attractiveness of His walk as the Lamb of God; in all the varied blessedness of the ministry in word and deed which flowed out of that fulness of grace and truth which resided in Him; in the service of His love when He had stooped to wash His disciples' feet; and in those intimacies of holy affection which made him so conscious that he was "the disciple whom Jesus loved". He had known what it was to lean on the breast of Jesus. But when he saw Him in the midst of the golden lamps he fell at His feet as dead.

I think this is an experience which, if all had gone through it, would have preserved the assemblies from defection; it is what each individual needs to pass through in order to be an overcomer. It is the learning in His presence that all that is of the flesh, and according to man after the flesh, is brought to the nothingness of death there. We then realize that everything that is of ourselves has to be rebuked and refused, and that we can only be for the Lord as under the strengthening of His right hand. We have to learn that "without me ye can do nothing". We may learn this in nearness to the Lord, in the searching light of His presence, or we may learn it through practical failure or inward declension. It is happier, and the lesson is more deeply learned, if we learn it with Him. If I have to fall at His feet as dead, it is that He may become practically to me the first and the last, and the living One.

“He laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades”. It is as much as to say to the one who is at His feet as dead, “All that I am is for you; I became dead because that was your place, and I took it in grace for you; but now I am alive to be your strength and the Source of everything for you”.

We have to learn death on all that is of ourselves that He may be all to us. Have we learned that there is not a bit of anything that has divine value save as we derive from Christ? That is how proper material for the candlestick comes in. Paul had the consciousness of utter weakness in himself, but he boasted in it that the power of Christ might tabernacle over him. The right hand of Christ speaks of His power, which becomes available to us through the Spirit given. It is only as we are under the touch of His right hand that we can be overcomers. We see the effect of being there in John and in the other apostles. None of them departed from first love; they were sustained in freshness and spiritual energy to the very end of their responsible course. The letters of John and Peter and Paul, near the end of the course of each, shew them with undiminished affection and energy, strengthened and sustained by the right hand of Christ’s power. The same power was available for others, and if it had been utilized there would have been no breakdown in responsibility. Thank God it is still available for all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, so that such may be found overcomers even in a day of general defection.

The importance of verse 19 has often been dwelt upon as giving a clear division into three parts of what John was to write. “What thou hast seen”, is recorded in chapter 1: “the things that are” are the assemblies on earth — the church period — as addressed in chapters 2 and 3: “the things that are about to be *after these*” are things to take place when the assemblies are no longer found here; these things follow from chapter 4 onward.

Finally, we are told that “the seven stars are angels of the seven assemblies; and the seven lamps are seven assemblies”. The angels of the assemblies represent that in each which can be addressed as having responsibility. It is not any special individual in each assembly, for Scripture gives no hint of one individual being put in charge of an assembly. Elders, bishops, or overseers, are always, I believe, when mentioned in relation to an assembly, spoken of in the plural. There is no suggestion of *one* bishop in any assembly. The angel of the assembly would appear to be a symbolical person representing the responsible element; for what is written to the angel does not refer to the works or state of any one individual. Though the personal pronouns “thy” and

"thou" and "thee" are used, the references throughout are clearly to the works and state of the assembly.

"Stars" are heavenly luminaries, and in this there may be a suggestion of those who are set in the assemblies to give light. If we view them thus it is important to see that their place is in the right hand of the Lord. He alone is entitled to hold them, and to dispose of them as He will. But if we view the stars as representing symbolically those who are in the place of light-givers it involves a very serious consideration. It would shew that those who take the place of giving light become, in a sense, responsible for the moral state of the assemblies. The thought of this would make all ministry a very serious thing, for it is really a bringing to bear of divine light in view of a moral result in those who are ministered to. In a general way the state of the assemblies would be the product of the character of the ministry. A legal ministry would produce a legal state; a carnal ministry could only produce fruit after its kind; a spiritual ministry of Christ would produce spiritual results. The general state more or less takes character from the ministry. The thought of purity was very prominent in connection with the candlestick in the tabernacle. It was called "the pure candlestick", and it was to be made of "pure gold", and the oil was to be "pure oil olive". The enemy's effort all along has been to bring in elements contrary to this holy purity, and to lower the tone of the church's testimony by introducing in ministry what was of the mind of man and not of the Spirit of God and not after Christ. Responsibility attaches to the assemblies as a whole, but it attaches in a special way to those who take the place of having light, and of bringing it to bear upon others. It is a blessed thing to bring an influence to bear upon others which is spiritual and of God, and in keeping with the purity of the candlestick. But it is an intensely solemn thing to be influencing others in a way that tends to departure from Christ, and to the lowering and corrupting of what is of God in the souls of His people. A serious exercise as to this would have had a preservative effect, and it was probably with a view to producing such exercises that responsibility for the moral state of the assemblies is seen to attach in each case to the angel. The angel represents the responsible element, and there can be no doubt that this is found chiefly with those who influence others.

REVELATION 2 - EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1-7

Few chapters in Scripture are more important than Revelation 2 and 3. They give the Lord's estimate of what He sees in the assemblies. That word, "I know", is repeated many times. There is much in the christian profession that is a vain show, but there is One who can say, "I know"; He knows the state of every assembly and of every individual.

The way in which the Lord presents Himself to each assembly is that which, if spiritually apprehended, would be a corrective of the departure seen in each, or would furnish support to the overcomer. To Ephesus He presents Himself as "He that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamps". It is only as the stars are held in His right hand that assembly responsibility can be carried out. It can only be carried out by those who have found themselves as dead at His feet, but who have known the power of His right hand upon them, and who are held and sustained by the strength of that hand. If the responsible element in the assemblies had gone through John's experience in chapter 1, and been maintained by the strengthening of His right hand, all would have been well. There must be the complete setting aside of man in the flesh; God does not propose to set up that man in responsibility. In the epistle to the angel of the assembly in Sardis the Lord speaks of Himself as "he that has ... the seven stars". They are no longer said to be in His right hand, but He has them; He lays claim to them; He holds them still to their responsibility though they have departed from the conditions in which alone it could be carried out. But here the responsible element is seen in its normal place; His right hand alone can hold it so that it shall shine according to His pleasure. It is probable that in the assembly at Ephesus the responsible and light-giving element was getting away from conscious nearness to Christ, and was no longer held and sustained by His power alone. Hence He presents Himself to that assembly as holding the stars in their true and normal place in His right hand.

Then He is not only "in the midst of the seven lamps" as in chapter 1: 13, but He "walks" there. There is a circle on earth where the Lord is in movement, and His movements can be discerned by those who have eyes to see them, just as His voice can be discerned by those who have an ear to hear. The Lord is not moving among the nations yet, though God overrules all things even there, but He moves, He is in activity, in the midst of the assemblies.

Ecclesiastical historians take account of the movements of men in the assemblies, and a sad record it is. But how deeply interesting would be a true

history of the movements of the Lord in the midst of the assemblies! We know a little of those movements,

through His grace; we shall know the whole story soon in courts above.

The seven lamps are "golden"; they represent the assemblies as in responsibility here, but viewed as the product of divine working and characterized by what is of God — the presence of the Spirit and the activity of the divine nature. These things constitute the "golden" character of the assemblies. It is only as having this character that they are qualified to maintain Christ here in testimony during the night of His rejection. If practically they cease to have this character, and do not repent, their place is forfeited, and the lamp will inevitably be removed; it has ceased to serve the purpose for which it was set there.

It is well to get at the outset the divine thought attaching to the assemblies in their responsibility here. It helps us to form a true estimate of the departure which has taken place. The presence and activity of "first love" are essential, so that if that is gone the position of the "lamp" is forfeited. This epistle to the angel of the assembly in Ephesus is one of the most solemn and searching parts of the New Testament Scriptures, for it shews that if the assemblies get out of vital touch with Christ everything which is essential to the true character of the "golden lamps" is gone. As to outward faithfulness everything was right at Ephesus, yet it was a "fallen" assembly. Things with us may appear to be all right outwardly, but if we have lost contact of heart with the living One so that what we do is not the result of living impulse from Him, its true value for His heart is gone. "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love".

The Lord commends all that He can, as we see in verses 2 and 3. They laboured, they did not tolerate evil, they tested that which came to them with great pretensions and found out its true character, they had endured and borne for His Name's sake without wearying. He knew how to value all this, but it did not satisfy His heart, nor was it in itself sufficient to sustain the "golden lamp" character. Their first love had been left. "First love" is a thing which we ought all to be very much exercised about; we may never have known what it really is. It is not merely "first" in point of time in the soul's history, but "first" in quality; it is the same word as "the *best* robe" in Luke 15 and is frequently translated "chief". "Thy first love" is not the brightness and zeal which may often be found in a young convert, but it is love of an assembly character. It is what marked the company. My impression is that "first love" is that character of love to which Christ gave impulse amongst His own at the beginning. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this

shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves" (John 13: 34, 35). It is this which would have really given them the "golden lamp" character during His absence. It is the result of coming under the powerful and personal influence of His love.

The assembly's "first love" was when the Head was held in affection, and the saints abiding in Him were engaged in activities to which His love gave impulse. I think it would be the result of that blessed state which is presented in the form of prayer in Ephesians 3: 14 - 19. "That the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love, in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God".

It must have been beautiful under the eye of the Lord to see a company "holding the truth in love" and growing "up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love" (Ephesians 4: 15, 16). I think that gives the character of "first works" which go along with "first love". First works are not what men can take account of; a "joint of supply" does first works. Joints are hidden things but very effectual in their working. "First works" result in knitting together; it is the activity which draws saints into contact with one another, and overcomes all hitches and jars which interfere with the harmonious working and building up of the body. It is great divine favour — though it is very humbling — to see what the assembly was in first love and first works. There were living impulses from the Head pulsating through the body here, and resulting in knitting together and building up in love. The assembly has left its first love and is fallen, but it is still possible for us to hold the Head and to grow up to Him, and to get supply and impulse from Him. And every member of the body with an impulse from the Head can do first works. And as saints have nourishment ministered to them, and are knit together in love,

there may be found even in the closing days a measure of return to "first love". The call to repentance leaves the door open for this, and one cannot doubt that the Lord is working to bring it about.

We may have a good deal of light, and yet not have it livingly connected with Christ; He may not really be dwelling in our hearts through faith. It is very suggestive that this state is brought before us in Ephesians 3 *not as true of the saints*, but in the form of prayer. This should guard us from any kind of assumption as to it, but should lead us to pray. For the Christ to *dwell* is not

merely a transient thing. I think, as a matter of fact, we get touches and tastes of what is infinitely precious, but one longs for more spiritual steadiness and constancy! How one loves that expression of J.N.D.'s — "the constant mind"!

When the assembly got away from her first love she ceased to do the first works, and the Lord had to say that if she did not repent He would remove her lamp out of its place. It was no longer answering the purpose for which He had set it there. It is very solemn to consider that the assembly was "fallen" even before Paul and John departed to be with Christ, and long before there was any outward break-up.

Whatever the works of the Nicolaitanes were they were not "first works", and they were hated by Christ. They have been commonly held to be a fleshly abuse of grace, but it may suffice to see that what Christ hated the angel of the assembly in Ephesus hated also. The assembly in Pergamos had those who not only did the works, but who held the doctrine of Nicolaitanes; if things are allowed in practice that displease the Lord, the next step is that they may become characteristic of what is held as doctrine. Evil is thus systematized and propagated.

There can be no doubt that the seven assemblies here addressed were representative of *all* the assemblies. Seven is the number of mystical completeness. No Christian could suppose that Christ's concern about the assemblies was limited to those found in a province of Asia Minor, though they were taken representatively. Nor is His interest limited to assemblies existing in the apostolic age. We are still in the time of "the things that are"; and therefore we may expect to find in these seven epistles that which will cover the whole of what may be called the assembly period. But one's exercise is to look at them in their moral bearing.

It is to be noted that *the Lord* addresses the angel in each assembly, and what He says is a formal and public declaration of His estimate of the state of each. But in each of the addresses there is a call of a more limited character — a voice to the individual — "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". This is an intimation to all whom it may concern that the Spirit has somewhat to say to the assemblies as well as the Lord, and the one who has an ear is to hear it. I do not believe there has ever been a moment since Pentecost when the Spirit has ceased to speak to the assemblies. He has given utterance to that which was needed at the moment, whatever aspect of the truth it might be. This was by revelation in the early days, or by the inspired writings of the apostles. But since the completion of the canon of Holy Scripture He has spoken by calling attention in varied ways to that which met

the defect, or supplied the lack of the time being by presenting what was of Christ, and bringing out spiritual wealth from the divine treasury. The manifold grace of God, and the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in the mystery of God have thus been presented to the assemblies from time to time. How deeply important that we should have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies today! The state of each individual is tested by it. If we do not hear what the Spirit says we shall not be in communion with His present activities, and this is a very serious loss.

Each of the addresses emphasizes a character which may attach to the individual saint — “him that overcomes”. It is always open to the exercised individual — the one who has an ear — to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, and it is always possible for the faithful individual to be an overcomer. What encouragement there is in this! It opens the door — and keeps it open — for each loyal heart to be in accord with the mind and activities of the Spirit in spite of surrounding conditions in the assemblies. And it sets before each loyal heart the path and prize of the overcomer. Who would not covet to tread that path and to win that prize?

I believe the overcomer in each assembly is the one who apprehends and appreciates Christ in the character in which He presents Himself to that assembly. The Lord provides the remedy for each form of defection in the way He presents Himself, so as to make the one who appreciates Him an overcomer. If I want to be an overcomer I must pray much that I may apprehend and appreciate Christ. This involves conflict because there are great powers always at work to hinder it, and to move saints’ hearts away from Christ. I cannot follow Christ and appreciate Him without being assailed by the enemy. But there always has been, and always will be, that in Christ which would make the one who truly apprehended it an overcomer. If we are preserved, we are “preserved in Jesus Christ” (Jude 2). It is good to see the preservative power there is in Him.

“To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God”. The assembly had left its first love; it had ceased to hold fast the Head; and though many spiritual activities remained they had not the character of first works; they did not get their impulse from living contact of affection with Christ as Head. But the overcomer in such a state of things would be marked by cherishing the thought of Christ as Head, and he would not be content with anything that did not flow livingly from Him. The whole body, and nothing less, would therefore be before him in connection with the thought of supply and increase. He would be exercised to be a “joint of supply”, and to work in his measure as “one part” of that body which works for

itself increase "to its self-building up in love". The prize of such would be "to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God". He would enjoy, and be sustained by, those twelve fruits which speak of perennial satisfaction, and of varied perfections which minister gratification to every form of spiritual desire; "in each month yielding its fruit".

What a picture of the life of the holy city do we find in those words — "In the midst of its street, and of the river, on this side and on that side, the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit"! The street of the city speaks of its movement and activity; the river speaks of the Spirit of God as the blessed current of its life subjectively, pure in crystal brightness; but in the midst of both the street and the river is the Tree of life. Every movement in that city centres in Christ; He gives impulse to everything there. And He is in the midst of the river too; the very Centre of all that quickens and gladdens, of all the Spirit's flow in the heavenly city, even as He is the Theme of the Spirit's ministry and testimony here below! And He is not only "in the midst", but "on this side and on that side". It suggests that whichever way you look you see the Tree of life there, and it yields its fruit perennially. Each month is but an opportunity to taste some new refreshment and delight in Christ. The spiritual year yields one blessed satisfaction after another in the enjoyment of the varied fruits of Christ. To eat of that Tree is the prize of the overcomer. Nor can we doubt that though this rich reward has its full outlook in the future it brings some of its blessedness, even in the promise which sets it before us, into the present experience and joy of the overcomer.

REVELATION 2 - SMYRNA

Revelation 2:8-11

To the angel of the assembly in Smyrna the Lord presents Himself as "the first and the last, who became dead and lived". How suitable is this character to an assembly marked by tribulation, poverty, suffering, and death! For if in the assembly in Ephesus we see indicated the spiritual decline which became evident even before the apostles departed, we may discern in what is said to Smyrna the Lord's regard for His saints as persecuted and suffering. There was, as we all know, a time of intense persecution, and it tended to spiritual wealth, so that the Lord could say, "But thou art rich". I do not doubt that the sufferings of the saints stayed the progress of decline, and brought out for the time a true spirit of fidelity. In presenting Himself as "the first and the last" I think the Lord suggested to their hearts His ability to carry them through everything, while in saying that He "became dead and lived" He showed how He Himself had gone the way that they were treading, and could therefore be sympathetic with them in it.

"A synagogue of Satan" stands in very pointed contrast to the assembly of God. It refers, no doubt, to those who claimed to have some divine status as in the flesh, and who railed at believers in Christ. Much of the opposition and persecution of early days was instigated by the Jews, who were not indeed Jews in any spiritual sense (see Romans 2: 28, 29), but had become "a synagogue of Satan" — adversaries of all that was of God. It is well for us to realize the severity of this designation, for if it had become true of those who were literally the seed of Abraham, how much more is it true of those who under the christian name take up things in the flesh! The cross has brought man after the flesh to an end in holy judgment before God, and the Spirit has been given to maintain that judgment in the hearts of saints. There could be nothing more offensive to God than to bring back, as it were, before Him, the man whom He has utterly condemned. It is from those who do so that the greatest hostility to what is of God comes. "First love" would hold everything in living connection with Christ the Head, but departure from that leads to giving man after the flesh a place. And when that is set up formally, and in an ordered way, it becomes in God's sight "a synagogue of Satan". It is referred to again in the epistle to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia, where it would appear to designate those with fleshly religious pretensions who are found opposed to those who keep the Lord's word and do not deny His Name in the closing hour of the assembly's testimony on earth.

The assembly in Smyrna would suffer, some of them would be cast into prison, and they were exhorted to be faithful unto death. The Lord does not hold out to them any prospect of present deliverance, though even in such circumstances it is a great comfort to see that the power of the devil is strictly limited. "Ye shall have tribulation ten days". Christ is supreme over all the power of evil. He may suffer the enemy to afflict His saints for ten days with a view to their purification and His testimony, but the time of persecution and pressure is limited. No hostile power could make the tribulation last *eleven* days when He has said *ten*! It is a great comfort to saints in any time of special pressure to remember this. The consciousness of His power is a great support; it is there even if He allows things to go to the extreme length of martyrdom, which is what is meant by being "faithful unto death".

At such a time His power is manifested in an even greater way morally than if He intervened to stop the suffering, for it comes out in the way He sustains His persecuted and martyred saints. It has been known in days of persecution that saints were disappointed when they were reprieved. Some very touching letters of the martyrs were written by those sent back to prison to their companions who had been sentenced to the stake. They manifested real sorrow as feeling deprived; for the time, of the privilege and honour of suffering death for the Lord. In some cases they had afterwards the privilege which they coveted. It shews the power in which the Lord can succour and sustain what is of Himself even under the extreme violence of the adversary. In this connection it may be well to remember that in many cases those who spoke very confidently before they were tested failed when the persecution touched them, but those who had been timid, and had feared lest they might fail, were often the ones to go through triumphantly. Nothing will really carry saints through such testings but the strength of the Lord.

"The crown of life" is the glorious answer to martyrdom here, and "he that overcomes shall in no wise be injured of the second death". Such might appear to have death for their portion, but they would be found invested with the distinction of victorious life. They would truly "reign in life".

REVELATION 2 - PERGAMOS

Revelation 2:12-17

Satan works on two lines of opposition to God; one is violence and the other corruption. They are really his only two lines of action. We see the former in Smyrna and the latter in Pergamos. The Lord introduces Himself to the angel of the assembly in Pergamos as "He that has the sharp two-edged sword". The assembly had lost the power to discriminate and to divide between things that differed. "The word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4: 12). If this assembly had really been under the action of the word of God it would have kept them from dwelling "where the throne of Satan is". There was a measure of faithfulness, and the Lord took account of it, and especially of one faithful witness who was slain amongst them, but in general the assembly was found in the position of dwelling in the world. This came about when the world-powers took up the profession of Christianity, and became the patrons of the church instead of her persecutors.

The Lord spent His first night on earth in the manger connected with an inn; He spent part of His last night in an inn also. (The word "guest-chamber" in Luke 23: 11 is the same as "inn" in Luke 2: 7.) He was ever true to the Stranger character, and He brought the one whom He blessed "to the inn" (Luke 10: 34), and expected to find him there when He came back. If the church had remained in "the inn" — if she had retained the character of a heavenly stranger — she would have proved divine resources and care, and there would have been no admittance of the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes.

For it is at this point we find those in the assembly holding corrupt doctrines. Not that these corruptions were universal as yet, but they were there. The Lord discriminates between the angel and the corrupters; "I will make war with *them* with the sword of my mouth". What is contemplated here is not only evil practice, but corrupt teaching; it is in each case "doctrine"; it is evil systematized and taught. There began to be teaching in the assembly that was idolatrous, and led to unholy association with the world, and that introduced what was positively hateful to Christ. What a contrast to this do we see in Jesus as the Blessed Man of Psalm 16! He was "not of the world", and He was absolutely separate from all that was idolatrous. The way to escape

from the influence of Balaam is to be under the influence of Christ. The enemy is ever seeking to seduce the people of God, and to get them to feed on that which pertains to his system, but the antidote to all this is to have Christ before us. He has been here in the presence of seduction and opposition, and in every detail He was entirely for the will of God.

The reward of the overcomer in Pergamos is to have “the hidden manna”. This would have reference to what Christ was here, but viewed as “God’s treasured store”, kept for the generations of His people. It is the abiding memorial before God of what was once in the wilderness. One in whom the grace of heaven came into contact with every circumstance of wilderness life. Now it is all treasured in the golden pot in the ark of the covenant — the reserved and hidden memorial of a life that was morally out of heaven.

It is very blessed to see that in a day of public departure — for the assembly dwelling where Satan’s throne is, and tolerating corruption in doctrine, is clearly public departure — there is set before the overcomer that which is hidden in the secret of God’s presence. Such a promise calls every faithful heart away from the public character of things in the assembly — now marked by departure and corruption — to that which is hidden in the sanctuary. No one will prosper spiritually, or be in communion with God, who allows himself to be influenced by what goes on publicly in a worldly and departed assembly. The *hidden* manna suggests something which is really a secret from the many. Do we covet this? What do we know about “the hidden manna”? Have we really a secret of delight with God in all that which He treasures of what Christ was here? We sing sometimes of

“... the blessed secret
Of His preciousness to Thee”. (277:6)

What is public even in a spiritual way — meetings, ministry, etc. — will not keep us, or even help us much, if we have not our own secret communion with God as to the preciousness of Christ. The hidden life is of the deepest importance, and yet how often it is neglected!

To appreciate truly and delight in what God appreciates and delights in one must be on the same line morally. If I am a lawless person I shall not appreciate obedience. If I am characterized by pride and vanity how can I appreciate lowliness? If I am haughty and overbearing I do not appreciate meekness and gentleness. Christ can only be truly appreciated in a nature kindred with Him. So that what we delight in we really are. If you knew what my heart delighted in you would know me. It is as having Christ before us that we become overcomers;

then the overcomer gains more of Christ; there is growth.

“Yet sure, if in Thy presence
My soul still constant were,
Mine eye would, more familiar,
Its brighter glories bear.
And thus, Thy deep perfections,
Much better should I know,
And with adoring fervour
In this Thy nature grow”. (51:4)

Then there is the “white stone”. This, too, is of the nature of a personal secret, for on the stone is written a new name “which no one knows but he that receives it”. It is the consciousness of the Lord’s approbation — a secret between Himself and the faithful heart. There could be nothing sweeter for a true heart than this, and it encourages one to go on, whether in the face of opposition or seduction. Antipas was a faithful overcomer, slain on account of his witness for Christ, and no doubt he had the “white stone”. We are often weak because we are not sure of the Lord’s approval; we are not near enough to Him for Him to give us the “white stone”.

Would you not like to have such a distinct character under the eye of the Lord that He could give you a name? I believe He gives a name to every overcomer. It does not matter much if people call us names, but it is surely of deep interest to know what the Lord calls us! He surnamed Simon, Peter; James and John He surnamed *Boanerges* — Sons of thunder. And the apostles seemed to have followed the Lord’s example when they surnamed Joseph, *Barnabas* — Son of consolation. We all have names in relation to this world, but each overcomer has also a name in relation to Christ — a distinctive character owned of Him, for it was He Himself who imparted it. The Lord loves to tell us what He appreciates in us. We see this in the Song of Songs, in those passages where the Bridegroom speaks to the heart of the bride of all the beauty that He perceives in her. And we may see the same thing, in principle, in the way the apostles spoke simply and freely of the features of spiritual beauty which they discerned in the saints. They delighted to dwell on such features. But the name written in the white stone is not spoken publicly; it is a personal secret between the Lord and the overcomer. It is the consciousness that He has given us that which He can approve, and that it marks us under His eye. It does not elate us to know it, but it becomes a secret and powerful source of encouragement, strength, and affection.

REVELATION 2 - THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29

It has often been pointed out that in the addresses to the four last assemblies the call to the one that has an ear to "hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies" comes after the promise to the overcomer, intimating that only the overcomer would have an ear. Then the Lord's coming being spoken of to Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia, while Laodicea is warned of utter rejection, indicates that these four assemblies represent conditions which go on to the end of the present period.

To the angel of the assembly in Thyatira the Lord presents Himself as "the Son of God, he that has his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass". We see in this His Personal dignity, and the penetrating nature of His scrutiny, and that He moves in the assemblies to search and test "the reins and the hearts". One can understand the Lord taking this character in relation to such an assembly.

In Ephesus, though there was as yet no public defection, under the Lord's eye first love had been left; then in Pergamos there was public departure — the assembly dwelling in the world and having corrupters within; now in Thyatira we find Jezebel permitted and those in the assembly who were her children. The different stages of departure, and the increasing inroads of evil, which succeeded each other in the history of the assemblies, are thus clearly seen as discerned by the Lord.

But even in an assembly where gross corruption was permitted there was that which the Lord could commend. "Love, and faith, and service, and thine endurance, and thy last works to be more than the first". One delights to think of the personal devotedness found in many saints during what are called "the dark ages". Many whose writings, or portions of them, have been preserved to us evidently loved the Lord and laboured for Him; and probably the vast majority of devoted ones left nothing to perpetuate their names, and never got a place in church history. The Lord could recognize even in such an assembly as Thyatira a remnant who were not Jezebel's children, nor personally corrupted by her teaching, and His consideration for them is very touching. "But to you I say, the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine ... I do not cast upon you any other burden; but what ye have hold fast till I shall come". He takes account of them as having that which was of divine value, and which was to be held fast till He should come.

Their love, faith, service, endurance, and increasing activity in works were the evidence of what was in *their* "reins and hearts".

But along with this fruit of divine grace (every feature of which the Lord loves to recognize and approve, wherever it may be found) there was a condition of things which can only be regarded as appalling. "Thou permittest the woman Jezebel". To recall the history of that "cursed woman" is to be filled with horror at the thought of such a person, typically, being permitted in the assembly. She was the daughter of an idolatrous king of Sidon, and through her influence Ahab became a servant and worshipper of Baal, and "did more to provoke Jehovah the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16). She was the active promoter of idolatry in Israel, for 850 prophets of Baal and of the Asherah ate at her table. She would have killed Elijah the prophet of Jehovah; she brought about the martyrdom of Naboth because he would not surrender the God-given inheritance of his fathers; and she was the prime mover and instigator of the greatest wickedness ever known in Israel. "Surely there was none like to Ahab, who did sell himself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, Jezebel his wife urging him on. And he did very abominably in following idols" (1 Kings 21: 25, 26).

Nothing could be more solemn and terrible than that such a woman should be *permitted* in the assembly, and that she should be there as professing to speak for God; "she who calls herself prophetess, and she teaches and leads astray my servants to commit fornication and eat of idol sacrifices".

The lesson is written large and plain in these epistles to the assemblies that what is called the visible church — the public and responsible light-bearer in the world — cannot be trusted as affording any security for souls, or for truth and holiness.

To how many millions even yet the church's teaching and sacraments appear to have divine authority and to afford divine security! How many think that what the church permits in the way of teaching and practice must be right! How needful for such to consider that when the Lord addresses the assemblies He speaks to Ephesus as fallen, to Pergamos as dwelling where Satan's throne is and as having corrupters of doctrine, to Thyatira as permitting Jezebel with all her abominations, to Sardis as having a name to live and yet dead, to Laodicea as about to be spued out of His mouth! In short, the public body of christian profession is seen to be marked by extreme unfaithfulness, and by the toleration and teaching of everything that is abhorrent to the Lord. So that nothing but judgment, and utter eventual rejection by Him, awaits it.

At this point the Lord turns from the public body, after giving it the most solemn warning of inevitable judgment, and addresses Himself to "the rest

who are in Thyatira". The definite owning of a remnant by the Lord is, in a way, the disowning of the public body, and this is a very solemn consideration, for it is something like the removal of the candlestick. But there were those whom He could distinguish as having that which had divine value, and they were to hold it fast, not until Jezebel repented — for that she would not do — but "till I shall come". The coming of the Lord, would alone terminate the necessity for holding fast and overcoming.

There is an obvious connection between the fornications and idolatries taught by Jezebel, and the fornications and abominations of the great harlot in chapter 17. There we find that the kings of the earth had committed fornication with her. She had sought by her corruptions to get influence and power in the scene where Christ had but a cross and a grave. For the church to want political power in the world that rejects Christ is the most monstrous thing conceivable, and yet to what an extent this unfaithfulness prevails! Many who would denounce the claims of Rome are eager to get, and hold, as much political power as they can; though we may recognize that the Protestant churches have departed from the truth rather by seeking the support of the secular powers than by seeking to dominate them.

The church's place was to be true to Christ, and to maintain undimmed in testimony the light of God revealed in grace in His Son. But this would have been the testimony of a heavenly stranger not seeking influence in the world system, but delivering souls from it. For that which should have been the suffering witness to a rejected Christ to be found in a place of glory and authority in a world which still rejects Him is the complete reversal of all that the Lord intended. The Son of God, as seen in Psalm 2, will have the nations for His inheritance, and the ends of the earth for His possession. He will break them with a sceptre of iron; as a potter's vessel He will dash them in pieces. But that is in a coming day. There could be no greater travesty of the truth than for the church to be in public honour where Christ has suffered and died, and no greater deception for the world.

Christ Himself is the Morning Star of the day of glory, and He is given in that blessed character to the overcomer in Thyatira. The day of glory *will* come, and *then* the overcomer will have "authority over the nations"; he will reign with Christ when Christ reigns, but while Christ suffers and is rejected it is his privilege to share that suffering and rejection. The Morning Star is not Christ shining in public and manifested glory; that is connected with the rising of the Sun of righteousness. The Morning Star is Christ unseen by the sleeping world, and unknown by the corrupted church — occupied in glorifying herself where

Jesus had the cross — but cherished in the affections of the overcomer as the Harbinger of the day of glory.

The overcomer is taken up with all that is coming. He knows its character and he delights in its blessedness because the Day Star has arisen in his heart. All that he has learned and known in Jesus is going to shine forth and irradiate the earth with its glory. Think of what will mark that coming day! The reign of God's Anointed, under which all lawlessness will be judged and banished from His kingdom, and righteousness and peace established. The assembly, His bride, the subject of His love (in which He gave Himself for her, and sanctified and cleansed her by the washing of water by the word) presented to Himself a glorious assembly with no trace of imperfection or decay upon her, reigning with Him to shed abroad in beneficent influence all that she learned of Him by the Spirit while He was hidden in the heavens. The effulgence of God as revealed in His beloved Son shining forth in the assembly as the holy city. All this is present to the affections of the one who has the Morning Star.

Some features of the night would have been ever present if the assemblies had remained faithful, but there is the sad additional element now of assembly corruption. But what cheer and joy to the overcomer, amid the surrounding darkness, to have the Morning Star! The assembly in Thyatira may be regarded as in the darkest hour of the night, but at the darkest moment Christ becomes to the faithful heart the bright Herald of the coming day.

"The Son of God" known in the affections preserves His saints from the idolatrous influences of Jezebel, for He is "the true God and eternal life". "The Morning Star" carries the heart away from any thought of present world glory, and centres its desires and hopes in the Coming One who will bring in the day of glory. To know Christ in these two characters marks the overcomer in Thyatira. And we need to know Him thus to be preserved from the elements of departure and corruption that are seen there. For *our* hearts are naturally prone to idolatry, and to seek some place or glory in the world. Indeed there is not an evil in christendom that we cannot find the germs of in our own hearts. It is possible to denounce the full-blown development of these evils in the historical church without really judging that in ourselves which is their secret root.

All these evils come from the allowance of the man after the flesh. This gives place to that which Satan can work on, and to which he can present seductions which are suited to what man is naturally. There are influences which appeal powerfully to the religious sentiment of the natural man, and we are all liable to give some place to that kind of thing. But if "the Son of God" is before us we have a Man of an entirely different order in view, One out of

death, and able to quicken others so that they live spiritually in association with Him, and are not of the world even as He is not. Then "the Morning Star" arising in the heart connects the affections with all that belongs to the coming day. And this is deeply essential if we are to be preserved from the ten thousand subtle moral influences that belong to man's day.

REVELATION 3 - SARDIS

Revelation 3:1-6

In presenting Himself to Sardis as “he that has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”, the Lord asserts the power which He possesses — a power adequate to bring to pass all that is pleasurable to God — and also that every responsible and light-giving element in the assemblies is His, and therefore that He alone is entitled to order and dispose of it as directly subject and responsible to Him.

“The seven Spirits” are seen in chapter 1 as “before his throne”, and in chapter 4 they are seen as “seven lamps of fire, burning before the throne”. The throne represents God’s sovereign power, the glory and honour of which He must eventually receive, for all things subsist and have been created for His pleasure. And the “seven lamps of fire, burning before the throne”, speak of a power that is adequate to secure a perfect response in light, and in holy judgment of evil, to all that the throne required.

But this will be brought about, as chapter 5 tells us, on the ground of redemption, and when the Lamb is introduced “the seven Spirits of God” are seen as His seven eyes “sent into all the earth”.

This is an evident allusion to Zechariah 3: 9; Zechariah 4: 10. When Zechariah prophesied there had been an intervention of God providentially to deliver His people from Babylonish captivity, and the assembly in Sardis had been the subject of a similar intervention. The gross corruptions and idolatries permitted in Thyatira are not found in Sardis. This in itself suggests some divine intervention, and at least a measure of divine deliverance. But if we read the post-captivity prophets — Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi — who give us what the returned people “received and heard”, we find that while Jehovah called them to devotedness to His house it was to be taken up in the light of Christ, and of His Spirit remaining among them, and of the latter glory which would fill that house. He would have had them to pass beyond what was outward and providential whether Cyrus, Darius, Zerubbabel, or even the temple they were re-building — to be engaged with all that He would establish in a coming day by Christ and in the power of the Spirit. He laid before Joshua the high priest a Stone upon which were seven eyes. He would, in figure, engage him with Christ as the Foundation upon which all His pleasure could rest, and the One marked by perfection of intelligence with regard to it. Perfect discernment with a view to the ordering of all things according to God’s pleasure, and particularly the temple and the holy service, are suggested by the seven eyes.

And His word to Zerubbabel was, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts".

How enlarging would all this have proved to them, and how it would have preserved them from the lifeless formality and Pharisaism into which all soon fell! Through lack of remembering how they had "received and heard" and keeping it and repenting, they lost everything vital, and fell into such a state of unwatchfulness as to be quite unprepared for the coming of Christ. So that when His birth was spoken of by the magi it not only troubled Herod, but "all Jerusalem with him". He truly came upon them as a thief, and they did not know the hour of His coming. And this resulted in their house being left to them desolate, and eventually in the wrath coming on them to the uttermost.

It is solemn to see how history repeated itself in the assemblies. Even though a great deliverance was effected at the Reformation, and escape given from many idolatries and corruptions, and a certain "name that thou livest" attaches to the reformed churches, they are really characterized by lifeless forms, and by the progressive decay — even to the point of death of such things as were of God. The assembly in Sardis is marked by the failure to do works that are complete before God, by forgetfulness of what has been received and heard, and by unwatchfulness as to the coming of the Lord. Such is Protestantism, as to its general state, under the eye of the Lord. And who cannot see how true is the indictment? An open Bible, and much truth from God — for He speaks of what had been "received and heard" — does not ensure spiritual vitality. It is a wholesome warning for us all, It is not what I am in profession, or even the "name" I have with others, that has value, but what I am in *spiritual vitality*. If this is lacking there is no completion of one's works before God, and even what remains of that which was originally of God tends to die.

The Lord presents Himself to this assembly as having the seven Spirits of God. He has every power that can bring about a spiritual result. All that will be accomplished in the earth when righteousness covers it, and the will of God is done on earth as in heaven, will be accomplished by Christ in the power of the seven Spirits of God. But all the power which He will exercise in a coming day to bring about such public and universal results is His today, and He is exercising it on behalf of His saints, though in a hidden way, so that only faith can recognize it. In presenting Himself to Sardis as having the seven Spirits of God the Lord indicated that He had plenitude of power and intelligence to bring about the setting up of that which would really be for the pleasure of God. If the reformers of the sixteenth century had taken due account of this they would have been preserved from looking to the world-powers for patronage and support, which only had the effect of putting the world-powers

in a place of authority over the church. This is nearly as lamentable as for the church to assume to exercise authority over the world-powers.

Then the assertion that the Lord has "the seven stars" is a reminder that He alone is entitled to order and control every responsible and light-giving element in the assemblies. If this had been seen clearly it could never have been admitted that kings and rulers should appoint to office in the church, or that congregations even of believers should choose their own pastors and teachers. The gifts in Ephesians 4 are given by the ascended Head for the body universally. In 1 Corinthians 12 gifts are set by God in the assembly. Ability to edify the assembly must be God-given, and when it is given it becomes the assembly's privilege to recognize it and profit by it. But where a human order prevails there may be much divine gift that is not available because the established order gives no room for its exercise. What men call *order* is often really confusion in a divine sense, because it does not recognize the sovereignty of the Lord, or the operations of "the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular as he pleases", nor is it the order of the assembly of God as we see it in Scripture.

The effects of the human appointment and ordering of that which can only be rightly appointed and ordered by the Lord are manifest on all sides. Where such conditions obtain, the inevitable tendency is to drop into lifeless forms, and even that which remains of what was originally of God gets weaker and weaker so that it is "about to die". In presence of such conditions can we wonder that there is but a name to live? Or that unwatchfulness as to the coming of the Lord is everywhere found?

Only under the direct authority and control of Christ as Lord will responsibility be carried out according to His mind, and His service go on in true co-operation and co-ordination as one whole. "There are distinctions of services, and the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12: 5). The carnal mind would regard Paul and Apollos as *two*, and would make choice between them; one saying, "I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos", but the Apostle insists that "the planter and the waterer are *one*". Each is serving "as the Lord has given to each", and under His administration each (in the measure which divine sovereignty allots to him) contributes to one whole. Each has his own gift and service from the Lord, and his direct responsibility to the Lord, but he is called to serve in harmony with all other service which is being carried on under the same Lord. So that in the Lord's service there is individual responsibility without anything like independency.

There is also local responsibility, for each "star" has its local place, but there can be no local independency if "the same Lord" has the *seven* stars. No

principle can be rightly applied locally that it would not be right to apply everywhere; so that local responsibility must be carried out in view of what is universal. Everything enjoined on "the assembly of God which is in Corinth" was also obligatory on "all that *in every place* call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". What a wide outlook this gives us, even while dealing with what seems to be merely local! True assembly thoughts and exercises can never be limited to what is local. They always take account of what is universal.

The due recognition of the Lord as having "the seven stars" would put every responsible element in right relation and subjection to Him, and would preserve it from any merely human arrangements or ordering. And each service taken up, whether by individuals or by saints viewed as in local responsibility of assembly character, would be carried out in harmony with all other service under the same Lord universally. How this would deliver from all personal and ecclesiastical independency! And it would also exclude all narrowing influences such as are connected with what is merely local, national, or sectarian.

However favoured we may be spiritually we have to take heed that things do not become formal or decadent with us. There is always that tendency, and it has to be watched against. He says, "I have not found thy works complete before my God". Nothing but completeness will satisfy Him, nor will it really satisfy those who love Him and care for His interests. Hence Epaphras prayed for the Colossians that they might stand perfect and complete in everything that was God's will. And Paul prayed for the Philippians that they might be "complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise". There can be no relaxing of purpose, vigilance, or prayer, or our works may be found incomplete before God. There has been a beginning with many of us, but not a sufficient following up of spiritual exercises to bring them to completion. There is great danger in this, for if things are not pursued to completion they ever tend to decline.

The assembly in Sardis is marked by incompleteness; A measure of light, and a measure of divine deliverance, but nothing in regard to Christ, or the Spirit, or the assembly worked out to its proper result before God. How easily may any of us fail in like manner! The Lord gave much that was precious to Sardis. Much light was given at the time of the Reformation and afterwards, but it was lost in great measure by the attempt to adapt it to the world and by settling down in worldly associations. "A name that thou livest, and art dead", is a reputation without spiritual vitality. To each assembly the Lord says, "I know thy *works*". He knows our words, and what doctrines we hold, but He takes

account chiefly of what *holds us*; He looks to see how things work out practically with us. The result in light-giving is what He is concerned about.

Satan is always trying to catch the people of God and draw them into worldly associations. If saints mix with the world they do not sanctify the world, but they defile their own garments. The result of worldly associations is that the confession of Christ has to be given up, for it will not be tolerated in the world. A confessor of Christ must be a separate man. He believes on the One whom the world has rejected; he watches for His coming again; and in the meantime confesses Him. His works, his watchfulness, and his confession all flow from affection for Christ. Such a one will be confessed by Him before His Father and before His Father's angels. He may have to suffer and bear reproach now, content to walk under the eye of the Lord and have His approval in secret. But by-and-by he will have public acknowledgment. You need never fear that anything in your public or private history that has been pleasing to God will be overlooked. Nothing that is of God can ever be lost; it is eternal in its very nature. So "he that does the will of God abides for eternity".

"But thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy". "A few *names*"; that is, the Lord takes account of them personally by name. Amid general decline and unwatchfulness they have preserved purity in their associations — practical separation in heart and life from the world. They will walk with Him in white, as worthy. How blessed to walk even now in suitability to Christ, so that to walk with Him in white is but to continue in scenes of unsullied purity a similar character of movement!

The reward of the overcomer in Sardis is threefold. The "white garments" are the appropriate recognition of the character of his walk here. As marked by unworldliness and the moral features of Christ, he would know reproach here, for his walk and deportment would condemn the lifeless and unwatchful professors around him, and awaken their enmity. But his reward is to be "clothed in white garments". The "white stone" of chapter 2: 17 is private and personal, but the "white garments" are public recognition — the Lord putting forth as approved by Himself those who "have not defiled their garments".

Then "I will not blot his name out of the book of life". The book of life is an ancient book, for names were written in it "from the founding of the world" (Revelation 13: 8); that is clearly connected with God's purpose and counsel. But the working out of that purpose must be through suited moral conditions, and it is in reference to this that from of old the thought of blotting out has been connected with God's book. Moses, in a wonderful moment, said, "And now, if thou wilt forgive their sin ... but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy

book that thou hast written. And Jehovah said to Moses, Whoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32: 32, 33). And we also read, "Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous" (Psalm 69: 28). It is the record of those who are "written among the living", but there is the solemn possibility that names which were once enrolled there may be blotted out. If it turns out that there is no vitality in a man his name may be removed from the register. Indeed, the very fact that it is the book of *life* suggests that a living character must attach to those whose names are in it. If it becomes manifest that persons are not characterized by *life* their names may be blotted out as no longer entitled to remain on the register.

Finally, the overcomer's name will be confessed "before my Father and before his angels". It is to be noted that He does not speak of confessing him before the world, who might not have known much about him, but before His Father, who had seen everything in secret (Matthew 6: 6), and before His Father's angels, who had been observant of all his ways, and had noticed even such details as whether a woman was sufficiently in the truth of headship to cover her head when she prayed (1 Corinthians 11: 10). How strikingly does this speak of the spiritual vitality and intense reality which mark the overcomer!

May none of us miss the solemn lessons connected with the Lord's words to Sardis, or be found lacking in the characteristics which mark the overcomer there!

REVELATION 3 - PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:7-13

No part of Scripture could be more encouraging and stimulating to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to cherish His interests at the present time, than the epistle to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia. It shews that the Lord intends to have under His eye at the close of the church's history on earth something quite different from the corruptions of Popery, or the lifeless formalism of Protestantism, and in marked contrast to the lukewarm and boastful condition seen in Laodicea.

There is a remnant in Thyatira, a few faithful individuals in Sardis, and the possibility of some individual hearing the Lord's voice, and opening the door to Him, even in Laodicea. We have seen in Sardis indications of revival corresponding with the movement which we speak of as the Reformation. But Philadelphia speaks of a further revival. Not merely a correction of gross abuses, but a return to the original spiritual features of the assembly. For to keep the word of Christ and not to deny His Name, to know His love, and to keep the word of His patience is really to have the spiritual features which marked the assembly at the beginning. And these features are seen here as held in "the love of the brethren" — Philadelphia means this — and having the approval of the Lord.

That there have been remarkable spiritual movements within the last hundred years will not be questioned by any whose ears and eyes have been open to what the Spirit has been saying and what the Lord has been doing. Those movements have had in view the bringing about such spiritual conditions as are seen in Philadelphia. I do not pretend to say how far that end has been reached, or in how many of the saints; probably only in a partial way as yet anywhere. But I have no doubt that the Lord is working in thousands of hearts with this end in view. If this is the distinctive character of what He is doing at the present moment, it claims the attention and profound interest of every heart that loves Him. None of us, surely, would like to miss the peculiar privilege of the great spiritual revival which Philadelphia indicates! We have often heard of evangelical revivals, but what comes before us in Philadelphia is the fruit of what may be called a church revival. If we consider the features of assembly revival which are here presented to our view we may discern how much — or how little! — that revival has reached our hearts in divine power.

We have seen already how important it is to observe the character in which the Lord Jesus presents Himself to each assembly, for it is the spiritual apprehension of Him in that character that enables one to be an overcomer. To

Philadelphia He presents Himself as "the holy, the true", and as having "the key of David". It is what He is personally, and His acting for the assembly. To have Christ before us as "the holy, the true", is to be apart in spirit from every element of corruption or formality. It is to be engaged with One who is of an entirely different order from the man who admits such elements. One absolutely apart from any trace of what is defiling, God's Holy One.

He knew no sin, yet was He made sin for us that God might be glorified in His holiness; and now as risen and ascended He is "the holy"; no moral stain can ever be found upon Him. He ever was personally without stain, but He is "the holy" as having taken up the question of man's sinful state as in Adam, and removed it sacrificially in His death. He was forsaken because God was holy (Psalm 22: 3) when He was found vicariously in the place of the defiled and sinful man, and in His death the history of that man has been ended before God. Anything that gives man in the flesh a place — even in his best and most attractive form — is contrary to divine holiness. The sanctimoniousness of the flesh often passes for holiness, but it is quite another thing to be in Christ Jesus — the risen and heavenly Man — and to have Him made unto us holiness. Any true desire amongst Christians for holiness or increased devotedness is an exercise produced by the Spirit of God, but the movements in this direction at the present day often stop far short of the divine thought. People can have what they call "holiness by faith", and yet go on with many things which are contrary to the truth, and which really give man in the flesh a place. But God would have us to see that man condemned and set aside in judgment in the death of Christ, and that a risen and glorified Man is "the holy", and that we are in Him and have His Spirit so that we may come out here as having the moral features of a new and heavenly order of man. This detaches us completely from self as a centre, and connects us in mind and affection with Christ in heaven. We then begin to realize that the saints are "one body in Christ" for the expression of Christ down here. In the light of this how could we go on with any religious order or system which gives man in the flesh a place? In taking character from Christ, and being formed in Him — formed in the divine nature — we get *holiness by love*. And as saints take this up together in the love of the brethren there is that under the eye of the Lord which has the original features of the assembly. There is something which has true assembly character.

Then Christ is also "the true". The assemblies have proved themselves untrue; they have not maintained the character which attached to them as "golden lamps" set to shine in witness here. They have not been genuinely even what they have professed to be. But Christ is "the true". Whatever character attaches to Him, whatever office He fills, whatever service He renders,

whatever He presents Himself as being or doing or saying, Godward or manward, *that* He *is* in the fullest and most genuine sense. He is the true Light, the true Bread, the true Vine, the true God, the true Witness. He is the absolute embodiment and expression of all that is blessed, whether it be on the side of revelation, or on the side of response to revelation in a Man. In whatever character we think of Him — and how innumerable are the forms of love, wisdom, grace and power which He wears! — He is the full setting forth of that character.

All God's thoughts of blessing for man are set forth in Him. We do not need to go outside Christ for anything. He is made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness and redemption. All is seen in Him without defect or diminution. He is "the true". And consequent upon His death, and His being glorified, we have His Spirit so that we may consciously know and enjoy what is true in Him, and be found in moral correspondence with it down here, and that this may mark us in the relations in which we stand as loving the brethren.

"He that has the key of David, he who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open". This is clearly an allusion to Isaiah 22, where under figure of Shebna and Eliakim is set forth God's utter rejection of man after the flesh, and His causing all that is glorious to be found connected with Christ. As to Shebna, all his activities in the house only resulted in his having a sepulchre there — the evidence that he was under death. "Behold, Jehovah will hurl thee with the force of a mighty man, and will cover thee entirely. Rolling thee up completely, he will roll thee as a ball into a wide country: there shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, O shame of thy lord's house!" No more striking figure of utter rejection can be found. But there is One of whom Jehovah speaks as "my servant", who has the key of the house of David upon His shoulder, and who opens and shuts so that none can reverse what He does. He is a throne of glory to His Father's house, and He sustains all the glory and vessels of that house. And even He after the flesh must go — as intimated in verse 25 — that He may take all up, and hold it abidingly as the Risen and Heavenly One.

To Philadelphia He gives "an opened door, which no one can shut, because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name". The "works" of Philadelphia have a very precious character, for they are all directly connected with Christ. They consist in keeping His word, not denying His Name, and keeping the word of His patience. The fact that these things are kept is the evidence of power. It is not power that makes a show in the world; the Lord speaks of it as "a little power"; but it is spiritual power

exercised in the cherishing of that which is infinitely great and precious, and that in which all assembly testimony consists.

His "word" is the expression of Himself, and in that the Father is revealed. He came into the world to declare God, and none but the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father could do that. Then His "name" suggests that He is personally absent; He is no longer here, but is a glorified Man in heaven. It is everything to cherish that Person, to cherish the revelation of God in Him, and all the precious and holy features of that Blessed Man. It is really to know Him that is from the beginning, and there is nothing beyond this; it is the joy of "fathers" in the family of God (1 John 2). Though He is no longer here personally He is here in the confession of His Name by the brethren who love one another. The test of everything in word or deed or spirit is, Does it express Christ? Is the love that binds us together as brethren the very love to which He gave impulse at the beginning? "A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13: 34). Whatever is contrary to this is a denial of His Name. Our self-seeking, our sectarian narrowness, deny that Name; they do not confess the absent One, or maintain Him here in testimony; they are unworthy of saints. We are to walk together in the love of the brethren confessing His Name — bringing that Name into evidence by the holy love in which we walk together. This is true assembly character, and assembly testimony.

Then He can say, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience". The whole story of His rejection by the world is wrapped up in that word. His rights have all been refused Him here, and He sits at God's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool. He is waiting in patience to have His rights and glory in another day, and His saints in Philadelphia are marked by keeping the testimony of His patience. They will not reign as kings where *He* is despised and rejected. They leave the politics of the world to those who are of it; they wait for the One who will set aside the whole present political system of the world by His own power and kingdom in due time. They own the powers that be as ordained of God, and are in submission to them, but they cannot take part in ruling where Christ is rejected. Nor can they help on things which are on the line of giving Christianity a place of honour in the world. As companions of Christ's rejection they look to be found in the place of reproach here. And they will escape the hour of trial that is coming. The world hopes that things will get better; politicians labour to bring about improvement; but the saints know that what is about to come is an hour of unprecedented trial "upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth". The Lord spoke of it very distinctly. Those that dwell upon the earth will have to learn by terrible experience the instability of all things here; everything that

they trust in will be overturned. The events of recent years have shewn how little confidence can be put in the stability of things here. What will it be in that fast-approaching moment when the hour of trial really comes, and the power of evil breaks forth in its full manifestation? The assembly will be kept out of that hour of trial, for she will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the great tribulation. And in the meantime saints, as keeping the word of Christ's patience, are kept out of the turmoil and instability that mark the political world. Their trust is in God amidst wars, revolutions, and the angry contentions of selfish and ambitious men. Their hope as to things here is the appearing of Christ.

"Behold, I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut". Those who have the Philadelphian characteristics will not be stopped in their service or testimony, though having no human influence or support, and no human organization to promote success. The synagogue of Satan is plainly hinted at as the great opponent of this assembly, even as it had been of the assembly in Smyrna. It is those with earthly religious pretensions, authority derived from tradition, and exercised through formal ordinances. The Lord says that they lie. The severity of this description should be well weighed; comment upon it is needless. All such will be caused to come and do homage before the feet of those whom they have despised and opposed, but whose way they have not been able to close. They "shall know that I have loved thee". It is the assembly's sweet portion and joy to be loved by Christ. He "loved the assembly and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that *he* might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless"(Ephesians 5: 25 - 27).

"I come quickly". People say, How could it be "quickly" when nearly 2000 years have intervened? Such do not understand the language of love. It was "quickly" to Him — ever near to His affections; and He would have it to be "quickly" to the affections of His saints. He would not have us to be, like those of old, counting long periods of prophetic days or years to His coming, but ever having it in our hearts as "quickly".

The "crown" is the distinction and glory which saints have as cherishing Christ and His thoughts of the assembly. There is an unremitting effort to take it, and it is needful to "hold fast". Religious literature is often very subtle and ensnaring, and many suffer more loss than they are aware of by reading it.

Keep yourself in the atmosphere of Scripture, and feed on spiritual ministry. I remember when newly converted coming to the conclusion that it was well to

read *the best that is available*, and I commend this as a good principle to young believers.

There is an overcomer even in Philadelphia. Whatever character an assembly may have, overcoming is always individual. This requires individual energy in spiritual affections. It would be a very great privilege to walk with saints who had truly Philadelphian character, but we should have to recognize that each one who had this character was individually an overcomer. No matter how spiritual the persons may be with whom I walk, I can only have the Lord's approbation and reward by being an overcomer myself. It requires individual overcomers to *hold together in the love of the brethren* the precious things which we have spoken of. And this is Philadelphia. It is a condition that can only be maintained in the energy of spiritual affections to which Christ is pre-eminent, and by which the assembly, and all that relates to it, is cherished because it is the subject of the love of Christ, and all is held in the love of the brethren. It is an exercise for us all — for all saints as to how far we have this character. But at any rate we can allow our desires to be formed by this precious utterance of our Lord, and we can pray that it may increasingly characterize us as seeking to walk with our brethren in truth and love.

The reward of the overcomer in this assembly is very precious. "He that overcomes, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more at all out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven, from my God, and my new name". Notice the four-fold repetition of "My God". It is the anointed and glorified Man who speaks, of whom it is written that "the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11: 3). His delight will be to make the overcomer a conspicuous and abiding ornament — like the Jachin and Boaz of Solomon's temple — in that heavenly shrine where there is holy intelligence of the mind of God, and where "everything saith, Glory". It is what the overcomer is morally now. As having found his strength in being established by God in Christ and anointed, he is marked by spiritual intelligence and stability. He stands firm in that holy temple where all is made known that is covered by the word "mystery" — so characteristic, in its different connections, of Paul's ministry. He will have his abiding place as a pillar in that shrine where

"Radiant hosts for ever share
The unveiled mystery". (74:7)

"And I will write upon him". We are accustomed to think of Christ as the Apostle — the great Speaker — but He is also the great Writer. Saints are even

now the epistle of Christ, and He is writing upon the fleshy tables of their hearts, in principle, what He will write upon the overcomer. "The name of my God". It is God revealed — we may reverently say as Christ His beloved Son knows Him that is being written now in the affections of saints by the skilful hand of that Blessed One. What is *spoken* by Christ is the revelation presented objectively to men, but what is *written* by Him is the revelation made good in human hearts subjectively under the effective operation of His hand. It is written that it might be "known and read of all men" — that saints might appear before men as having the true knowledge of God in their hearts, because it has been written there by Christ. They thus become the tables of testimony here. The Name of His God will be written by Christ on the overcomer in his glorified state. He will display publicly in the overcomer those impressions of His God which as the great Writer He delights to imprint in a living and indelible way in the affections of His saints.

"And the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven, from my God". God revealed as the Son knows Him must be, as it were, the first line of the divine writing; it is primary and fundamental. But the second line, if we may so say, is concerning the assembly. How Christ loves to write in the affections of His saints now what the assembly will be as the city of His God! The new and holy and heavenly vessel in which the glory of His God will be displayed! That city will be the pure and transparent shrine of divine glory in the world to come and throughout eternity. The overcomer will have its name written upon him by Christ; the renown and glory of the city of God will be read upon him in a peculiar and distinctive way. It is a wondrous honour to come even now under the impression from the hand of Christ of what the assembly is in her divine and heavenly dignity and glory. And do you not think that it is a peculiar satisfaction to Christ to find overcomers today on whose hearts He can write what the assembly is as the city of His God? While so many even true believers think hardly at all of the assembly, and so many in christendom connect the thought of the church with a great corrupt profession which is in God's sight Babylon, it must be a pleasure to Christ to write — as it is indeed an honour to the overcomer who is counted worthy to have written upon him by Christ — what the assembly is in her true character and glory as the city of His God. The effulgence of all that God is, shining forth in the accomplishment of the purposes of His love in that city for which Abraham waited, and in which will be found the answer to every spiritual desire that was formed by divine working in the spirits of just men in ages past. They will find all that they longed for in that city, and though not forming part of it, their blessedness will be found in relation to it, "God having foreseen

some better thing for us, that they should not be made perfect without us" (Hebrews 11: 40).

That city will come down out of heaven having the glory of God to be the connecting link between heaven and earth in the world to come, as we see in Revelation 21, and what it will be in displayed glory is what it is morally now. It is not future to the faith and affections and spiritual intelligence of the saints, for we are said to "*have come* ... to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12: 22). To do so must be to turn one's back for ever on the corrupt city which is in evidence here, the city which is marked by the glory of man — Babylon!

"And my new name". Christ has a Name of gracious power in relation to what is old. For example, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for *he* shall save his people from their sins"(Matthew 1: 21). "Him has God exalted by his right hand as leader and saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins" (Acts 5: 31). He can meet divinely all the need of fallen and sinful men, and it is His renown to do so. But that is not what is written on the overcomer; it is His "new name"; the renown that attaches to Him in relation to what is new! This book speaks of "new Jerusalem", a "new heaven and a new earth", "all things new", Sin and death have come in here, and made things old, but Jesus has a Name in relation to what is entirely and eternally new. He has already brought in a company of brethren after His own order, and many sons for God, and He will be the Centre and Sun of a universe of bliss where no trace of evil will ever come. It is His distinctive glory to be the Accomplisher of all the Father's eternal purposes of love. And when every trace of that which became old by the entrance of sin has passed away, the new, which had its origin in God's purpose before the foundation of the world, will remain. And all that Christ is in relation to what will be eternally new is set forth in "My new name". It will be written on the overcomer, so that it may be read in him in a distinctive way.

The epistle "to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia" shews that the Lord contemplated a distinct revival at the end of the history of the assembly on earth. There was a measure of revival in Sardis, but it goes much farther in Philadelphia, and restores to those who have — through the Lord's grace to them — "a little power" the precious spiritual features which marked the assembly at the beginning. There is individual faithfulness, but there is something more. *There is a binding together in the love of the brethren.* And I believe the grace of the Lord is active at the present moment to bring this about. It is the greatest comfort and encouragement to think of it.

It is open to all saints to consider that we have reached a time in which the Lord is moving, and the Spirit is speaking, with a view to things being found in Philadelphian character. In a day of much weakness it would ill become any saints to assume to have that character. It would be better to leave the determination of this to Him who says, "I know thy works". But if we recognize that there is such a phase in church history as Philadelphia, coming in after Sardis and continuing to the rapture, it might well be our earnest prayer and purpose of heart that we might answer to what is said to that assembly.

If the Lord is moving to bring this about in His grace we may be sure that it is in love to *all* His saints, and that He would have all to appreciate His movements, and to follow them. It is for all saints to see that they do not lag behind in Sardis if the Lord is leading on to Philadelphia. For if we do not move with Him we may possibly fall into that last terrible phase which is set forth in Laodicea. Lukewarm and boastful, but with no place for Christ, and about to be spued out of His mouth.

REVELATION 3 - LAODICEA

Revelation 3:14-22

Christ is everything to Philadelphia, but He has no place in Laodicea. The presentation of Himself is encouragement and stimulus to Philadelphia, but to Laodicea it is rebuke. Philadelphia is the product of a spiritual ministry of Christ become formative through self-judgment and the exercises of intelligent affection. This gives the knowledge of Christ in His relation to the assembly and to all things, and of the assembly in its relation to Christ. But Laodicea is marked by indifference to Christ, and self-sufficiency. It is the closing phase of church history, and its characteristics are widely discernible today. So that it is most important to apprehend Christ as He presents Himself to this assembly. It is what the Spirit would bring before the christian profession in a special way at the present time.

He is "the Amen" — the establishment and confirmation of every divine thought and purpose. There can be no development, no advance upon Christ; He is God's last word. All the Fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily, and the saints are filled full in Him. We must remember that the Colossian epistle was to be "read also in the assembly of Laodiceans" (Colossians 4: 16). That epistle, if engrafted in the souls of the saints, would have preserved them — and will preserve us — from the state into which Laodicea fell. The test and exposure of every corrupting influence is that it is "not according to Christ" (Colossians 2: 8). And in the new man "Christ is everything and in all" (Colossians 3: 11). All departure is really a turning away from Christ. When people first admit the principles of the world — legality, philosophy, etc. — the enemy persuades them that they are getting something additional to Christ; it is a bitter lesson for a soul to learn, that for the sake of worthless things it has really *given up Christ*. To add anything to "the Amen" is really to lose Him.

It is the time of witness now, and everything that God is witnessing is embodied in Christ. A risen and glorified Man is "the faithful and true witness". The fact that He is in heaven witnesses that He died here, and His death witnesses the total ruin, and setting aside in judgment, of man after the flesh. But the fact that HE died is the perfect and blessed witness of the love of God.

"Love that on death's dark vale
Its sweetest odours spread;
Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail,
Redemption's glory shed". (235:4)

Now Man is in the presence of God for God's delight, according to His eternal purpose. God's thought for man, and the full measure of His grace to men, are set forth in a glorified Man in heaven. He is preached as glad tidings — the faithful and true Witness of what is in the heart and mind of God. God would have us to pass over from all our ruin and condemnation in Adam to the blessedness and acceptance of the glorified Man! All true witness — whether individual or assembly witness — is presenting in testimony what He is. The church should have been faithful and true, the continuation of Christ here in witness. She has utterly failed, but Christ abides faithful, and the ministry of Christ brings hearts back to Him as the true Witness of God, and of all that has value before God. It is to be preserved in witness, and an assembly that fails to do so will inevitably be utterly rejected — spued out of His mouth as nauseous to Him.

He is "the beginning of the creation of God". It changes the whole outlook of the soul when Christ is seen to be the Beginning of God's creation. It is not that Christ comes in subsequently to remedy what has failed, but He is the starting-point of all that God has ever done or will do. He was the Beginning of the creation of Genesis 1 — the One from whom all derived being, and it came into existence that it might be the sphere of His glory. Whatever element appeared in God's ways — promise, sacrifice, resurrection, government, the kingdom in Israel or in mystery, the church, the world to come, eternal purposes unfolded — Christ was "*the beginning*" of all. Nor do we understand any part of it until we see this. If He is "the beginning of the creation of God" it involves that all that follows must take character from Him. And eventually everything will disappear from the creation of God that does not take character from Christ. The Colossian epistle presents Him as "the beginning" in relation to "the body, the assembly" (Colossians 1: 18), as "firstborn from among the dead", the One who will have "the first place in all things". What a setting forth of Christ is this to an assembly like Laodicea which gives Him no place!

A lukewarm state is nauseous to the Lord. It is neither the "cold" of no profession at all, nor the "hot" of hearts that truly love Him, and that love one another with a pure heart fervently. It is a state that unites boastful profession with real indifference to Christ, and in which there is not a single thing that has divine or spiritual value. Lukewarmness is a special feature of the closing phase of church history, and it is a danger against which we ever need to watch and pray. We have to discern and judge what is Laodicean in ourselves. It is possible to have intelligence of Scripture, and a large measure of outward correctness, without that heat of spiritual desire and affection which is agreeable to the Lord.

Possibly none of us are as “hot” as we might be. We may well pray, as we sometimes do: -

“O kindle within us a holy desire,
Like that which was found in Thy people of old,
Who tasted Thy love, and whose hearts were on fire,
While they waited, in patience, Thy face to behold”. (194:4)

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and am grown rich; and have need of nothing, and knowest not that *thou* art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”. She speaks of herself and not of Christ — a sure sign of spiritual decay, And she claims to be rich — to have acquired wealth — so as to be self-sufficient. It is *her own* estimate of her endowments and resources, but an altogether mistaken one. She may be rich in the intellectual culture of her ministers, and their ability to decide which part of Scripture is inspired and which not, or whether any of it is! Rich, too, in the architectural beauty of the buildings in which her congregations gather, and in the attractiveness of her services, and in her ability to present what meets the tastes of natural men, and gives her influence over them. But what has she *spiritually*? Judged by every standard of spiritual value she is “the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”. Such is the Lord’s estimate of this assembly. She has not Christ; He is outside.

But He gives her counsel. “I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire, that thou mayest be rich”. To buy of Him is a personal transaction with Christ. All of true value must be acquired and possessed through exercise, and from Christ alone. “Gold purified by fire” would be all that is of God in Christ,

made available for men through sin having been judged in the sufferings and death of Christ. This is true riches, and a solid ground of boasting. (See 1 Corinthians 1: 30, 31.) Paul in Philippians 3 is an example of one who was set to buy “gold purified by fire”. He had parted with all that was once his trust and boast, as in flesh, that he might acquire CHRIST as his gain, and might be “found in him, not having my righteousness which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith”.

“White garments that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest”, speak of the moral characteristics of Christ as that with which the saints are to be invested. The vain-glorious pretensions of the flesh are spiritually “nakedness” and “shame”. But the fruit of the Spirit of Christ being possessed is that lust and pride and self-sufficiency are judged, and such qualities as obedience, meekness, lowliness, kindness,

longsuffering, come into evidence. These are "white garments"; they are the moral features of the heavenly Man as they come out in the circumstances of the saints on earth. Clothing is that in which we appear before others. They are the fruit of Christ being in the saints.

Then the power of spiritual perception is a great necessity. So He counsels Laodicea to acquire "eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see". Ananias was sent to Saul "that thou mightest see, and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9: 17). He was henceforth to see things in an entirely new way — to have the vision of the Spirit, if we may so say. In Laodicea there is boasting in the abilities of the human mind; its competency to judge of things is assumed and gloried in; but the Holy Spirit is ignored. There is no spiritual perception save by the Spirit. John says to the "little children" in the family of God, "Ye have the unction from the holy one, and ye know all things ... and yourselves, the unction which ye have received from him abides in you, and ye have not need that any one should teach you; but as the same unction teaches you as to all things, and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2: 20, 27). This anointing is indeed "eye-salve", and none but the Lord can supply it.

It is very striking that the Lord should speak of His love to such an assembly as Laodicea. "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love; be zealous therefore and repent". He speaks as a Lover still, but it is love that cannot be complacent; things are such that His love can only be active in the way of rebuke and discipline. It is a solicitude over the assembly in its last stage of failure similar to that which yearned over Jerusalem in its last day (Matthew 23: 37, 38). Happy are those who discern His rebuke and discipline! Amid boastings and self-sufficiency they discover that all is really wretchedness, misery, poverty, blindness, and nakedness. Intellectual culture, modern thought with its unblushing infidelity, the bringing Christianity into line with all man's ideas of progress and world-improvement, are wretched and comfortless things indeed to a conscience that has learned under the rebuke and discipline of divine love that man after the flesh is an utter moral ruin, or to a heart that has got the feeblest conception of Christ as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness,

the beginning of the creation of God". They are worthless because they are not Christ, and they exclude Him. In Laodicea the door is closed, not upon philosophy and vain deceit, the teaching of men, or the elements of the world, but upon CHRIST. He is outside.

But how sweet to the heart that has learned to value Christ to hear Him say, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice and

open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me"! This is the Lord's position and attitude today in relation to a profession which is characterized by the boastings of man in the flesh. He is still faithful to His own love; He still rebukes and disciplines in a thousand ways; and it is not simply that He knocks once or twice and retires, but He has placed Himself at the door and continues knocking, and He will do so until that moment when the catching up of the saints will involve the utter rejection by Him of Laodicea.

An opportunity is afforded still for any one to hear the Lord knocking and His voice. Where there is spiritual vitality it will respond; His rebuke and discipline will be recognized, His voice heard. The work of God in souls comes to light in that way. If any one desires to have His company, and opens the door, He says, "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". The Lord would thus separate morally each responsive heart from an assembly that is rich without Him, and that does not want Him. The Lord sups with such an one; He enters sympathetically into all his exercises, and makes him conscious that he is thoroughly known, and that every spiritual desire in his heart that has Christ as its Object, or that has found its satisfaction in Christ, is fully and deeply appreciated by an Eternal Lover.

But there is more than this! "He with me". The Lord delights to bring such a heart into the communion of all that He desires and cherishes. To sup with Him would indicate sharing His thoughts and interests in the intimacy and confidence which is the portion of a friend (John 15: 13 - 15). "All things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you". He loved to manifest the Father's Name to the men which the Father gave Him out of the world. They were those of whom He could speak as "My brethren", and to whom He could send the message, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". To sup with Him would surely be to be brought into the communion of what is in His heart in regard to the assembly which He loved, and for which He delivered Himself up. So that the individual supping with Christ would not remain individual as to the scope of his thoughts and affections, but would have his heart expanded into the width of the interests and affections of Christ.

John is very individual, but no one emphasizes more than John love to one another, love to the brethren, and the family links and affections of the children of God. The more we enjoy individual privilege in having the manifestation of Christ, and supping with Him, the more we shall value those spiritual links that bind us in holy affection to the brethren. We come individually into the light of what pertains to the saints collectively and

corporately as the house and family of God, as the body of Christ, as the temple. The assembly is still here, and faith holds to this in spite of all the feebleness and scattering that have come in. So that individual faithfulness, and the enjoyment of individual privilege, can never lead to isolation or independency, but to the increased appreciation of every link which we can take up with our brethren that is in keeping with the truth of the assembly.

The promise to the overcomer in Laodicea is the only one which contains any reference to the Lord's own pathway. "I also have overcome". It is as though the Lord would retain Himself in a special way in the view of the overcomer. Almost His last word to His own before going to the cross was, "In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33). He never gave place to any principle that is found in operation in the world. When the ruler of the world came he found nothing in that Blessed One; there was no point of moral contact between Christ and the world.

It is as having been the Overcomer that He has sat down with His Father in His throne. He is not yet on His own throne; He is waiting for the moment when His foes will be made His footstool; but in the meantime He is with His Father in a place which bears witness to His Father's appreciation of Him as the Overcomer. And in the coming day when He sits upon His own throne in the kingdom He will give to the overcomer to sit with Him. The world which Jesus overcame was the Jewish world — the world of profession and self-righteousness, but of unreality, where every divine witness was persecuted. It was in almost the last day of the nation's history before the wrath came upon them to the uttermost. The overcomer in Laodicea is in the last day of the christian profession; he is surrounded by lukewarmness, boasting, and indifference to Christ. But Christ is to him "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God", and he has clear in his vision the coming kingdom. In that kingdom he will sit with Christ in His throne.

REVELATION 4

Revelation 4

We must keep in mind that this book is divided into three parts. It was said to John, "Write therefore what thou hast seen, and the things that are, and the things that are about to be after these" (Revelation 1: 19). The things which John had seen are in chapter 1; "the things that are" refer to the assemblies — the church period. This was present when John wrote, and it still continues. Then there are "the things that are about to be after these"; chapter 4: 1 connects itself with this by the twice-repeated, "After these things". We do not find the assembly on earth after chapter 3, but we see divine grace and testimony in other companies of saints who will be found here after the assembly has been translated.

Chapters 4 and 5 come in as introductory to the properly prophetic part of the book. The first verse of chapter 4 is most important. John saw "a door opened *in heaven*", and heard a Voice which said, "*Come up here*, and I will shew thee the things which must take place after these things". John was to look at things from heaven, and it is from that standpoint that saints of the assembly view prophecy. It is this which makes the difference between Revelation and Daniel, though there are, of course, certain points of contact between them. Daniel — the representative of an earthly people — had visions by the rivers Ulai and Hiddekel, but John is the representative of a heavenly company, and he is called to "Come up here".

The church will be actually in heaven after chapter 3, and to look aright at chapters 4 - 19 we must be spiritually there. The Lord would call us up there in spirit now, so that we may look down upon the earth as the scene of prophecy from a point outside it. He would not have us to be occupied with prophecy from an earthly standpoint. Many interpreters of this book have not gone up there, and they have been largely occupied in trying to fit past and current events into prophecy. Every one knows how they have succeeded! If you read this book to discover what will happen to England, how certain wars will terminate, and so forth, you are not likely to get much light. But if at the outset you respond to the invitation, "Come up here", you will get great illumination. Heaven is our true place; the assembly is found here in witness for the moment, but she belongs to heaven. It is as she takes her true place as belonging to heaven that she gets understanding in regard to other families.

Then there is another thing essential to clear vision of "the things which must take place"; John says, "Immediately I became in the Spirit". The heavenly

position must be accompanied by a state in keeping with it. To become in Spirit is to be abstracted from all activity of the human mind, and to be in a region where every thought and feeling is of the Spirit. It is a privilege within our reach. A brother well known in the ministry of the word said, "As soon as I find my mind working when reading Scripture, I close the book!" A right standpoint and a right state are necessary if we are to profit by this revelation. We need to look at things from the standpoint of heaven, and to be "in Spirit". This is really to anticipate the rapture in mind and spirit. It will preserve us from being earth-dwellers, and from the influence of the human mind. Surely each saint should covet this.

We need to apprehend what John saw: viz., "a throne stood in the heaven". Sin's confusion is here, and it has not been publicly interfered with by God since the flood, save in such exceptional cases as that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The heavens do rule, but it is in a hidden way. It has been said that God is behind the scenes, but that He moves all the scenes He is behind. Faith knows this, and is kept quiet in the presence of empires overturned and lawlessness abounding. The power of the throne protects the saints so long as their witness here is needed, but it has not yet asserted itself in a public way. Psalm 110: 1 describes the present interval. "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet". Nearly two thousand years of Christ being despised and rejected here have passed, but the throne stands unmoved in heaven; there is no perturbation there. The One upon the throne is sitting, and round the throne are seated twenty-four enthroned elders. In view of His purposes of grace God has borne long with the wickedness of men, but the throne will assert its power when the appointed time comes, and it is now close at hand. God is going to bring in the Firstborn into the habitable world. In the meantime the elders are in repose — in restful accord with the throne, and with Him who sits upon it. It is our privilege to be there in spirit now.

The One sitting upon the throne was "like in appearance to a stone of jasper and a sardius". It is God known in His glory as it will shine forth in the holy city (chapter 21: 11), and in the building of its wall, and in the first foundation of its wall (chapter 21: 18, 19). It is all that which has been obscured by the entrance of sin and death into the world. If men judge of God by the present state of the world, as if He were to be known by what is seen there, we cannot wonder if they come to entirely wrong conclusions. For we see every kind of evil, innumerable forms of sorrow and misery, wicked men prosperous and the righteous suffering, wars desolating, and death passing upon all. It is true there is a witness to the goodness of God in the sunshine and the rain, and in the productiveness of the earth furnishing food for man, but even the

Providence of God is often mysterious. There is no public administration of God's throne. There could not be in a fallen and sinful world without judgment coming on all. In the wisdom of God it is a time of longsuffering that men may have opportunity to repent, and that by the gospel of His grace those may be called who shall be joint-heirs with Christ, but who in the meantime suffer with Him.

The jasper and the sardius speak of what God is as He is known in relation to the throne in heaven before that throne makes its power and character publicly known. It is known to the one who comes up to heaven and is found in the Spirit. It is made known for faith in the gospel which reveals the righteousness of God in perfect grace to men, and in connection with which the principles of His government have come clearly into view (Romans 2). It will shine forth in "the holy city, Jerusalem", in "crystal-like" clearness. There will not be a shade of obscurity, not a trace of dimness, then. What God is will shine forth in His glorified saints, made the righteousness of God in Christ, and He will be publicly vindicated in the scene where He has been so long slandered and blasphemed, and where the very fruits of man's sin, and His longsuffering in regard to men, have seemed to obscure His true character, and the principles of His government.

I think one can understand why the wall of the holy city should be jasper! It is what God is, as known in relation to the throne, that will safeguard that city, and for ever exclude from it what is common or what makes an abomination and a lie. And one can understand, too, why the *first* foundation should be adorned with jasper! Man's great cities have no moral foundation, and therefore the cities of the nations will fall. I have often thought that this world is like the vale of Siddim — "full of slimepits". You cannot build securely on slime! Abraham looked for a city which had foundations, and nothing but what is founded in righteousness will stand. The kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit", so that those who are in that kingdom walk in accord with what will characterize the city, and with Him who sits on the throne in the heaven.

Then the "rainbow round the throne" carries the mind back to Genesis 9; it speaks of God's faithfulness to His covenants and promises. I do not know how many promises there are in Scripture, but God is faithful to them all. In the public course of events it might seem that His promises had failed, for Israel is scattered; the answer to the glowing picture of her future glory in the prophetic word seems as far off as ever, and all creation groans still under the bondage of corruption. But the throne in heaven is encircled by the sure token of God's faithfulness, and it is known there with abiding certainty that it will

yet be said in the fullest possible way that "there has not failed one word of all his good promises".

The promises of God have come in as the divine answer to successive developments of the power of evil and its results. Whatever form of evil made its appearance here God met it by a promise to bring in on His part a corresponding good. The promises fall largely into three classes. The first has to do with the power of Satan; of this class Genesis 3: 15 is an example. The second stands in relation to all the rebellious pride of man's heart, and the confusion which results from it. Genesis 12: 2, 3 belongs to this class. The third comes in to meet the demonstrated inability of man after the flesh to hold anything for God. 2 Samuel 23: 1 - 7 would illustrate this. The world to come under the Son of Man will be the fulfilment of every promise, and the complete vindication of the faithfulness of God. But His saints know His faithfulness today; they see the rainbow round the throne in heaven. Our place is to rest in His faithfulness, and, not get occupied with events on earth.

The first movement towards the fulfilment of prophecy will really take place in heaven. It will be the rising up of the Lord Jesus from His Father's throne to receive the church. If we want to see the first move we must keep our eye on heaven, not on events here. That current events are all being overruled in view of what God has in His mind is most certain, but God would not have His people occupied with them as fulfilling prophecy. To get thus occupied is really to be distracted from what God is doing at the present time in the assembly. If we are in the calm certainty of the mind of heaven we shall in spirit be sitting — like the elders — instead of being restless, and perturbed by political movements in the world, or excited by foolishly imagining that they are going to bring about any divine result.

The twenty-four enthroned elders are a priestly and royal company. Their number alludes, no doubt, to the twenty-four courses of the priesthood instituted by David (1 Chronicles 24). It is the whole priesthood represented by the heads of each course, and probably includes Old Testament saints as well as the assembly, all having been caught up in glorious bodies at the rapture. It is instructive to note that they are seen as a complete company around the throne in heaven before one of the seals is opened. Indeed, it is characteristic of this book that before each series of judgments begins we are shewn that God secures His elect before we see the judgments which will fall upon the sphere where their testimony was rendered. The different companies of saints have different places assigned them by the sovereignty of God. The elders are seated in heaven before the seals are opened (chapters 4 - 6). The bondmen of God from the sons of Israel are sealed, and the great crowd

which no one could number from the Gentiles are seen before the throne before the trumpets are sounded (chapters 7 - 9). The hundred and forty-four thousand bought from the earth are seen with the Lamb upon mount Zion, and those that had gained the victory over the beast are seen upon the glass sea before the bowls are poured out (chapter 14 - 16).

This is in keeping with the ways of God in all ages. Noah and his house were secured in the ark before the flood came. Lot was taken out of Sodom before the overthrow of the guilty cities. The firstborn in Israel were sheltered by the blood of the lamb before judgment was executed on Egypt. Israel was saved, and on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, before the hosts of Pharaoh perished. The remnant according to the election of grace from amongst the Jews was brought into the assembly before Jerusalem was destroyed.

The fact that the glorified saints are seen as "elders" would indicate that they are viewed as having matured experience and intelligence. It has often been noted that they can explain things. (See chapters 5: 5, 7: 13). The Old Testament saints had much experience of God's ways, as they moved in the pathway of faith in the light of the world to come, and those ways have been recorded that we might be enriched by their experience. It is said of Israel, "Whose are the fathers" (Romans 9: 5), and if Israel had "the fathers" we have them too, to profit by their wealth of experience, and to acquire our own in the light of theirs. I think "his ancients" in Isaiah 24: 23 is much the same thought as the "elders". It speaks of those who, through thousands of years, have waited for God's glorious world to come, and have suffered for it, and have passed out of this world in the faith of it. The kingdom in glory will be taken up before them. They will be spectators of its glory, and will have their own glory in it too; we see them here as enthroned and crowned. It is the divine answer to a long course of endurance and suffering in faith.

The "lightnings, and voices, and thunders" (verse 5) which proceed from the throne shew the peculiar character of the time that is in view from Revelation 4 - Revelation 19. It is not like the present time when God is speaking from the mercy-seat, declaring His righteousness in grace, and all is in man's favour — a throne of grace. There is a different character of things at once when the church has been translated. But it is clearly not yet the millennium, when "a river of water of life, bright as crystal, goes out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22: 1). Chapters 4 - 19 come between, and are characterized by those preparatory dealings of judgment by which the scene will be cleared of all that is evil in view of the establishment of the kingdom in power. Even the Spirit of God takes a judicial character here as "seven lamps

of fire, burning before the throne", reminding us of how God will cleanse His people "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning" (Isaiah 4: 4).

The "four living creatures" (verses 6 - 8) are very intimately connected with the throne — in the midst of it and around it — and they are "full of eyes, before and behind" and also "within". They have, symbolically, fulness of intelligence as to the actings of the throne, and inward discernment as to the character of Him who sits upon it. As seen in this chapter they are ceaselessly engaged in ascribing holiness to Him. In chapter 6 they call the four terrible horses and their riders to "Come" to inflict progressive sufferings upon men, and a voice in their midst announces famine. In chapter 15 one of them gives "to the seven angels seven golden bowls, full of the fury of God". So that they act in a twofold character. *Godward* they "give glory and honour and thanksgiving to him", and they fall before the Lamb. And when the myriads of angels acclaim the worthiness of the Lamb, and every creature ascribes blessing, and honour, and glory and might to God and to the Lamb, they say, "*Amen*". Then they have also an executive function in regard to the judgments of the throne, and in this they are characterized by strength, firmness, intelligence, and rapidity of movement, set forth in the lion, the calf, the face of a man, and a flying eagle.

The elders worship God as Creator, in the intelligence that all things exist and have been created for His will or pleasure. "Glory and honour and power" are ascribed to the Creator. The last verse of this chapter is important as giving the scope of what is in view in the Revelation. We shall find in this book, as we might expect, special dealings with those who have come in a special way into contact with divine testimony. But all men everywhere are God's creatures, and all have had testimony of some kind, and will come under God's dealings. What joy it is to see that God created all things for His pleasure, and it is impossible for Him to be finally robbed of His rights in regard to creation! This is celebrated in heaven while man on the earth is saying "No God". We are called to go up to heaven now in spirit, and to be in concert with the theme of heaven's worship. To give glory to God as Creator, and as the One for whose pleasure all things have been created, is not a low or limited note. It brings the whole "wide creation" into view as standing in relation to "him that sits *upon the throne*". Psalm 148 strikes a wonderful note of praise which will yet vibrate through all creation from angels at the top to creeping things at the bottom.

The throne speaks of the absolute supremacy of God. It is well known in heaven, if not on earth as yet, that "God sits as Sovereign on the throne". He is worshipped and glorified by those actually in heaven, and by those in spirit

there, as the Supreme Creator before a single movement of the power of the throne has been manifested on earth. The throne ensures that that for which He created all things will be secured; His pleasure will be brought about in the wide creation. Whatever happens, this must be the ultimate issue of things. The coming in of sin is not alluded to by the elders in their worship here, though the character which the throne takes in this chapter supposes its presence. The elders know all about that, but what prostrates them in worship is that God has created all things for His will. This utterance is the foundation of the whole book; all that follows in this book is the necessary consequence of chapter 4: 11. *God's will must prevail in the wide creation*. This necessitates the "restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since time began" (Acts 3: 21).

If God's will is to prevail in blessing in a creation devastated by sin it necessitates the most wondrous actings of divine love and mercy in redemption and reconciliation. *This* we shall find celebrated in heaven in the next chapter. It is the ground of all blessing for every family in heaven and earth that is named of the Father. But that which is lawless, and will not come into reconciliation, must pass away in judgment. The solemn judicial actings seen in this book — whether corrective inflictions with the possibility of repentance in view, or the final judgment of the wicked — are the actings of the throne to enforce what is due to God as celebrated in chapter 4: 11. All the companies that are seen in blessing throughout this book, and their praises, are secured by sovereign love and mercy upon the ground of what is celebrated in chapter 5. So that these two chapters give the key to all that follows.

The holiness of God which the living creatures are absorbed with, and His rights as Creator which the elders celebrate, necessitate that judgment must come on all that opposes His rights or is contrary to His nature. But, then, there is another thing. Redeeming love has come to light in the Lamb, and on that ground infinite blessing can be brought in, whether for heavenly families or earthly, or for the wide creation. The elders know God and His blessed will; they understand that the Lamb of God is the Taker away of the sin of the world. They know the wide scope of that verse, "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything" (Hebrews 2: 9). It is much wider than "every man". The very Person "by whom also he made the worlds" has tasted death for everything. Is it not wonderful that we belong to that company which is represented by the elders? God would give us the knowledge of this, and form us in the intelligence that we see marks them. We are not yet actually in heaven, but we are privileged to be there spiritually, and to be in accord with heaven's worship and praise. To glorify God as Creator, and to

know that His will must and will prevail throughout creation, is profoundly blessed. None but the "elders" — the saints of the assembly — really do so at the present time. There are sweeter notes connected with family relationships and affections, and we may be sure the elders know sonship in the full height of its blessedness. But they are seen here as falling before Him who sits upon the throne to do homage to Him as Creator, and as linking all created things with His pleasure. It is our privilege to do so even now.

REVELATION 5

Revelation 5

We have seen in chapter 4 the throne in heaven, and the glory and faithfulness of Him who sits upon it, and that all created things are for His will. Now a book is seen on His right hand, which I take to be the record of what God purposes to bring about so that His will may come into evidence in the very scene where lawlessness has been.

The book referred to in Psalm 40: 7 and Hebrews 10: 7 is different. What is in view there is that the sacrifices which were offered according to the law entirely failed to give God pleasure, or to establish His will in the blessing of man. He had innumerable thoughts of blessing. "Thy thoughts toward us: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee; would I declare and speak them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40: 5). Another Psalm says, "But how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Psalm 139: 17, 18). All those precious thoughts were written in a book, and on the roll of it was written, "Lo, I come to do, O God, thy will". Every line written in that book depended on Christ for its effectuation; He stood engaged to bring all to pass. It was not a sealed book, for God would have men to know His blessed will, and the One who came to give effect to it. It was no question of changing the conditions here, but of bringing to light the will of God, and His numberless thoughts of blessing, not in public manifestation, but in the way of testimony. See Psalm 40: 9, 10. That is the present character of divine acting; the book of Psalm 40 is the book we have to do with at the present time.

The book in Revelation 5: 1 stands in relation to another dispensation. It has to do with a time when God takes in hand to bring about His will *in this world*. The fact that there is *a book written* indicates that God has definitely and formally committed Himself to what is written. He has put it, if we may use the language of men, in black and white. There can be no reversal or change. Then its being "written within and on the back" conveys the thought of great fulness, for it was not usual to write on both sides. And, finally, it was "sealed with seven seals". God has a will as to the earth, His purposes are all written, but they have not yet been opened up, or brought out in a public way. The scene before us brings out very strikingly that only ONE is worthy to do that. The time when He will do it is now very near.

Verse 2 is a challenge to the universe. "Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?" God would have every creature in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, to face this question. The elders know the answer

to it, but John as the seer does not, and he weeps much "because no one had been found worthy to open the book nor to regard it".

There are widespread hopes in the world of a good time to come. People have vague ideas of a time of universal peace and happiness, and I suppose that these may have been gathered, in part, from Scripture. But how few connect these ideas with the thought of God having His rights here, which is essential to such conditions! The world has had an opportunity for thousands of years of learning that no one has been able to bring in conditions here which would be in accord with the will of God, and which would secure peace and happiness for men.

One might well weep to see mighty monarchs, great statesmen, and all the best of the sons of this world, proving one after another their inability to open the book, or even to regard it. Do you think there is a great leader of men anywhere able to look at the will of God in regard to the earth, as we may see it in Scripture, with the slightest hope of being able to bring it to pass? No, he would say, it is a hopeless impossibility.

How many people have given their money, and their sons and brothers, in recent years in hope that the world was going to be reconstituted! Have they not had to realize that it was all in vain? Do you think there is a thoughtful person in the world who does not feel like weeping today? God has allowed every class of men to be tested as to their ability to put things right. Absolute monarchy, the rule of the nobility, the rule of the middle classes; and the rule of the working classes will have its day too. All these and different combinations of them, have been and will be tried. Each class thinks it could do better than the others, but all alike fail because they cannot deal with the root of the mischief.

Then some have thought — chiefly by a perversion of Old Testament scriptures — that the church would eventually bring all under divine influence and would be found worthy to open the book by means of the gospel, so that God's world-kingdom might be brought in that way. But, as we have seen in previous chapters, the church has proved herself an unfaithful witness. She has not maintained her own testimony. Instead of setting the world right she has become herself the subject of divine judgment.

After all man's attempts to improve things by legislation, education, and moral and religious influences of many kinds, there is an increasing feeling of insecurity. Instead of the world getting better, thoughtful persons are beginning to realize that it is like a city built on a volcano which may burst into eruption at any moment.

It is good to be an elder! The Christian, instead of being behind the times, as many suppose, is really very much in advance of the times. He knows all the evil that is developing, and will develop, here, but he also knows the ultimate issue of things in God's complete triumph. The elders do not weep, for they are in the secret of God, and one of them said to John, "Do not weep. Behold, the lion which is of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, has overcome so as to open the book, and its seven seals".

There is One whose supremacy cannot be challenged by any when He rises up — "the lion which is of the tribe of Juda". The lion is "mighty among beasts, which turneth not away for any" (Proverbs 30: 30); it has been connected with Judah since Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49. David is the king of God's choice — the one marked by victorious power over all his enemies. "The root of David" suggests that every promise of royal glory in the earth had its root in Christ. It was from Him that it sprang in the mind of God; and He is the only One competent to give effect to those promises. He became "the offspring of David" that He might take all up in Manhood, and give effect to it.

He it is who "has overcome so as to open the book, and its seven seals". That word "overcome" contains volumes. I have no doubt it refers to the work of the cross as that which annuls "him who has the might of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2: 14); and in which principalities and authorities were spoiled (Colossians 2: 15). In the place where every evil power was found in array against God and against His Christ He overcame. It was such a victory as was never gained on any other battle-field, for

"By weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet,
By being trodden down". (24:2)

He "has overcome" by going into death. "Sin, death, and hell are vanquished". Viewed as enemies opposed to all that is in God's thought for man — they are overcome. Sin cannot hinder, for it has been removed in sacrifice. Death has been annulled by One going into it upon whom it had no claim. And the powers of evil, which would have used man's envy and wickedness to blot out in the death of Christ all that was of God when it appeared in grace amongst men, have been defeated. For that very death has brought God in, and made Him known so that the works of the devil might be undone in men's hearts. He "has overcome", and that has established His worthiness to open the book. What He has done for sinful man is celebrated in verses 9, 10. But in verse 5 it is the victorious Lion overcoming every power that is adverse to God. Of

course, as John learned immediately, the Lion is also the Lamb, the One who has redeemed to God by His blood, and He is worthy to take the book, and to open its seals, on that ground also.

But as having "overcome" He is entitled to lay His hand on everything that is hostile to God, and to set it aside by power so that God's will may be brought in where all the lawlessness of man has been. His having "overcome" gives Him title to deal with all evil; His having "redeemed" gives Him title to secure for God "kings and priests" who will reign with Him over the earth when all that is evil has been set aside.

The Lamb stands "as slain" in the midst of the throne. How affecting is this! It is the One who has suffered, even to death, in doing God's will who is entitled to take up all that will in relation to the earth, and to bring it into effect. He has "seven horns" — perfection of power — "and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God which are sent into all the earth" — probably answering to the sevenfold qualification for government seen in Isaiah 11: 2.

He comes and takes the book. The One who could open the book of grace in Luke 4 is worthy to open the book of God's will as to the earth in Revelation 5, and to give effect in power to all that will. It involves in result "the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since time began" (Acts 3: 21). The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall before the Lamb,

"having each a harp and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints". It is the Lamb — the once-slain One — whom they worship. It is the hand once nailed to the cross that takes the book. The One who died will have the kingdom and dominion. Everything that rendered His death necessary — lawlessness, lust, Satan's power — will be set aside. He would not have died to bear the judgment of these things, and then leave them permanently to defile God's creation. So that the opening of the seals brings judgment. God begins to deal definitely with things as they are here in this world, and His judgments begin to be realized as abroad in the earth.

The saints are delivered in grace from the dominion of sin. Men are not shut up hopelessly under the power of evil now; they may go out from the sphere of judgment through the door which the death of Christ has opened. If people fall under judgment it is because they have despised the way of escape which has been opened. I believe there will be the consciousness in all who come under judgment that they might have escaped.

The "harps" which the elders have are, I think, suggestive of their personal praises. The "golden bowls" contain the prayers of saints still on earth after

the church has been translated. The elders are a priestly company in heaven, but they are sympathetic with the exercises and prayers of saints still suffering on earth. They identify themselves with those prayers as they fall before the Lamb.

It is ever God's way to produce exercise and desire in His saints with regard to what He is doing or about to do. The saints on earth after the church has gone will realize as no saints ever have before what a scene of moral disorder this world is. For divine government, which has been such a check on the lawlessness of man since Noah's day, will no longer restrain. There will be a dominant power, but it will be Satanic in character, and not like the powers that be today, which are ordained of God. It will make war with the saints, and overcome them, and it will have authority over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. See chapter 13: 1 - 10. Under such circumstances how terrible will be the suffering of saints! Many of the Psalms give expression to their experiences and exercises. They will look for judgments on their enemies and persecutors, for the time introduced by the Lamb taking the book and opening its seals is a time of judgment. The Spirit of Christ in the saints today is a Spirit of intercession for all men that they may be saved, because it is the day of salvation. But the Spirit of Christ in the saints in that coming day will put them in harmony with what God is about to do in dealing with all that is evil here by "the thunder of his power". And the elders in heaven will be sympathetic; they will carry before the Lamb the prayers of the suffering and martyred saints on earth.

Then the new song which they sing is not as to their own redemption, but it is the celebration of the worthiness of the Lamb to take the book and to open its seals, "because thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth". It contemplates the blessed fact that in the midst of wrath God remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3: 2). He will still have in those terrible coming days His elect and redeemed ones, secured in the value of the blood of the slain Lamb, made kings and priests to Him. God will see to it that there is a witness right through to redemption by blood, and to the Lamb as slain. Every persecuted and martyred saint will be a witness to Him; as the judgments come one after another, in ever-increasing severity, there will still be in each saint a testimony that there is such a thing as redemption by blood, and that those who have been sinful men can be with God in the value of it. But each saint will be a witness, too, that the obduracy and wilfulness of man as utterly apostate from God is proof against every testimony which God can present to him, so that judgment is inevitable — strange work though it be to the blessed God.

Nothing could be more solemn than to consider that the worthiness of the Lamb to take the book and to open its seals lies in the fact that He has been slain, and has redeemed to God by His blood! He has died to redeem. Divine love could go no farther. If lawlessness will not yield to such a testimony it must be broken by a rod of iron.

The saints in view here as redeemed are not those who go through the tribulation to enjoy millennial blessing on earth. For those who do so will not reign; they will be reigned over. But these "shall reign over the earth". It refers to those who will live and reign "with the Christ a thousand years". See chapter 20: 4 - 6. It is true of all saints who will be raised or changed before the millennium that they are redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, and that they will "reign over the earth".

The "new song" awakens universal acclaim. The "myriads of angels, the universal gathering" (Hebrews 12: 23),

"ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands", ascribe worthiness to the Lamb. The elders strike the note, but all created intelligences around the throne take up and prolong the strain. Then the vast harmony overflows the bounds of heaven, "and every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth and under the earth, and those that are upon the sea, and all things in them, heard I saying, To him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, blessing, and honour, and glory, and might, to the ages of ages". This evidently anticipates the final issue of God's ways, when everything that hath breath will praise Him. It is the grand climax reached at the end of the Psalms.

The Lamb taking the book is the pledge that all will be brought to pass that is for God's pleasure in His creation. Judgments will have to come in to give effect to that pleasure in a scene where lawless wickedness is rising to a head preparatory to its being broken for ever. But heaven looks beyond the judgments to the reign over the earth of those redeemed by blood, and it celebrates the worthiness of the Lamb. The unrivalled honour belongs to Him alone. The whole creation which "groans together and travails in pain together until now" will be "set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8: 21, 22). This chapter carries us in anticipation to the blessed day of creation's liberty when, instead of a universal groan, there will be "blessing, and honour, and glory, and might" from every creature to Him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. It is the final result; God's complete vindication and triumph in the creation where sin has wrought its havoc. "And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and did homage".

When the Holy Babe was born the heavenly host celebrated the full result of His coming into the world. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". In like manner when the Lamb takes the book the full result of His doing so comes before the mind of heaven. The fact that the first move on God's part has been made is the sure pledge to heaven of the accomplishment of all. There may still be on earth that darkest part of the night which precedes the dawn. Heavy clouds may still hang over a world where apostasy is reaching its climax. But the vision of heaven is filled with the worthiness of the Lamb, and looks beyond the darkness to "the light of the morning, the rising of the sun, a morning without clouds, when from the sunshine, after rain, the green grass springeth from the earth" (2 Samuel 23: 4).

God has given this revelation that we may look at creation's future in the vision of heaven, and "boast in hope of the glory of God".

REVELATION 6

Revelation 6

The chapters which we now enter upon — 6 to 19 — give us much detail as to what will occur between the close of the church period and the introduction of “the fulness of times” which we speak of as the millennium — the thousand years of Revelation 20: 4. We should value the favour in which God has taken us into His confidence as to the future. It is intended to have a sanctifying effect in separating us even now from all that is so soon coming under divine judgment. And it is also intended to develop in our hearts a sympathetic interest in the saints who will be found in witness here after we are gone. God’s work in them, and their faithfulness under tremendous pressure, has a voice for us. The church will be kept “out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3: 10). We shall not be in the great tribulation, but we may have to face increasing difficulties in the last days, and there is great comfort and moral support in seeing how God can and will secure His saints and sustain them even in a much darker and more terrible time than our own. No doubt this book will be of immense comfort to the suffering saints after the church is gone.

The opening of the first four seals will be followed by certain events not unlike things which have been previously seen in the history of the world. They may surpass in intensity anything that has yet taken place, but they will be similar in character. A great conqueror first appears, who achieves success by the ability to strike at a distance through the air; he has a bow. Then when the second seal is opened one comes who has a great sword, and he takes peace from the earth; men slay one another. He is followed by one with a balance, and a voice in the midst of the four living creatures speaks of food at famine prices. “Do not injure the oil and the wine” seems to suggest that the poor will suffer most under this infliction, as is always the case in famine. Those who can get luxuries do not feel it so keenly as others. Then a pale horse comes when the fourth seal is opened whose rider is Death, and hades follows with him. He has authority given “over the fourth of the earth to slay with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and by the beasts of the earth” — what God calls, “My four sore judgments” (Ezekiel 14: 21). All this would correspond with Matthew 24: 6 - 8.

There are often foreshadowings of prophetic events before the actual fulfilment. God allows things to take place which indicate the character of what is about to come on a much greater scale. But whatever correspondence there

may be between events that happen now, and those of which prophecy speaks, we must beware of thinking there is anything more than an analogy. The fulfilment of Revelation 6 and the following chapters belongs to a future day when the church period is over.

From what John saw when the fifth seal was opened we learn that God will still have saints on earth at the time to which this chapter refers, and that they will be the subjects of persecution and martyrdom. This corresponds with what the Lord said in Matthew 24: 9. People think that the world is too advanced in liberal sentiment ever to tolerate persecution again! Just as they thought before 1914 that arbitration, treaties, alliances, and understandings between nations had made war almost impossible! But war with all its desolations came, and persecution of saints will come, probably on a scale more dreadful than the world has yet seen. The terrible visitations following the opening of the first four seals will not affect men in the way of humbling them and turning them to God. They will slay His servants who have His word, and who hold the testimony.

"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". This is of deep interest, because it shows that God will secure something for Himself still after the assembly has gone. Christ having come in, there will never be a time when He is not maintained here in testimony until He appears in glory. This world will never be a scene of universal grief for God; He will always have Christ under His eye in some family of saints. For every family named of the Father will be marked by the love of righteousness and the hatred of lawlessness, and this is Christ characteristically. He was slain for the word of God, and for the testimony, and the saints referred to in Revelation 6: 9 will follow in His steps. Think of the pleasure God will have in them! The bringing of different companies of saints into view is specially found in connection with the opening of the seals. The administration of the Lamb secures this; it is the precious and widespread fruit of redemption.

God will have a people prepared to take up His testimony here after the assembly is translated. When God was about to bring Christ in He prepared a company to receive Him. When He was about to send the Spirit and to form the assembly He prepared a company for that great new departure. And when the removal of the assembly, which is the vessel of testimony today, calls for a new family of witnesses, He will prepare those who will be ready to step into the gap. The rapture of the church might be used to bring at once into evidence a new body of witnesses for God. We know from 2 Thessalonians 2: 7 - 12 that these will not be from amongst those who have heard the present

truth and have not believed it, nor received the love of it, but have found pleasure in unrighteousness. Such will come, by the just judgment of God, under the power of the lawless one who is to be revealed. They will believe what is false, and be judged. How far persons in Christendom have come under the guilt of not believing the truth is known only to God. Many who live in nominally Christian countries may never have heard the gospel of the grace of God or any true preaching of Christ. But there is no "larger hope" for those who have heard, and have not believed.

We can see much "working of error" today. Spiritualism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and many plausible perversions of Scripture by which millions are being turned from the truth. It is a time of many antichrists, and we know thereby that it is the last hour. To value "the word of God" and to hold His testimony in presence of such conditions will become increasingly difficult. The first intimation as to saints who succeed the assembly in witness here is that they are a persecuted and martyred company. Their souls are seen underneath the altar; they have "been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held".

It may be remarked that this book is largely built up on the types of the tabernacle or the temple. The elders "round the throne" would answer to the holiest. The white-robed multitude of chapter 7 stand "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits upon the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them"; this would answer to the holy place. Then another company of overcomers stand "upon the glass sea" (chapter 15), which evidently answers to the laver in the court of the tabernacle. And the souls of the company seen when the fifth seal is opened are "underneath the altar". But, while observing this as an important feature in the structure of the book, we must be careful not to get these things before the mind in a material way. God presents to us under these figures great moral conceptions, and He would give us spiritual perception of what is conveyed in them.

Souls "underneath the altar" are in the place of the ashes. It suggests that they have been offered as burnt-offerings. Christ has been found in them morally; they have been marked by identification with the word of God, and by holding His testimony, and they have been slain for it. They form the first group of martyred saints after assembly testimony is over, but they will not be the last, for "it was said to them that they should rest yet a little while until both their fellow-bondmen and their brethren, who were about to be killed as they, should be fulfilled". I believe God would have us to be intensely interested in those who will so soon succeed us in holding the place of

testimony here. One of the great interests of this book is to see the various companies of saints that appear in the scene. We see the features of Christ, and of "the testimony of Jesus", as they are maintained right through by God's election and power in different families of redeemed ones.

There will be a great activity of sovereign mercy after the assembly is gone, and before the kingdom is established. We see this very plainly in chapter 7. We are not shewn in this book how these different groups of witnesses are called or by what means God effects His work in them. We may gather this, in some measure at least, from other parts of Scripture. For instance, it would appear from Matthew 6: 6, 23 that there will be a special testimony to the lost sheep of the house of Israel which will not be completed until the Son of man be come. And from Matthew 24: 14 we learn that "these glad tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable earth for a witness to all the nations, and then shall come the end". This testimony will be rendered in such conditions of the world, and in such persecutions, as are in view in Revelation 6 - Revelation 19, as we may see by comparing the scriptures. In this book we find the product rather than the process of divine working. Certain things which are going on now may have in view the preaching of the glad tidings of the kingdom in a future day. I refer particularly to the widespread circulation of the Scriptures in almost all languages of the earth. It is bringing some light as to Christ before all nations. If the assembly were translated today there would be a good deal that God could use as preparing the way for succeeding testimony to all nations.

God will secure a continuation of Christ in testimony here right through. The sweet savour of Christ will be before God in those who cherish His word, and who hold the testimony. But it will call forth relentless enmity on the part of "them that dwell upon the earth", and the saints will be martyred. They will be, as it were, offered on the altar of God. Not, of course, in any way as atonement, but as suffering to death in obedience and testimony. There will be a sacrificial sweet savour for God in their death, but so far as man is concerned their blood will call for vengeance. Hence the cry, "How long, O sovereign ruler, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?" The marked contrast between this and Luke 23: 34 and Acts 7: 60 makes clear a change of dispensation. We are here on ground familiar in the Psalms, but not that of the present period, which is one of grace to all.

The "white robe" given to each one of this company seems to indicate a personal consciousness of divine approval — a special compensation accorded them during the interval of waiting for their public recognition in the kingdom.

The opening of the sixth seal is followed by a great upheaval, and the subversion of order and authority. The sun, moon, and stars are figurative of rule (See Genesis 1: 16 - 18) in various degrees of dignity — supreme, dependent, and subordinate. And the removal of mountains and islands indicates the unsettling of all that has seemed stable and abiding. Men do not realize that the stability of things in the world — politically and commercially — is only maintained while God pleases to maintain it for the good of His saints and of His creatures. So long as the assembly is here prayers will be continually ascending “for all men; for kings and all that are in dignity, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity” (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2). I gather from this that God will, in answer to the prayers made in His house, maintain government in the world so long as the assembly is here. I believe that the saints — though they take no part in the politics of the world — are the most important factor in the maintenance of order and government. Their prayers are much more effective than votes. Everybody is beginning to feel that there are great forces of lawlessness ready to break out, but God will maintain in government a restraint upon those forces so long as the assembly is here. Kings and rulers owe the stability of their position to the fact that the people of God are praying for them. But when the assembly is gone, government will no longer be divinely supported, and the terrible disorder and anarchy that follows the opening of the sixth seal will come. We do not need to go outside Europe to see what it means for the sun to become black, and the moon as blood, and the stars to fall! God allows coming events to cast their shadows before them as a warning to men if they will but heed.

Under the inflictions which follow the opening of the sixth seal the conviction will be brought home to men that God and the Lamb are acting in wrath. What a solemn thing for Christendom, where God has so long been made known as a Saviour God! It is not that “the great day of his wrath” will have actually come; but it will have come *in men’s guilty consciences*. It is often so even now when dreadful catastrophes occur; the thought of God’s wrath rises in men’s minds. Man has a conscience after all; no power of Satan can take it quite away. And man’s conscience is ever a witness on God’s part against him.

REVELATION 7

Revelation 7

This chapter shews how God will secure vast companies of saints for Himself even in tribulation days. It is a great comfort to see that He will allow nothing to interfere with His purpose to have an immense company both from Israel and the nations. It will be a time when universal judgments will be imminent — “four angels standing upon the four corners of the earth” — but even God’s judgments will be held in check until His bondmen are sealed (verse 3).

We see here in a wonderful way the diversity and far-reaching character of God’s ways in blessing. Paul said “I bow my knees to the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named” (Ephesians 3: 14, 15). The Father is going to have many families, and every one of them will take its character from Him. He will put an impression of Christ upon each family, and hence there will be a unity of character between all the different families which will occupy the different abodes in the Father’s house. Whichever family we look at, we see features which correspond with those which the Father is imprinting on saints of the assembly today. To observe this is one of the most instructive objects to have in view in reading this book.

“Another angel ascending from the sun-rising, having the seal of the living God”, speaks of what is connected morally with a new day. The Sun of righteousness will not yet have risen, but the living God will put the impress of the day that is about to dawn upon the forehead of His bondmen. In the midst of surrounding darkness they will be publicly marked by traits which belong to the coming day. “The seal of *the living God*” — the very title speaks of His activities and energetic working — will ensure that moral features which are of the day will be found in them *vitality*. The difference between saints of this day and of *that* have often been considered — we have noted it in chapter 6: 10 — but we have much in common with them. 1 Thessalonians shows how saints of this period have “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God”, and that they are “sons of light and sons of day”, and are therefore to put on “the breastplate of faith and love, and as helmet the hope of salvation”. The assembly is today the sealed company amongst whom God’s activities are known, and in whom are seen, by His operation, the features of “the day”. God delights to produce those features in His saints in the midst of present darkness.

The sealed bondmen in Revelation 7 are “out of every tribe of the sons of Israel”; it is not two tribes now, but the whole twelve. Their number is not necessarily a literal number; it is symbolic of completeness in an administrative

way. The fact that Dan is omitted would indicate, I think, that Israel is viewed here with the element of idolatry and apostasy eliminated, so that they can be truly "bondmen of God" and serviceable to Him. It is an elect Israel, for it is twelve thousand "*out of*" each tribe, and it is seen in moral completeness for administration here. God will begin His work again with Israel, and will use them in blessing among the nations. They will "sow beside all waters" (Isaiah 32:20), and the fruit of their sowing follows. For it is "after these things" that John saw the "great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues". We see here first an elect company out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, and then an innumerable multitude blessed out of the nations. Christ will be known as God's salvation to the ends of the earth even in that day.

I do not think God is presenting to us the millennial result exactly, though what we see here may reach on to that. But he is shewing us, through the vision which John saw, what will be secured for Him before the millennium. In the millennium Israel will have the land, and Dan will have his portion in it with the other tribes (Ezekiel 48). But here it is the moral side that is presented; how God will work in an election from the twelve tribes during the time of judgment and tribulation, so that He will have an Israel, purged from the element of apostasy, which He can use administratively towards the nations in the way of testimony. They will be marked vitally by the features of the coming kingdom before that kingdom is established, and God will use them in announcing the kingdom to the nations.

Then a vast Gentile multitude is found "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands". They are seen before the throne as approved and victorious, and with a loud voice they ascribe "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb". It is a mighty host of Gentiles who have found salvation during tribulation days, and who appear before the throne to give God and the Lamb the glory of it. It is a note of praise such as could not be raised by those who have only known millennial conditions. They are viewed as those who come out of the testing, but they have been in it, and they found salvation in God and the Lamb while they were in it. They come out of it and are before the throne as victors. I do not think "before the throne and before the Lamb" means that they are in heaven; it is rather where they stand *morally* as victors. Any saints martyred during the great tribulation — and there will be many such — will have a heavenly place. Those preserved right through to the establishment of the kingdom will have blessing on earth of a peculiar character. But it seems to me that the point here is that after all the testing —

however it issues — they are before the throne as victors, having become such through finding salvation in God and in the Lamb.

The presence of such a company before the throne causes all the angels and the elders and the four living creatures to fall on their faces before the throne and worship. To witness the triumph of God on such an immense scale where the concentrated forces of evil have had to be encountered in their fullest development and energy, leads all heaven to say, "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and strength, to our God, to the ages of ages. Amen". Surely our hearts add even now their glad "Amen!"

John's interest in this great company was stimulated by the enquiry of the elder as to who they were, and whence they came. He could only answer, "My lord, thou knowest". And he was told, "These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb". What could be more cheering to faith than to see that there will be so much for God even at such a time? No other scripture that I know of tells us of this great multitude, so that this vision is of peculiar interest. It is *they* who have washed their robes. The act indicates the cleansing of themselves externally — our robes are that in which we appear before men — that is, of their ways and associations. Robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb intimates that they have not only known the redemption value of that blood but that they have applied it in practical cleansing to their ways and associations. They have held themselves practically as a redeemed people. Washing in water would be moral cleansing — the death of Christ known in the soul as cleansing from the man after the flesh with all his defilement, so that saints may be consciously apart from that man. But washing robes in the blood of the Lamb would rather be that saints realize that they have been redeemed by that blood from the whole power of evil here, and they apply that practically to their ways and associations. They are exercised that there should not be a spot on their robes of the evil from which they have been redeemed.

It is instructive to see that when they *speak for themselves* in verse 10 they ascribe "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb". They gratefully own their deliverance as being entirely God's salvation. But when the elder *speaks of them* he speaks of what *they* have done — the exercises by which they have cleansed themselves practically and externally as knowing themselves to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb from all the evils which surround them. The washing of robes is their side, that they may

be in practical keeping with redemption, and that they may carry themselves as those who own the Lamb's rights acquired through redemption.

To see all this in such companies of saints suggests an enquiry as to how far we are in correspondence with their faithfulness today? We are not in the great tribulation; our testings are not nearly so severe as theirs will be. But as having the Spirit we carry God's mark in a scene of abounding evil, and it is intended to be plainly manifest that we do so. We, in our time of witness, are to be marked by purity and victory — the evidence of the power of divine salvation from all the evil around us. And it is for us, too, to wash our robes — see chapter 22: 14 — to keep our ways and associations unspotted by the evil of the world, as holding ourselves redeemed from it by the blood of the Lamb. It is our privilege to come out as distinctly from the evil of the world in our day as they will in theirs. It would be sad, indeed, if we, with a higher and more blessed calling, and a richer and deeper knowledge of God, did not equal them in faithfulness, purity, and separation. Or if, practically, we were found carrying the emblems of defeat — as overcome by the world — rather than the palm branch of victory.

The faithfulness of this great multitude will have its sure answer and recompense, as faithfulness ever does. They will serve God "day and night in his temple". The phrase "day and night" implies in Scripture unbroken continuity, whether in time conditions or in eternity. (See Luke 2: 37; Acts 26: 7; Revelation 20: 10). "His temple" is not the millennial temple of Ezekiel 40 - Ezekiel 46, for "no stranger, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter" into that sanctuary, and this is a Gentile company. "Temple" is used here, I believe, as very often in Scripture, in a moral sense, as indicating service in priestly nearness and intelligence. God will "spread his tabernacle over them"; they will be in a peculiar way under His protection. "They shall not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any burning heat". In contrast to all this "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes".

It is sweet to think of so vast a multitude coming out of the great tribulation to have this peculiar place and blessing with God. For theirs is not the public and universal blessing of the millennium, but an inside place in the temple, and as overshadowed by God's tabernacle. They are shepherded by the Lamb, and led by Him "to fountains of waters of life". They will be caused to know the very springs of life; not merely earthly blessing in its fulness, but spiritual springs in the knowledge of God. It is precious to know that the Lamb will

have such a flock to shepherd, and such a blessed service of love to render that flock. Many scriptures speak of Israel's blessing in the world to come, and of the blessing of the Gentiles in the kingdom when the nations will be healed by the leaves of the tree of life, and will walk by the light of the heavenly city. But I do not know any other scripture which gives us what we have in Revelation 7 — a Gentile company with such a peculiar place of temple service Godward, and a special leading by the Lamb "to fountains of waters of life". One can understand how a chapter like this will comfort and support faithful saints in tribulation days, giving them as heavenly light what soon will be their part. I have no doubt that, while in the tribulation, they will anticipate in spirit what is here presented, and they will know God as the One who will very soon "wipe away every tear from their eyes".

The whole of this chapter is most comforting and establishing to us in view of the rising tide of evil around us. It assures us that God will secure an immense result for His own pleasure in the very darkest day of the world's history. He will have those then who carry His mark, and who will go through, and come out of, all the tremendous pressure of the power of evil spotless and victorious. His salvation will be with them, and they will work out their own salvation through much personal exercise and suffering. It is for us to do so today. We are not in the great tribulation — and, through infinite mercy, we never shall be — but all the principles of evil that will come out in full bloom then are working in the world today. It is for us to find salvation in God and the Lamb, and to wash our robes.

REVELATION 8

Revelation 8

The opening of the seventh seal is followed by "silence in the heaven about half an hour". It is something like the "Selahs" which we find in the Psalms; a solemn pause indicating the momentous character of the subject in hand and its demand for the quiet consideration of heaven. It ushers in a new series of judgments, which follow upon "the prayers of all saints" being presented at the golden altar before the throne. No doubt the Angel who stands at the altar is Christ, and He has much incense by which efficacy is given to the prayers which He presents. "All saints" on earth are praying — it is the only hint of what they are doing while the first six trumpets are sounded — and their prayers are being presented by Christ as the Angel-Priest at the golden altar before the throne. We have seen in chapter 6: 9 that there will be saints on earth who will have the word of God, and will hold the testimony; from chapter 7: 14, we learn that there will be others who will wash their robes; and now chapter 8: 3 indicates that they will all be marked by prayer. These features are of deep interest, as shewing how different families of saints are morally related to each other. For they are features which mark saints of the assembly today.

But when we consider the character of their prayers — which we may learn from the answer given in the sounding of the trumpets — we see at once that God's ways will have changed. The prayers will be no longer, "Lay not this sin to their charge", but will be a cry to God to come in and set aside by His holy power all the lawlessness which robs Him of His pleasure in men, and is destructive of all true happiness for men. It is the happiness of the saint that he has been brought, by infinite mercy, into subjection to God; he can therefore truly say, "Let thy kingdom come, let thy will be done as in heaven so upon the earth". But saints *now* are in communion with God's longsuffering patience and grace, knowing that it is the day of salvation. But *then* the saints will understand that the time has drawn near when God will deal in judicial power with all that is evil here, and they will be in accord with what He is doing. They will pray in communion with the mind of God at the moment. And the judgments come in answer to their prayers, just as sinners are converted and blessed today in answer to the prayers of God's people.

The altar at which the Angel stands is the brazen altar — the place where the sweet savour of Christ came out sacrificially when He was found in the place of sin and death! — and it is from the fire of that altar that He fills His censer and casts it on the earth. The prayers of the saints are presented at the

golden altar, which is where the fragrance of Christ as the Living One is before God for His saints. He sustains them in an intercessory way in all His own sweet odour and acceptability. The Angel is seen in relation to both altars. Both have been available in grace for men, but they both necessitate that what is not in keeping with them must eventually go out in judgment if it does not go out under the sway of grace. The fragrance of perfect obedience, and of perfect devotedness to the will of God, has been found here in Christ, and He has died so that men might learn the blessed will of God as the source of infinite good. But if Christ has been offered to establish the will of God it is impossible that what He suffered for can be allowed to continue indefinitely.

The Lord Jesus standing at the altar suggests that the time has come when His death will have its answer in a public way. There has been a long period of divine testimony during which men have had the opportunity of repenting in the light of what has been displayed in Christ and in His death, and of being delivered from lawlessness in the way of infinite grace. But if lawlessness does not yield to the testimony of divine grace in Christ it must go out in judgment. Its judgment in the coming day is as distinctly the answer to the cross as all the wealth of blessing is today. It is not possible in God's universe that lawlessness can escape destruction. His people are being "salted with fire" now; grace is reigning in the way of bringing men to self-judgment in the light of Christ and of His death. The fire of the altar is being cast into men's souls now that they may judge themselves, and turn to God in repentance, and find that He is a Saviour God. But Revelation 8 speaks of a time when the fire of the altar will be cast on the earth, and all that is lawless will come under judgment.

In connection with the opening of the fourth seal we find inflictions on "*the fourth* of the earth". But when the trumpets are sounded what is characteristic is that they bring inflictions on "the third part". It is touching to see that, even when acting in wrath God remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3: 2). He gives evidence of what His heart desires even while doing "his strange work" and performing "his unwonted act" of judgment (Isaiah 28: 21). He does not at once act universally in His visitations, but moves from stage to stage in such a manner as to give opportunity even yet to the greater part of men to repent when they see His dealings with others. The fact that it is recorded that "the rest of men who were not killed with these plagues repented not"(chapter 9: 20) shews at least that they had had opportunity of doing so, and that the possibility of such a result had been in view. It is an affecting testimony to the compassion of God, as well as a sad witness to the obduracy of man's heart. God's thought for man is that he should repent and be blessed.

It may be well to remark here that of the various divine actings brought before us in Revelation 6 - Revelation 16 the opening of the seals takes the first place, not only in the order of presentation but morally, for it is of primary importance that faith should recognize the power and title of the Lamb to deal with all things so that the will of God may be established here. It will be a great stay for saints of that day to know that events which issue in such tremendous overturning are the result of the Lamb's actings in heaven, and that they have in view the bringing to pass within a brief time universal blessing. The trumpets of the seven angels follow — a seven-fold testimony to the consciences of men in a solemn series of inflictions which have as their end the completion of the mystery of God. Then the bowls are the outpouring of the fury of God upon what is apostate and openly rebellious. Not its final destruction, but inflictions which will make manifest during its continuance that it is the subject of divine wrath.

The first four trumpets bring inflictions upon the earth, the sea, the fountains of waters, and the heavenly luminaries. These four things embrace the whole of the conditions in which man is set as a creature, and they are figurative of the whole system of things in which men live. *The earth* is the place where man flourishes "like a green tree in its native soil" (Psalm 37: 35) — striking contrast to the one who can say, "I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God" (Psalm 52: 8) — and where "all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as the flower of grass"(1 Peter 1: 24). God will bring destructive influences upon man's prosperity here. Then *the sea* speaks of the masses of mankind (chapter 17: 15). "As a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea". The casting down of some great power, which has become itself a subject of divine judgment, will be caused to affect the mass of humanity in such a way that a great part of the life of the world which is dependent on international conditions and commerce ("the ships") will perish.

Then when the third angel sounds, "There fell out of the heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of waters". This seems to be a moral influence which embitters people as moving together in certain directions — "rivers" — would suggest this — and which affects the sources from which men draw their life morally. It is "a great star"; some influence that appears to men to bring light from above; but it is really "wormwood"; it embitters everything that it comes in contact with. We can see that there are many different "rivers" in the world today! Different classes of men moving together in certain social and intellectual channels, and with certain definite objects in view. And we can hardly be blind to the fact that it would not be difficult to embitter the different classes against one another. "The fountains of waters" represent the

sources of thought and feeling, all that forms the moral springs of conduct. When this "great star" falls these will be greatly embittered in a large part of the earth. The result will be — not happiness or prosperity for any class, but moral death.

The fourth angel sounds, and the third part of the sun, moon, and stars is smitten. All that has been in the place of rule as divinely ordained is darkened. I think this indicates a change in the character of government. Instead of being in favour of righteousness, as all government is in principle today, it will cease to be divinely supported, and will become morally darkened. Authority will become arbitrary and unjust, and increasingly marked by oppression and mercilessness.

At this point there is a break, dividing the first four trumpets from the last three, and calling attention to the inflictions which would come when the three last trumpets were sounded as more to be dreaded than those which had gone before. "And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to them that dwell upon the earth, for the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound".

REVELATION 9

Revelation 9

When the fifth angel sounded, John "saw a star out of the heaven fallen to the earth; and there was given to it the key of the pit of the abyss. And it opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up smoke out of the pit as the smoke of a great furnace". Here we get another star fallen, and it lets loose upon men influences even more terrible than the star Wormwood. For in this case they emanate directly from the pit. It is something far deeper than the embitterment of class feelings and antagonisms; these are, in a sense, natural to men. But the locusts which come out of the smoke of the pit are supernatural tormentors who bring such misery upon men that they seek death, but "shall in no way find it; and shall desire to die, and death flees from them". These are spiritual powers of evil coming from the abyss. God allows the power of Satan which has at first been received and welcomed by men, to become their scourge. It is so with all evil teaching. There is something fascinating about all false doctrine. To the natural mind it seems to be more powerful and attractive than the truth. This is conveyed in the locusts being "like to horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as crowns like gold, and their faces as faces of men; and they had hair as women's hair, and their teeth were as of lions, and they had breastplates as breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to war". All is impressive, attractive, and overwhelming in its apparent power of conviction. Men who have turned away from the truth eagerly accept it, and prefer it to the gospel, but when received it becomes a scourge — darkness in the heart and terrible oppression in the conscience. "They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and their power was in their tails to hurt men five months". It is not the first appearance that torments men, but the after part. One has known of terrible instances of people who have adopted teachings which had their origin in the pit, and who have come into an agony of remorse which could not be relieved. Persons have told me they would give anything to get rid of teachings which they had imbibed, but which had now become agony to them. I think this is a foreshadowing of what will be general in a more terrible way when the fifth angel sounds. All the things that men are playing with today — Theosophy, Spiritualism, Christian Science, Astrology, the Occult in many forms, the superstitions of the heathen world — will exact a terrible penalty when God allows them under Apollyon to become retributive. The king of these locusts is "the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew, Abaddon, and in Greek he has for name, Apollyon". Both speak of him as the destroyer. The name being given in both Hebrew and Greek would seem to

suggest a warning to Hebrews as well as Gentiles, and the suitability of this appears when we see that the trumpets bring Palestine and Jerusalem into prophetic view again, as we shall see in the next two chapters.

It is blessed to see that the men with the seal of God on their foreheads escape this fearful infliction (verse 4). They will be sustained by the intercession of Christ at the golden altar, and their prayers will go out of His hand before God with much fragrant incense. Every one of them will know something of the value of the blood of the Lamb, God and the Lamb will be their salvation, and they will know — from this book, if not otherwise — that Christ appears before the face of God for them. What is of Apollyon will be kept out of their souls because what is of God is cherished there. They will know something of what the smoke of the incense means that is going up with their prayers out of the hand of Christ before God. It will tell them of all His fragrant perfections as before God for them, and in the light of this what comes out of the smoke of the pit will have no attractions for them, and therefore its sting will never torment them. And this is true, in principle, of saints today. If we have an imprint on our souls, by divine grace, of Christ, and of the features of the coming day of glory to be ushered in by His rising as the Sun of righteousness, we shall neither be impressed nor attracted by what comes from beneath. It can only deceive those who have nothing better by which to measure its value.

We must remember that all this is judicial. Many things which are the sad evidence of man's depravity,

and of Satan's power over him, are in themselves judicial. They are really judgments from God upon a state of heart which does not honour Him. Such a thing as Mahometanism, coming in on countries where Christian light has been, is really a judgment from God. Superstitions which bring men's consciences into bondage to what is evil, and oppress their hearts, are often of this nature. Such things as materialism on the one hand, or spiritualism on the other, come in where men have turned from divine light. If people turn from Christ, who is the Truth, it need not be wondered at if they are found wandering in a labyrinth of error in which they weary themselves in heart and mind. The materialist of yesterday is today the disciple of weird mysticism, tomorrow he will be deceived by the antichrist, and will worship the beast.

Though Satan's power will be in these inflictions, and the state of man's heart and will exposed by them, they are the judicial acting of God. Hence all is measured and limited; it is all under control, and cannot break its bounds. Whether it be the scope of the inflictions — "the third part"; or the duration of these special torments — the twice — repeated "five months"; all speaks of a

sovereign power that, while it makes use of what is evil in its inflictions, holds everything under its own control. What a sense it gives us of the absolute supremacy of God!

When the sixth angel sounds his trumpet, a voice speaks "from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God". It is an answer to the prayers which have been presented there by the Angel Priest. The saints on earth have understood that the time has come in the ways of God for the eastern question to be finally settled by the fulfilment of the prophetic word in regard to Immanuel's land and the city of the Great King. Their exercises will be like those of Daniel in the ninth chapter of his prophecy, where he says, "I Daniel understood by the books", etc. I have no doubt they will understand "by the books"; they will have Daniel and the Revelation; they will know where they stand in the seventy weeks, and that the time is at hand; that the mystery of God is just about to be completed. With deep humbling and confession they will own their sin, but will cry, "Lord, hear! Lord, forgive! Lord hearken and do! defer not, for thine own sake, O my God! for thy city and thy people are called by thy name".

The fact that the voice speaks from the horns of the golden altar suggests that it is in answer to the prayers of saints that "the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates" are loosed. The mention of the river Euphrates is a geographical index; it shews that the eastern world comes into view as the source of divine judgment; perhaps as the subject of it also. Under the sixth seal men are represented as using language which seems to suggest Christian knowledge, for they speak not only of Him that sits upon the throne, but of the Lamb. But the sounding of the sixth trumpet brings the east into view, and the things mentioned in chapter 9: 20 - 21 are such as would be found in the heathen world, as well as in corrupt Christendom. The heathen world is apostate from God, and will be judged as such. The whole population of the world stood round Noah's altar in Genesis 8 with a knowledge of the true God, and the fact that idolatry soon came in proves that "knowing God, they glorified him not as God ... they did not think good to have God in their knowledge" (Romans 1: 21 - 32). "In the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ... there shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and distress, on every soul of man that works evil" (Romans 2: 5, 9). The heathen will be subjects of judgement in that day as well as those who have been in outward relation with God.

The infliction in this case is a host of two hundred million horsemen. The *number* of them is emphasized; "I heard their number". It is a vast number of

agencies connected with four angels "who are prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they might slay the third part of men".

REVELATION 10

Revelation 10

A parenthesis comes in here (chapter 10 to 11: 14) between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as chapter 7 comes in between the opening of the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh. In each case we are taken aside from the course of judgments which is in progress to see divine actions connected with God's people and testimony. Before the beast and the false prophet are presented in their terrible activities of evil, and before the outpourings of wrath connected with the bowls, the divine side is seen in the action of the "strong angel", and in the testimony of the witnesses here.

The "strong angel" is the Lord in angelic form; He comes down clothed with that which speaks of divine glory, and with the token of divine faithfulness upon His head. The undimmed effulgence of God in His face, and His feet as pillars of fire. Wherever those feet go there must be the judgment of evil according to divine holiness. And He has "in his hand a little opened book".

We may gather what the "little opened book" is from the fact that John — the representative here of those who should be vessels of prophetic testimony — had to eat it up, and that it was in his mouth sweet as honey, but bitter in his belly. It is an "opened" book; its contents are known prophecy, not matters sealed up; it is what is referred to in verse 7, "as he has made known the glad tidings to his own bondmen the prophets". And I apprehend it is a "little" book because it refers to things as being taken up in exercise and testimony by His witnesses rather than to the public result in the kingdom. "Little" is characteristic of the time of witness, not of the time of manifestation. It refers to what will be taken up in testimony by the witnesses of chapter 11. It is sweet in the witness's mouth to taste all that God will do in restoring the kingdom to Israel, but what bitter inward exercises it entails as he is made to feel his own condition, and the condition of those who should have been God's witness on the earth.

The "strong angel" comes down to claim everything for God, and to swear "by him that lives to the ages of ages ... that there should be no longer delay; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God also shall be completed". It is a prophetic vision giving assurance of divine triumph for the comfort of saints in view of the darkest days of all.

"The mystery of God" is, I believe, that for thousands of years He has not taken His great power here. He has allowed evil and lawless men to continue

their course, and to gratify their lusts and ambitions. People have even questioned whether there is a God when they have seen what they judged to be great evils allowed to go on unchecked! God has been going on in longsuffering — in view of His purposes of grace and blessing for men — but He has ever given testimony by His prophets that He would come in to deal with all evil presently. It has been “the glad tidings” all through the ages from Enoch’s day (Jude 14) that God will eventually have His way; He will publicly set aside evil and establish good. “Mystery” in Scripture does not mean something inexplicable, but something known only to the initiated. There has been, in men’s account, a long delay in bringing to light publicly the principles of God’s government, but when the “strong angel” speaks there is to be “no longer delay”. God does not bring in judgment until man’s iniquity is full. He said to Abram — “The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Genesis 15: 16). God will wait until the sin of man comes to a head in open defiance of Him by the beast and the antichrist, and then He will judge it all and take to Him His great power and reign.

The taste of what God is going to bring in is sweet to the one who eats it, but it entails much bitter exercise, for it involves the discovery and judgment in himself of all the principles of evil which work in the flesh. There is not an evil in the world which renders it the subject of divine judgment of which the root and germ does not exist in the flesh of God’s people, and it is a moral necessity that they should discern and judge it there. They judge themselves, and therefore they are not judged; the divine end is reached with them morally. What an inward bitterness it will be for the remnant of Israel when they eat the book. It will be sweet to taste that Christ is about to appear to subdue all their enemies, to set aside all idolatry and lawlessness, to fulfil every promise as to Israel’s glory, and to reign before His ancients in glory. But when they eat this they will have to recall their own breaking of the law and despising of the promises, their idolatry and their rejection of Christ, their long centuries of unbelief of the testimony of the Holy Ghost. If you want to see something of the inward bitterness which they will have, read Zechariah 12: 10 - 14.

Their exercises are prefigured prophetically in the “great bitterness” which Hezekiah passed through when he discovered that death was upon him. How can a people who are themselves under death become the living to praise Jehovah? It can only be by the resurrection power and quickening of God, and they will have to learn in bitterness the absolute necessity for this. Isaiah 36 to 39 is an important section of the prophetic word as shewing three distinct exercises through which the remnant will have to go. They will feel all the power of the external enemy set forth in Sennacherib, and will be cast upon

God for deliverance from him. Then they will have to face the deeper lesson of chapter 28 in discovering that death is upon them, and that God alone can undertake for them in their extremity. And then they will have to learn and judge all the Babylonish elements that are in their own hearts (2 Chronicles 32: 31), that they may turn from these things, so that God may truly have all the glory of the wonder that will be "done in the land". All these experimental discoveries of their own weakness will be essential to their learning God's deliverance. It will be through these very exercises that they will learn to appreciate Christ.

In principle we have the same kind of exercise. If God enables us to feed on His thoughts and will as expressed in Christ it necessitates self-judgment. If we do not apply the truth in self-judgment we fall into Satan's hands. Peter had a marvellous revelation from the Father, and another from Christ, but he did not apply those revelations in self-judgment, so he became almost immediately the mouthpiece of Satan. The same man who in human sentiment would have turned the Lord from the cross would afterwards deny Him. But the inward bitterness had to come, for he was a true saint, and when it did come he went out and wept bitterly. We do not get anything really of Christ without a corresponding bitterness of self-judgment. People sometimes say, "What a nice word we had!" But if we really eat the word it comes home to us and searches our hearts. The true value of ministry can be measured very much by the exercise which it produces; the practical displacement of self by Christ is never brought about without this.

John was to prophesy, and he had to learn experimentally the effect of that prophecy. The prophets all had to go through similar experience. Think of what Isaiah went through and Jeremiah and Ezekiel! They had to learn what the state of the people was to whom they prophesied, and to enter into it as feeling it with God. They had their own personal part in it also, for they could not dissociate themselves from the state of the people; faith never could. See how Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel took up the state of the people, and identified themselves with it before God! (chapter 9 in each book). The only one who can prophesy is the one who feels with God, and who has himself the exercise which his prophesying is intended to produce. But this inward bitterness — this true spirit of self-judgment — sets God free to make known what is before Him for His pleasure and testimony. Such can measure the temple, and the altar, and the worshippers. The effect of inward exercise as to God's mind — though self-judgment ever goes with it — is that we are qualified to measure things by a divine standard. These are great moral principles which have their application as much to us as they will to the remnant in a coming day. When the truth works through self-judgment — and

if it works at all it works thus — it leads to the setting aside of our natural thoughts, feelings, and likings, and we begin to take account of God's things according to divine measurement.

REVELATION 11

Revelation 11

It is the privilege of faith to take account of what is on the earth for God at any moment. John being called to "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship in it", is evidence that even in that day — the very darkest moment of the world's history, the last half-week of Daniel's seventy weeks — there will be something on the earth which is of God and for Him, and of which definite account can be taken; it can be measured. The chapters following give us the most terrible time of the great tribulation, but before we enter those dark shadows God allows us to see that He will have something reserved for Himself. It will be like the seven thousand reserved who had not bowed the knee to Baal in the midst of apostasy in Elijah's day. The great consideration of faith, whether as to the present time or as to any future time, is to take account of what is of God and for God. And there is that today which we can measure as having divine importance and value; it is the privilege of faith to do so.

I do not think "the temple of God and the altar" refers to anything material. John was to measure what was there spiritually for God. He is here a representative man having received figuratively — in eating the little book — the communication of God's mind, and having gone through the exercise and self-judgment which that involved. He is now prepared to take account of what will be there spiritually for God. The measuring applies to what is internal; the court without is not to be measured "because it has been given up to the nations, and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty-two months".

There is a striking analogy between the conditions in that day and in our own. If we look at the external system of Christianity it is given up to men, and what is holy is trodden under foot. Man's will predominates there. But there is what is spiritual — the shrine and the altar and the worshippers — and faith takes account of that. The temple is the place where God's mind is known; "to inquire of him in his temple"(Psalm 27: 4). And the altar speaks of intense holiness "the altar shall be holiness of holinesses: whatever toucheth the altar shall be holy" (Exodus 29: 37). The mind of man is essentially unholy, even in its religiousness. Who would naturally suppose that man in the flesh could never be acceptable to God? That nothing but the sweet odour of Christ can be the ground or measure of divine favour? To speak to the majority in christendom about the setting aside of man in the flesh would be like speaking Hebrew to them; they would not understand; they have not come near the altar. But if persons are not in accord with the altar they will tread what is holy

under foot. We have here in John a representative man measuring what is holy, and then an external company marked by treading what is holy under foot. It should be a real exercise with us that God would give us the measuring reed, and enable us rightly to estimate the character of what is for Himself. It would lead to intense separation, for if we appreciate what is holy we cannot go on with what is profane. We read of the enclosure round about the temple, "It had a wall round about, five hundred long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common" (Ezekiel 42: 20). If we wish to maintain what is for God's pleasure and service we must build a broad wall of separation between what is holy and what is profane.

To take account of what is of God and for God involves much exercise. There are many things in the religious world which will not bear measurement by a divine standard. But if things will not stand measuring, faith cannot recognize them as being of God. In the holy city (chapter 21) all is in full measure and due proportion according to "man's measure". Everything there will come up to the measure of Christ.

How blessed to know that in the darkest tribulation days there will be "the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship in it"! It is what will be found spiritually in the remnant, for we are here on Jewish ground. The "holy city" is Jerusalem and it is also "the great city, which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified". All that is outward will be profaned, but there will be a company who will be spiritually intelligent in the mind of God — the "wise" of Daniel 12: 3 — and who will hate the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked; but who will wash their hands in innocency and will encompass Jehovah's altar (Psalm 26). It is what they come into spiritually before there is any material temple or altar at which they can worship. There will be a material temple, I dare say, at that period, but it will be one where the man of sin, the son of perdition, sits and shews himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2: 3, 4).

Then there will be not only worship, though that comes first, but also testimony. "I will give power to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth". There will be adequate testimony rendered in Jerusalem in deep sorrow, and God takes account of it in days to shew that it will go on day by day. And we are told that "These are the two olive trees and the two lamps which stand before the Lord of the earth". The witnesses are thus identified with what we read in Zechariah 4. Their testimony will not be in human might or power "but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts". And they "stand before the Lord of the earth", for that will

be the testimony of the moment. Men in their fear may for a brief time give "glory to the God of the heaven" (verse 13); they are compelled, as it were, to do that. But they will not admit that He is "the Lord of the earth"; they will dispute His title to the earth to the last possible moment. But in face of all the blasphemous pretensions of men, God will sustain through the last half-week a powerful testimony by His Spirit to His rights and title as "the Lord of the earth". Moses and Elijah maintained what was due to God in the face of a disobedient and gainsaying people — whether in the Egypt world or amongst the apostate people of God — and their testimony was supported by acts of divine power, and thus it will be in the days of the two witnesses.

It will be suited to the time and place and character of their testimony that they should be clothed in sackcloth. Their exercise as to the state of the people of God will have been very deep; they will realize how Israel has departed from all that was in God's mind for them. And we may learn from their sackcloth clothing something of the suited character of present testimony. We ought never to forget the failure and breakdown of the christian profession. The first effect of learning the truth as to Christ and the assembly must be deep exercise, and a profound sense of how the christian profession has departed from the original thoughts of God. As to spiritual privilege it is open to us, through infinite grace, to arise from the dust and put on our beautiful garments and take our place with God in all the blessedness of our holy and heavenly calling. This would answer to the temple and altar and worshippers. But when we come to testimony we have to remember the complete public failure; we cannot dissociate ourselves from the general ruin; and hence sackcloth is becoming. All true testimony now must be rendered in sorrow as feeling the failure of the public witness; this keeps us lowly and it honours God. But there is light sustained by the golden oil of the Spirit. It is still possible to be vessels "to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2: 21).

It is part of the testimony rendered by saints of the assembly that the earth is the Lord's. We claim it in faith for Him all through the time of His rejection, and await His coming to take possession of what is rightly His. One of our poets has said,

"Come, then, and added to Thy many crowns,
Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth,
Thou who alone art worthy! It was Thine
By ancient covenant, ere Nature's birth,
And Thou hast made it Thine by purchase since,
And overpaid its value with Thy blood

Thy saints proclaim Thee King; and in their hearts
Thy title is engraven with a pen
Dipp'd in the fountain of eternal love".

"And when they shall have completed their testimony, the beast who comes up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and shall conquer them, and shall kill them". Here we see another instance of what we have already noticed in this book, that the power of evil is always under divine control, and limited in its action to what God permits. Not all the power of the beast will be able to kill the two witnesses until they have completed every day of their testimony. It is a great stay to faith to see this.

The "beast" is introduced here without any explanation of who he is. It suffices that we should understand that there will be a terrible power in ascendancy here — a power of infernal origin — intensely opposed to God's testimony, and which will kill His witnesses as soon as it is able to do so. Their bodies will lie unburied for three days and a half on the street of the great city, and "they that dwell upon the earth" will, rejoice and be full of delight. But "after the three days and a half the spirit of life from God came into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell on those beholding them. And I heard a great voice out of the heaven saying to them, Come up here; and they went up to the heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them". God will give this remarkable testimony even to the adversaries that His kingdom is about to come in the power of resurrection and ascension. This has been demonstrated to faith by the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit's testimony to Him as risen and ascended. Indeed there is a certain correspondence between the ministry of Christ and that of the two witnesses. He ministered three years and a half and then was killed and raised again and carried up into heaven. And, no doubt, the public resurrection and ascension of the witnesses will lead the faith and hope of the remnant in that closing moment of their trial in a very distinct way to heaven. It is from thence that their deliverance will come. So at the end of this chapter "the temple of God in the heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple". Everything is secured for faith by the presence of Christ in heaven as risen and ascended. The remnant will know Him as the Ark of God's covenant there — the security of all their blessing — before He is manifested.

When the seventh angel sounded "there were great voices in the heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign to the ages of ages". The apportioned seventy weeks upon Daniel's people, and upon Daniel's holy city, will have run their full course. Nothing will now remain of the prophetic word but "to bring in the righteousness of the

ages", and heaven celebrates this grand climax of the ways of God as accomplished. The elders add their tribute of thanksgiving, and dwell on the kingdom as the time of divine recompense. They have been observant of the wrath of the nations, and of all the sufferings of God's servants — prophets, saints, and those who have feared His Name, small and great — and they give thanks that their sufferings will all be compensated. I am inclined to think, from the context, that "the time of the dead to be judged" refers to dead saints, perhaps more particularly to those martyred. They will all, be vindicated and recompensed. It is the bringing in of "the righteousness of the ages" (Daniel 9: 24), and making it publicly manifest. The saints from Abel down to the witnesses of this chapter have been killed, persecuted, reproached, ridiculed, and caused to suffer for righteousness' sake in small ways and in great. But all will be recompensed in the kingdom of God. God's wrath will come on those who "have been full of wrath" against His people, and He will "destroy those that destroy the earth".

REVELATION 12

Revelation 12

We are brought "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel" in prophetic vision to the setting up of the kingdom. Then chapters 12 to 19 come in to supply details which are full of instruction for us, and which will be of vital importance to those who are in the circumstances to which they refer. They manifestly give us things which precede what is celebrated in chapter 11: 15 - 18.

Israel comes into view here as she is in the vision of heaven. God purposes that Israel shall have authority and glory, and that she shall be in administration here. He has never recalled that purpose; "the gifts and the calling of God are not subject to repentance". But she can only have that place through the coming in of the Man Child; her glory all depends on Christ. "Of whom, as according to flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9: 4, 5). It is the Israel of divine purpose that we see here, and her great adversary, or rather the adversary of the Man Child whom she brings forth, and who persecutes her because of her relation to Him.

The "great red dragon" is "the ancient serpent, he who is called Devil and Satan, he who deceives the whole habitable world". He is described here as "having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems". I think we may see the significance of this description when we note how it corresponds with what is said of the beast in chapter 13. There will be a beast to which the dragon will give "his power, and his throne, and great authority", so that "all that dwell on the earth shall do it homage, every one whose name had not been written from the founding of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb". So that the seven heads and ten horns on the dragon shew that it is Satan viewed as the one who aspires to bring the whole earth under his authority, and who will set forth in the first beast of chapter 13 all that blasphemous ambition in public administration here. There is this difference between the dragon and the beast, that diadems are on the heads of the dragon, but on the horns of the beast. The dragon has it in mind and purpose to usurp all authority on earth; it is an object of deliberation and plan with him to do so; the heads suggest this. But the actual carrying out of it in power — of which horns speak — so far as God may allow it to be carried out, will be in the beast.

So that we see Satan, as the dragon, standing before the woman "in order that when she brought forth he might devour her child". Satan knows the Scriptures; he knows well that it is the purpose of God to give universal

dominion to Christ. He knows that the Seed of the woman is to crush his head. He knows that all Israel's glory, and everything that God has in view for the earth, hangs upon the introduction of the Child. And he is the great antagonist of God; he is set to oppose and countervail every divine thought. His whole device from Eden onwards has been to have man and the earth for himself. He would use Cain to kill Abel, he would use Pharaoh to oppress the sons of Israel, he would use a misguided and deceived people to persecute and kill the prophets of God, he would use Herod in the attempt to kill Jesus as soon as He was born, he would use chief priests and the Roman governor to put Him to death, he would use Saul of Tarsus and many another to persecute or kill His saints. He has been the same dragon all through, and will be to the end.

In this chapter and the next Satan is seen in three other characters of opposition to Christ. He is the accuser of the brethren, and in this he is opposed to Christ as *Priest* who intercedes for them. Then he brings in the first beast, who is the great usurper of the rights of Christ as *King*. And the second beast is the false prophet — the one who deceives with lies — the opponent of Christ as the *Prophet*. Everything that Christ has made known as the truth will be denied by the antichrist.

"And she brought forth a male son, who shall shepherd all the nations with an iron rod: and her child was caught up to God and to his throne". It is the King of Psalm 2, of whom Jehovah says, "Thou art my Son; I this day have begotten thee", who is brought forth, but instead of having the nations for an inheritance, and the ends of the earth for His possession, He is caught up to heaven. His life here and His death are not mentioned, because the point is to mark the fact that between His being born on earth and His having universal dominion there is an interval during which He is in heaven. We know that the interval has lasted nearly two thousand years, during which the assembly has been called, and that she, too, will be caught up to heaven because her place and blessings are there where He is. So that, as it has often been said, the rapture of the church is involved in the catching up of the Man Child. "Such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones".

His catching up to heaven involves hers, for she is His body and His bride. But all that is passed over here, because it is Israel His mother that is in view, and not the assembly His wife. What we learn from this scripture is that there will be an "Israel of God" then, and that she will have a place prepared of God, where she will be nourished during the last terrible half-week of the tribulation.

God has preserved a remnant of Israel all through in the assembly, and after the assembly has gone He will still have an elect Israel in a wilderness

position. This time in the wilderness will be of immense value to them. They will begin their history afresh by learning divine care and nourishing in the wilderness. He will not bring them at once into the land, but into the wilderness where they will learn what He has brought them to in Himself before they enter on millennial blessing. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart", etc. (Hosea 2: 14 - 17) refers to this time. The remnant will find their safety in retiring from the ordered system of things in the world to an outside place. Everything will turn for faith on the place which Christ has, just as it does today. If Christ were in honour here His saints would be in honour too. But if He is rejected and in reproach the word for His saints is, "Therefore let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach". And in that day, when Satan has by the beast usurped dominion here, there can be nothing but the wilderness for the woman. But it will be a blessed place of divine nourishing; they will be learning Christ there. Just as He disciplined and educated His people in the wilderness when He brought them out of Egypt, and prepared them morally, in figure, for the land, so will He again in the coming day. Many scriptures in the prophets refer to this time. They will have wilderness experiences of God before they enter the land. And their hopes will be, as it were, caught up to heaven because their Messiah is there. They will come into the good of Peter's addresses to "the whole house of Israel" in Acts 2 and 3, and will "know assuredly" that the crucified Jesus is made both Lord and Christ in heaven. They will know that "heaven indeed must receive" Him until "the times of the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken". And they will look for Him to be sent so that times of refreshing may come.

At this point we get a momentous event. War in heaven, the issue of which is the casting of Satan and his angels out of heaven into the earth. In what is probably the most ancient part of Scripture we find Satan presented as having access to God (Job 1), and as bringing accusations against one who feared God. He has used his place in heaven to accuse the brethren before God day and night. In the wisdom of God this has been permitted, just as other evils have been permitted, but it will be finally terminated by Satan being cast out of heaven. No doubt the failures of the people of God often give occasion to the adversary to accuse them, and this is a serious consideration, but his character comes out in his accusations. Whether he has any just ground for accusing or not, he appears before God as the accuser, whereas Jesus Christ the righteous is the Advocate. The sin of a believer calls advocacy into activity with the Righteous One, but accusations with the evil one. The question has been asked, and it is a very pertinent one, "The accuser or the advocate — whose side do you take?"

The brethren overcome the accuser "by reason of the blood of the Lamb". They find an answer to all his just accusations there. They will be justified in the power of that precious blood, which cleanses from every sin. It will become the complete answer in their consciences to every true charge which the accuser might allege against them. And this will set them free in conscience, and make them bold in heart, to come out in distinct testimony here. Satan would seek to intimidate them by accusations, the truth of which they might not be able to deny, but if the blood of the Lamb has removed every stain before God they can fearlessly go on with "the word of their testimony". They do not yield to the adversary, or surrender their witness for God; they overcome the accuser. And, finally, they "have not loved their lives even unto death". Satan's thought of men is "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2: 4), but the brethren will show that they love God's testimony more than their lives. Satan can do nothing with such people but kill them, if God permits him to do so; in any case, living or dying, they overcome him.

The casting of Satan out of heaven is the sign of his complete overthrow. So that a great voice in the heaven says, "Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ". Heaven is cleared of "all rule and all authority and power" that is contrary to God. The clearance of the earth will follow after a brief but terrible season of the devil's rage. All was anticipated by the Lord at the time when demons were being cast out through the power of His Name. "I beheld Satan as lightning falling out of heaven" (Luke 10: 18).

It was future as to fact, but the power was present, and in action, that would completely dispossess Satan. The catching up of the Man Child to heaven is followed by the casting out of Satan, and then when the Firstborn is brought into the habitable world Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss.

The special object of the dragon's enmity, when he is cast out of heaven, is the woman who bore the Man Child. But wings are given to her "that she might fly into the desert into her place, where she is nourished there a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent". The remnant — the true Israel of God at the moment — will be preserved and nourished in a desert place; I think it indicates retirement to a distance from the whole order of things in which the serpent's power will be active. Morally that is the place of the assembly today; she is preserved and nourished as she keeps herself apart from the world.

Then the serpent casts water out of his mouth as a river after the woman; I take that to mean that he influences a large body of people to move together

in a manner that is adverse to her. But "the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed the river". There will be a providential intervention which will render abortive the design of the dragon. It is often so in the ways of God when movements are taking place which are likely to have a serious effect on His people. He gives an unexpected turn to things which alters the whole situation.

"And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus". The woman has been seen as bringing forth the Man Child who was caught up to God. Now we find she will have other seed who will be the object of the dragon's enmity on earth. Israel will bring forth through travail of soul a seed for God. "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her sons" (Isaiah 66: 8). It will be a spiritual seed characterized by obedience; the law will be written in their hearts, and they will be quickened (Psalm 119) so as to respond to it; and they will have the testimony of Jesus. It is striking how "the testimony of Jesus" comes in here, and "the faith of Jesus" in chapter 14: 12. Then in chapter 19: 10, "For the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus". It is as though God would make specially prominent, in contrast to the blasphemous pride that prevails at the time, all the lowly grace of the One who came here to do His will. Faith will have Jesus as its Object and as its Testimony. The One who is to have the kingdom and dominion is Jesus. "Behold, thy King cometh to thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9: 9). The One who went down in obedience to the very lowest point has a Name above every name, and at His Name every knee of heavenly, earthly, and infernal beings will have to bow. He has a Name above every name now in heaven, and in the hearts of His saints, and He will have it in the hearts and testimony of the remnant of the woman's seed, and then finally He will have it universally. The men of Thessalonica rightly judged that if "another king, Jesus" came in it would mean the overturning of the whole present order of the world. All rights and honours belong to Jesus, and He will assuredly have them. We testify to it now, and the remnant of the woman's seed will testify to it in that coming day.

REVELATION 13

Revelation 13

This chapter shews us the two great forms which the power of evil will take during the last half-week of Daniel's seventy weeks. It is by these two beasts, that those who dwell upon the earth will be deceived, and the saints persecuted and slain. There will be a great political power, seconded and supported by a religious power. The beast of verse 1 is the revived Roman Empire or its head, and the beast of verse 11 is the antichrist.

The first beast rises out of the sea — an unsettled and unordered state of things; it will be such conditions that will give opportunity for the revival by Satanic power of the Roman Empire. At present the powers that be are ordained of God. Consequent upon the failure of Israel, God ordained that earthly government should be found in four successive Gentile empires — the Babylonish, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman — as made known prophetically in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image (Daniel 2). The unity of the Roman Empire has long been broken up, and men might doubt that it would ever be found in existence again. But it will come up out of the abyss, and have its power from the dragon, so that when it appears no allegiance or respect will be due to it from the saints.

It has "seven heads" — a terrible kind of perfection,

for it has "upon its heads names of blasphemy". Its perfection of deliberative capacity to carry out its designs is characterized by blasphemy. Its executive power is set forth in its ten horns. It has a certain resemblance to previous empires (compare Daniel 7); I suppose it will gather up and combine in itself the evil features that were seen in them. It appears as having had a deadly wound which had been healed. The Roman Empire has had a deadly wound; it would hardly be thought possible that its imperial supremacy could ever be restored. The spread of democratic principles would seem to have put a revival of imperialism out of the question. But I believe that the forces which work in the direction of anarchy will give occasion to the return of imperialism. When everything is unsettled and in confusion the whole earth will be ready to welcome the advent of a power that appears to be strong enough to bring chaos into order, and which appears able to exercise a control that brings about unity and efficiency. And — what is infinitely sadder to think of — an apostate world will be ready to do homage to a power that blasphemes God and persecutes His saints.

The extraordinary way in which the Roman Empire will appear again will make the whole earth wonder. They will do homage to it, and to the dragon who gives it authority. The only ones who will not do homage to this blasphemous imperial power will be God's elect, those whose names have "been written from the founding of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb".

The first beast in Revelation 13 is the "little horn" of Daniel 7, where we find details as to his coming up, and subduing three kings; but in this chapter he is seen as having acquired all the power of the ten horns. He is seen here in the full development of the power and great authority with which the dragon will invest him.

The beast will open "its mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle". There is something blessed conveyed even in this, for it is the proof that God's Name will still be here in testimony, and His tabernacle will still overshadow His saints with its protection. If His Name and His tabernacle had disappeared from the earth there would be no object in blaspheming them. Then the beast blasphemes "those who have their tabernacle in the heaven". I think this indicates that there will be those in that day who will maintain faith's ancient confession of being "strangers and sojourners on the earth", and who will be prepared to lose their lives here in view of a dwelling in the heaven. A place in the kingdom on earth will be the portion of those who are carried right through the tribulation under the protection of God's tabernacle. But the saints against whom the beast makes war, and whom he overcomes, will have "a better, that is, a heavenly" portion. The beast may overcome them, in the sense of being able to kill them, but morally they gain the victory over him (chapter 15: 2; 20: 4).

Thus some saints will be carried through to be a testimony to the protection of God's tabernacle here; others will not get deliverance here, but will be conscious that their tabernacle is "in the heaven". Satan is ever intensely hostile to the thought of man having a present dwelling in heaven. He does not so much oppose the thought of men going to heaven when they die, because that does not make men "strangers and sojourners on the earth". But he blasphemes "those who have their tabernacle in the heaven" *now* because Christ is there, and who are conscious that heaven is their present place of dwelling according to divine purpose and calling.

Verses 9 and 10 warn the saints of that day against the use of any human or fleshly power in their own defence. To suffer patiently, even as the slain Lamb did, was their calling. "Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints". It is a warning equally applicable to ourselves.

"Another beast" rises out of the earth. He makes his appearance in ordered and settled conditions, and has a resemblance to Christ. "It had two horns like to a lamb"; "and it works great signs"; it appears to have convincing credentials; and all its influence is to bring men to worship the first beast and its image, and to carry a mark indicative of their allegiance to him. This is a religious head, establishing its influence by signs, so that men may become worshippers of the first beast, and carry his moral impress. He causes "even fire to come down from heaven to the earth before men", and he causes an image of the beast to be made, and gives breath to it, and sets it up to be worshipped, and causes "that as many as should not do homage to the image of the beast should be killed". This corresponds in measure with the image which Nebuchadnezzar made (Daniel 3), but accompanied by supernatural signs which deceive those that dwell upon the earth. Indeed nothing could be more solemn than to see that the same words are used of the antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2: 9 — "power and signs and wonders" — which are used in Acts 2: 22 of the witness which God gave to the Lord Jesus.

I have no doubt that this second beast is "the king" of Isaiah 30: 33; Isaiah 57: 9; Daniel 11: 36; one who will "come in his own name", and who will have his seat in Jerusalem; the antichrist who will deny the Father and the Son; and "who opposes and exalts himself on high against all called God, or object of veneration; so that he himself sits down in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2: 4).

So that we see in this chapter a great political power of Satanic origin and character, and then a great religious power which acts in support of the political power, and which "spake as a dragon". Though it may pretend to be like Christ, its utterances are diabolical. These are powers which are soon to appear on the stage of the world's history. It is not impossible that both the beast and the antichrist may be alive on earth now, though not to be manifested until after the assembly has been translated.

All this has a voice for us, because the principles which will be fully developed in these two beasts are working in the world today. Paul tells us that "the mystery of lawlessness already works" (2 Thessalonians 2: 7); and John says, "According as ye have heard that antichrist comes, even now there have come many antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2: 18). The principles which will be embodied in the first beast are abroad in the political world, and the spirit of antichrist is abroad in the religious world. We have to see that we do not fall under the contamination of these subtle influences of evil. One cannot but notice that the conditions of the industrial world, both on the side of employers and employed, tend to the formation and recognition of

combinations which make it more and more difficult for those who remain outside them. There is not yet, thank God, the mark of the beast, but men are being familiarized with the principle on which his kingdom will be ordered.

When these principles are fully developed no one will be "able to buy or sell save he that had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of its name". There will be no civil or religious liberty, no freedom of conscience; every one must carry on his "right hand" or upon his "forehead" the mark of the beast. He must be openly identified in his working ability or in his personal character with the beast. The dragon's purpose in this policy, which will be carried out by his two representatives on earth as far as possible, will be to blot out from the face of the earth every trace of testimony to God or to His Christ. He will not succeed, and he will only have "a short time".

Those "that dwell on the earth" are a moral class. Paul speaks of those that "mind earthly things" as being "the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3: 18, 19), and he contrasts them with those whose "commonwealth has its existence in the heavens". Those that dwell on the earth are content to have their portion there without God and without Christ, and those who are in this attitude of mind will be ready to do homage to the first beast, and to be deceived by the second, and even to do homage to the dragon.

Difficulties will increase if we are left here, but divine resources and compensations will be better known. Those going on with God will prove what He can be to His tested and suffering people. A conscious link with Christ in heaven will keep our spirits in separation from the evil principles which are at work here. God may allow us to be found in circumstances which will teach us the value of the Psalms. That is, to find resource in God in presence of much external difficulty, whilst preserving in mind and affection the spirit of the present period of grace, and the spirit of sonship in relation to God. The Psalms will be the comfort and support of faith in a day when extreme pressure will come upon the people of God. And in proportion as saints of the assembly feel the pressure of things they will be qualified to sympathize with the suffering remnant. The elders will have priestly interest in the oppressed saints on earth, and sympathy with them as having known suffering themselves.

One would expect, too, that as outward pressures increase, saints will be more drawn together in mutual affection and care. So that if some are deprived of the means of getting a living there will be a readiness to care for them. Love amongst the children of God is God's mark. The mark of the beast is soon going to characterize the world, but the mark of God — the divine nature in activity — is to characterize the saints.

May we be increasingly exercised to carry that mark. "The number of the beast" will be understood by the wise when he appears, but until he does appear speculations are not of much value.

REVELATION 14

Revelation 14

The company of saints brought before us in the first section of this chapter (verses 1 - 5) is a deeply interesting one. I think we might regard them as near neighbours to the assembly, and as having a special claim upon our interest and affection. It is a company of saints with whom we can be peculiarly sympathetic. The assembly has a heavenly place, and this company is so near to heaven that they can learn its song. My impression is that this company will be a peculiar compensation to the Lord for what He suffered in Judah and Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city of the great King, but He had more reproach and sorrow and suffering there than anywhere else, and I believe the 144,000 on Mount Zion will be a Jewish company that will be specially near to Him as compensation for that sorrow.

They will have "his name and the name of his Father written upon their foreheads". In the kingdom of the beast every one will have to carry his mark, will be compelled to take character from him; he will not tolerate anything else. But at the very time when the beast is impressing his character on all his subjects, Christ will have a company who will carry His mark; they will take character from Him and from His Father. It is a cheer to think of Christ and His Father being expressed in other families besides the church. These saints are not in heaven, but they are near enough to heaven to learn its song. They stand with the Lamb upon Mount Zion in the appreciation of sovereign mercy. Before the Lamb's kingly glory is publicly known they will see Him in it, and stand with Him spiritually in the full recognition of it. They are "first-fruits" before the great millennial harvest is gathered in.

Scripture affords us light as to saints who will be marked by intimacy with Christ, as knowing His royal glory before the kingdom is actually established, in the Song of Solomon and in Psalm 45. There will be those in Jerusalem who will go to the lawless king with ointments (Isaiah 57: 9); but at the same time there will be "the king's daughter", "the queen", who will be brought to the One of whom it is said, "I have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness". There will be those who will know Him as anointed upon Zion while nations and peoples and kings are still in rebellion "against Jehovah and against his anointed" (Psalm 2). It is a peculiar privilege to know Him thus before the day of His public glory.

It has been said that "the queen" of Psalm 45 is Jerusalem, and that "the virgins behind her, her companions", are the cities of Judah. There will be an elect company from Jerusalem and Judah brought to know the King, and to

be, with Him in a special intimacy as His companions, while it is yet needful for Him to gird His sword upon His thigh, and to make His arrows sharp in the heart of His enemies. I conceive that these correspond with the company we have in view in Revelation 14.

Bridal character attaches to other companies as well as the assembly. It is a figure signifying intimacy of affection and companionship. The assembly is Christ's bride and wife — His intimate companion — in heavenly associations. Then the bride of the Song of Solomon and the "queen" of Psalm 45 will be in intimate relations of affection with Christ in connection with the earth before and during the day of His public glory. And Israel in millennial conditions will be the bride of Jehovah. Many have an idea that prophecy is "dry", but if it is looked at in relation to the moral exercises and affections of which it speaks — and this is its true interest to a spiritual mind — it is anything but dry.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah should be read in connection with the Song of Solomon, because that book shews the deep exercises through which "the princess" (Lamentations 1: 1) will have to pass to prepare her to be brought to the King. It is nearly all *heart* work in the Song of Solomon, but preparatory *conscience* work is needed, and this is set before us in the Lamentations, which morally precedes the Canticles. There can be no true spiritual affections apart from the raising and settling of moral questions. The "princess" will have to learn that everything has failed her, that Jehovah has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions, that all her splendour has departed. All peoples will behold her unparalleled sorrow (Lamentations 1: 12, 18), and she will have to own that Jehovah is righteous in it all. He has had to cast off His altar, and to reject His sanctuary. There is nothing for it but to let tears "run down like a torrent day and night", and to "pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord".

But they will learn in that coming day that their Messiah has taken up all their sorrows in grace, and identified Himself with them in those sorrows. They will feel how indifferent they have been to His sorrows, which were really *their own* borne in grace. They will remember their sorrow as knowing it to have been taken up by Him, and in remembering this their soul will be humbled in them, but hope will revive (Lamentations 3: 19 - 21). Jehovah's loving-kindness will become known to them (Lamentations 3:22; Lamentations 3:25; Lamentations 3:31,32). They will find that He is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. It is all very touching, and we can understand their exercises in some measure by our own. In principle we have had to travel the same road. We have had to learn that there was no room in our hearts for Christ, and yet in His blessed love He took up our case and bore our sins.

When we see this our affections begin to be drawn out to the One who has entered in gracious love into all the sorrow that was ours, and who has borne the death and judgment due to us.

In Lamentations 4 we see the deplorable state of a people who have got away from Jehovah, and been disowned by Him. They have lost their value; the vessels of fine gold have become earthen (verses 1, 2). Their affections have disappeared; "the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness" (verse 3). There is no food; "the young children ask bread, no man breaketh it unto them" (verse 4). Their moral beauty is all gone; "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, whiter than milk ... their visage is darker than blackness, they are not known in the streets" (verses 7, 8). And the blood of the Righteous One has been shed in the midst of her (verse 13). But a point is reached in verse 22 when it can be said, "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity". The deep exercises have done their work in preparing her to appreciate the way in which her Messiah took up her sins and her sorrows. Her own sufferings prepare her to appreciate His, and to be drawn to Him as the suffering Lamb. He will have royal glory on Mount Zion, but the One who has it is the Lamb — the meek and lowly Sufferer.

In following the exercises of "the princess" we pass from the Lamentations to the Song of Solomon. The scene of this book is largely cast in Jerusalem or its environs, and it speaks of affections which will be found there before Israel at large has been wooed or won, and while her spiritual affections are, as yet, undeveloped. Chapter 8: 8 probably refers to this. The "prince's daughter" is seen in the Canticles in another stage of her spiritual progress. The King has now set Himself to take her captive by His love, and to secure her wholly for Himself. Her movements of affection towards Christ and His movements towards her are beautifully delineated. It is clear that millennial conditions are not in view, for there are angry children, and she has to learn where to find the One whom her soul loves. She is "the lily among thorns". It is a time in which she has to seek Him, and in which He seeks her, and does not always find immediate response, so that she has to suffer the consequences of her supineness. And though she does come up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved, the book closes with a call to Him to "Haste". She is not yet with Him in abiding satisfaction, though she has tasted what it is like, nor does she yet follow Him wheresoever He goes. We do not get the *actual* presence of the King in the Song of Solomon; His presence, so far as it is known in this book, is known spiritually. It is the portrayal of the heart exercises of the "prince's daughter" in regard to the King, and of His appeals to her affections, before He is publicly manifested. Such exercises as are depicted here will have no

place after the kingdom is established. And it is just this which makes the book applicable in many ways at the present moment.

In Psalm 45 we go a step farther. It is "A song of the Beloved". Read the Psalm. We have not here the mixed experiences of the Song — the alternations between the joy of conscious nearness and the sense of distance; it is a more settled state of the affections. The One who suffered is seen in His royal glory, and He becomes the Beloved of those who know Him. They appreciate all His Personal and moral and official glory. "Thou art fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever ... Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever". He has shewn by becoming the Lamb, and by all that is involved in that title, how He "loved righteousness and hated wickedness", for He suffered and died to establish the one and to remove the other. Now He is seen anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions; He has associates who can appreciate the fragrance of every perfection as seen in Him. "Myrrh and aloes, cassia, are all thy garments; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad". And the queen is near to Him; she has left every other influence to be under His; she has true virgin character. She stands upon His right hand in divine suitability; she is brought to the King, and is all-glorious in the royal apartments. It is all anticipative, for His enemies have not yet been dealt with. Indeed, it is striking how little we get in Scripture about the heart experiences which saints will have when the glory is actually brought in. There is much about the exercises and experiences and spiritual possibilities of the faith period. In entering into that we know what the time of glory will be because we anticipate it in spirit. The actual future is made present to faith and hope.

It is blessed to know that there will be such a company as this in the last days. Before Jehovah destroys in Zion "the face of the veil which veileth all the peoples, and the covering that is spread over all the nations", and before He swallows up death in victory (Isaiah 25: 7, 8), He will bring to pass that this company will be led through deep exercise to appreciate their Messiah as the suffering One, and to have their hearts touched by all that He has gone through in His love and in His pity for them. They will be called to follow Him spiritually, as His disciples were in the days of His flesh. In being "with him" these saints come into the place occupied by those who were with the Lord when here. Luke speaks of some who were "attendants on the word" (Luke 1: 2). These are the Lamb's attendants in a future day. His name will be written upon their foreheads — His own blessed character as set forth in the beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1 - 12) will be seen in them — and His Father's Name also (Matthew 5: 45, 48).

The bride in the Song of Solomon can speak of the King's beauty, but He can also speak of hers; His features are reflected in her; and both are delineated in the sermon on the mount. The moral beauty of Christ will be seen in these saints, and their conduct will be patterned after the conduct of His Father. This answers to His Name and His Father's Name being written on their foreheads. The sermon on the mount will have its answer in them in the face of all the power of the beast and the antichrist, and at utmost cost. Such is the power of divine grace. The disciples saw the kingdom on the holy mount; it is our privilege to be spiritually "with him on the holy mountain", and it will be the privilege of these saints in Revelation 14 to be there also.

They are described as following "the Lamb wheresoever it goes". They will have followed Him in mind and affection through His ministry here, and they will have taken character from it. They will have followed Him through Gethsemane and Calvary to resurrection, and to His royal glory on Mount Zion. They will stand with Him there while all the earth is wondering after the beast and doing homage to it. They will stand with Him in faith in the full light of the kingdom before it is actually established. It is ours to do so today; and thus will they and we be preserved in virgin character while all around are being corrupted. And while the denial that Jesus is the Christ will be in every mouth of those who have believed what is false there will be no lie found in their mouths. And they will be blameless, not here as in the Authorized Version, "before the throne of God", but in their practical lives.

Then this company will be in sympathy with heaven; they can learn the song of heaven. I should suppose that the singers here in heaven may be the martyred saints of the tribulation period — the company referred to in Revelation 6: 11 — for they are not the elders, though the elders are in full sympathy with the throne and the living creatures in their appreciation of it, for it is sung before them. The great point is that it is a heavenly song. There are wonderful songs about the coming kingdom in the Psalms, but none of them could quite reach up to what can be sung in heaven. They are earthly songs, but this is a song of a *new* character. It is the celebration of all that is connected in the mind of heaven with the Lamb and Mount Zion. And it is blessed to see that there will be a company on earth who can learn that song. They will learn to celebrate the kingdom and the King according to heaven's appreciation, so that they come very near morally to heaven. Though on earth they are in accord with the mind of heaven.

This is the privilege of the assembly today. Indeed, this company has many features in common with the assembly; amongst them, their virgin character; and the fact that they are first-fruits. Paul says, "I am jealous as to you with a

jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11: 2). It is in keeping ourselves from the corrupting influences of the world that we preserve the virgin character. And the assembly is first-fruits also. See Leviticus 23: 17. "A certain first-fruits of his creatures" in James 1: 18 is probably wide enough in its bearing to take in saints of the assembly and the company in Revelation 14 also. I have no doubt that these saints will read and appreciate the epistle of James. There is a peculiar satisfaction in first-fruits; the husbandman sets special value on them; they speak of what is coming on a greater scale. The assembly is "first-fruits" today. We, like the saints we are speaking of, have come to Mount Zion; we see royal grace in Christ as risen; we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. All that God and the Lamb will have in the day of the kingdom they have in a peculiar way in the "first-fruits", and it comes out in circumstances which give it special value. "First-fruits" come early; they give the first and most cherished gratification to the husbandman. God's "first-fruits" come out in adverse circumstances, in face of difficulty and opposition, in the assembly today, and in the company of Revelation 15 in the time of the beast and the antichrist. Fruit at such times is very precious to God and the Lamb.

"These are they who follow the Lamb wheresoever it goes". *Movement* marks the Song of Solomon. "Draw me, we will run after thee!" (Song of Songs 1: 4). "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock" (Song of Songs 1: 8). "I compare thee, my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots" (Song of Songs 1: 9). "I will rise now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the broadways will I seek him whom my soul loveth" (Song of Songs 3: 2). "Who is this, she that cometh up from the wilderness?" (Song of Songs 3: 6). He calls her to "Come with me" (Song of Songs 4: 8). "Before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my willing people" (Song of Songs 6: 12). "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Song of Songs 8: 5).

We are tested as to whether we have affection to discern and follow His movements. It is a constant exercise as each one hears Him say, "Follow thou me". He will have an answer in that day to His mind and affections; His thoughts will be intelligently entered into by those who will follow Him wheresoever He goes. There are movements of Christ today which only affection can discern. Before He gets public recognition He gets private recognition from His own who are exercised to discern His movements and to follow Him. He is moving now in a spiritual way, and His movements put affection to the test. When He walked on the sea He "would have passed them by" (Mark 6: 48); in Luke 24: 28, "He made as though he would go farther". His movements tested their hearts. When He says, "I am coming to you"

(John 14: 18), or "I will love him and will manifest myself to him" (John 14: 21), what effect does it produce upon us? If we want to find Him today we must "go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach". Happy are they who follow Him wheresoever He goes!

The second section of this chapter speaks of a heavenly messenger with glad tidings to men universally. It is a call to "Fear God, and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and do homage to him who has made the heaven and the earth and the sea and fountains of waters". Even at a time when all God's rights are being challenged by the beast and the antichrist He will send out glad tidings world-wide; it is a blessed testimony to His goodness. It is "the everlasting glad tidings" because it does not belong to any particular age or dispensation; it has always been open to man to fear God in view of coming judgment, and to give Him homage as the Creator. There will be a world-wide call to do this, and those who give heed to it will escape from the coming wrath. It is not the glad tidings of the grace of God as preached today. It does not speak of God as revealed in grace, or of redemption, but men are called to acknowledge what is due to God. The great effort of the beast and the antichrist will be to exclude all thought of God, but the everlasting glad tidings will bring Him in, and give men a last opportunity to escape from lawlessness by fearing Him, and giving Him glory. We learn from Matthew 25 that before the Son of man comes in His glory all the nations will have been tested by the presence amongst them of Christ's brethren, and to have treated them kindly will secure the blessing of His Father and inheritance of the kingdom. It will be the practical evidence that such as do so fear God, and they will go into life eternal on the earth.

"And another, a second, angel followed, saying, Great Babylon has fallen, has fallen, which of the wine of the fury of her fornication has made all nations drink". This is the first mention of a subject of divine judgment which appears in this book as being in a superlative degree an object of abhorrence and indignation to God and to heaven. The adjective "great" is always connected with Babylon; she is marked by greatness and splendour in the scene where Christ is rejected, and where His own are a "*little* flock". We shall see later that she is described as "the great harlot". All her characteristics stand in contrast to those which pertain to "the bride, the Lamb's wife", which is "the *holy* city, Jerusalem". The two cities are put before us in obvious contrast. With which of them are our thoughts and affections identified? For both cities exist today, and we are morally citizens of one or the other. Are we attracted and influenced by what is "great" on earth where Christ died, or are we held by the power of what is "holy"? One city is earthly, the other is heavenly; one is full of the glory of man and of the world, the other has the glory of God.

"Great Babylon" is unfaithful herself, and she is a corruptress of others. Instead of presenting God to men, and being the vessel of holy and purifying influences — instead of having "a river of water of life, bright as crystal", flowing through her — she leads all nations into idolatries, and makes them "drunk with the wine of her fornication". If we had not been forewarned by the Lord and by the apostles that it would be so, no one could have imagined that Christianity as set up in this world by the labours of the apostles would become what it is today. But the Lord told us that the mustard seed would become "a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches"; and that leaven — always in Scripture a figure of what is evil — would work until the whole mass was leavened (Matthew 13: 31 - 33). And every inspired writer in the New Testament has warned us of the departure and corruption that would come in. "Great Babylon" is the result, and it becomes a special subject of divine judgment. God would have His saints to know it as "fallen" before it is actually overthrown. Just as the 144,000 stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion in faith and affection before He is actually there, God would have Great Babylon to be "fallen" for His saints long before it is actually destroyed. She will have wonderful eminence for a time as riding upon the beast (chapter 17: 3), yet to faith she will be "fallen". The Lord beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven in Luke 10: 18, but he will not actually fall thence until the time spoken of in Revelation 12. So the great corruptress — the false church, the rival to the bride — who by carnal glory and magnificence has deceived men, and who has ministered to idolatrous self-gratification, is to those who have ears to hear the voice of the second angel "fallen" even now. None are clear of its influence who do not see it as fallen. For it has splendid architecture, imposing ritual, exquisite music, and everything that appeals to the imagination and religious sentiment of the natural man. It is an immense divine deliverance to know it as "fallen". The elements of Babylon are in every one of us according to the flesh, and we have to judge them there. Babylon includes every element of human glory — everything that glorifies man in the flesh — and her wine stimulates and elevates the flesh. But God has nothing for the flesh; the new wine is for the new man. As Christ and the Spirit get place with us — and we come under the influence of what is of God — we get away from the influence of "Great Babylon". The twice-repeated "has fallen, has fallen", is very emphatic. The third section of the chapter is an intensely solemn warning as to the consequences of doing homage to the beast or receiving his mark. "The endurance of the saints" will be severely tested, but there will be those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus".

Then "a voice out of the heaven" comforts the faithful. They might have to die for their fidelity, and it might seem very sad to die just so near to the kingdom being set up, but such would be "Blessed". They would obtain rest from their labours, and what labours saints will have in those dark days! They will lose nothing of what they have wrought; they will carry with them the honour of all they have done and suffered. We see them in the next chapter on the sea of glass. They have been tested in the fiercest fires of persecution, but the fire that tested them purified them so that no defilement remained. The laver — no longer needed for their cleansing becomes a crystal pavement on which they stand.

The last two sections of this chapter give final results — harvest and vintage. When the Son of man as the crowned Reaper puts His sickle on the earth, things will have come to full maturity. "The harvest is the completion of the age" (Matthew 13: 39). The age has witnessed the sowing of the Son of man, and also the sowing of the devil, and there has been no public divine dealing on earth to make manifest the judgment of God as to what has resulted. But the harvest is the end of that period. It does not take place until things have fully developed and ripened even to the point of being "dried". Then the age closes by the gathering out of the kingdom of the Son of man "all offences, and those that practise lawlessness", while the wheat will be brought together into His granary, fruit gathered unto life eternal. Everything that is worthless for God will be cast into the fire, while all that is pleasurable to Him will be gathered for the garner of blessing in the age to come. The harvest is the time when everything will be perfectly discriminated, and dealt with according to its true character. Lawlessness is permitted to continue in this age, but none of it will pass over into the age to come. The harvest will finally close the present order of things. The darnel will be gathered first, and bound into bundles to be burnt. The binding into bundles seems to speak of confederacies and combinations. How careful Christians should be not to be tied up in any bundle that is going to be burned!

Then the vintage is the destructive judgment of that which has been professedly in the place of fruit-bearing for God, but which has become only fit to be cast into the great winepress of His fury. The angel who called for this judgment "came out of the altar, having power over fire". The altar speaks of the death of Christ, which is the ground of blessing now, but it will call for judgment then. God has shewn in the death of Christ how He could deal with sin in such a way as to provide for His own glory, and open a door of blessing for men. But His having done so is the greatest proof that He cannot be indifferent to sin, and that if men do not enter the door which He has opened there is nothing for it but judgment. If God has judged sin in the death of

Christ it is impossible that He can allow it to go on permanently unchecked. In the case of "the vine of the earth" it is not merely that men have disregarded the divine way of escape, but after having been in professed relation with God they have become apostate and blasphemous. For I believe "the vine of the earth" would include apostate Jews, and possibly Gentiles who have become identified with them after giving up the truth and falling under the power of the beast and the antichrist.

"Her grapes are fully ripened". It is the matured fruit of enmity against God borne by those who have had a place of privilege, but who have gone out into the dark night of apostasy. Judas was the great apostate, and with the price of his treachery the field of blood was bought. It remained as a solemn witness against him, and of the fact that he had gone to his own place. There will be another terrible "Aceldama; that is, field of blood", when verse 20 is fulfilled. It is the final destruction of the proud adversaries of God and of His Anointed. Compare Isaiah 63: 1 - 6.

REVELATION 15

Revelation 15

We have here what is introductory to a series of plagues in which "the fury of God is completed". The pouring out of the "seven golden bowls" given to the seven angels is the last visitation of divine wrath before the final dealing with all that is evil on earth. These judgments come specially on those who have the mark of the beast, and on his throne. See chapter 16: 2, 10. But we see a company secured for blessing before we see the judgments fall.

The "glass sea" on which they stand has reference to the molten sea in the temple. The priests had to wash their hands and their feet that no defilement might hinder the holy service of God. Water for cleansing is indispensable now; the molten sea contained two thousand baths, and it stood upon twelve oxen which looked north, west, south, and east. This indicated an administration of moral cleansing universally available wherever needed. Do we not feel the need of such a provision? Can we be comfortable with spots of the flesh or of the world upon us? Nor could we be suited or free for the service of God without moral purification. The cleansing of the laver is something more than the sense that God has pardoned. It is the removal of the moral stain that has been contracted. This is brought about by the application of the death of Christ through the word leading us to self-judgment, and the practical disowning of that which has defiled us.

But the necessity for moral cleansing no longer exists for those who stand on the glass sea. The fact that it is "mingled with fire" may be a memorial of the fiery trial through which their faith has gone, but it has stood the test, and been "found to praise and glory and honour". And the crystal pavement beneath the feet of these victorious saints speaks of abiding purity and stainlessness. No defilement will ever be contracted there.

They have "harps of God". Their ability to praise is varied; it has many notes, but all "formed by power divine". "Harps" imply skill on the part of those who have them, and ability to strike the different notes with intelligence, so that perfect harmony is produced. We could not suppose that the saints spoken of in this chapter are more skilled in that way than saints of the assembly should be. Paul was skilled as a spiritual musician. He said, "I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing also with the understanding". Many hymns are largely coloured by human sentiment; such have not the character of "harps of God". A skilled harper would strike the right note at the right moment, and how important is this when saints are found together in assembly! We should understand how to strike the note which will harmonize with the movements in spiritual

affection that are present, and which will sustain and carry forward the melody of praise. Even a sweet note on the harp may jar if it is struck out of time and tune!

The harpers on the glass sea "sing the song of Moses bondman of God, and the song of the Lamb". They, like Israel of old, will have known a divine deliverance, and will be able to celebrate it in song. Exodus 15 and Revelation 15 give the first and last songs in Scripture, and their theme is the same. It is the deliverance of God's people by divine power, founded on redemption by blood. His great and wonderful works, the righteousness and truth of His ways as "King of nations", are celebrated. They can take it all up on "harps of God". It is the day when the beast has usurped imperial power, but to them God is the "King of nations". It is a far wider title than "King of Israel". It brings in the universality of God's kingdom; and the fact that He is the "Lord God Almighty" ensures His ultimate triumph over every foe. "Holy" in verse 4 is a word translated "mercies" in Acts 13: 34; it seems to speak of holiness as connected with the gracious ways and mercy of God; it is used of Christ when He is spoken of as "thy holy [or gracious] one" (Acts 2: 27; Acts 13: 35). God's mercy is holy mercy.

Then His "righteousnesses have been made manifest". These saints will have come through the most terrible time that has ever been known on earth. They will probably have been slain on account of their testimony; but they will be able to say that God's righteousnesses have been made manifest. They will have proved Him to have been faithful in every particular, true to every word that He uttered. They will have proved, for example, the truth of what is written in the Psalms, which were written in great measure for saints like these in tribulation days. They will have had the exercises and testings which the Psalms depict as to deceivers and oppressors and workers of iniquity, and — saddest and deepest grief of all — the consciousness of their own sin. Yet every word which God had given to sustain faith and hope in His tried and oppressed people will have been proved true.

These are God's "righteousnesses". He has been, and ever will be, faithful to His word and to His people. It is *our* privilege to know His faithfulness now, and to prove it; all who confide in Him will assuredly do so. The word, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness", means that in coming under His sway we shall prove that God will be as good as His word in every particular. His "righteousnesses" being in the plural would shew, I think, that they are looked at in detail — the innumerable manifestations of His faithfulness. Those who learn to trust Him, and prove His faithfulness, in such circumstances as the reign of the beast, will have a deeper and sweeter note

of praise than those who — like those born in the millennium — have never known adverse conditions. And there will be a righteous recompense for every tribulation endured. This appears in Revelation 20: 4, where these saints are seen as living and reigning with the Christ a thousand years.

Then “the temple of the tabernacle of witness in the heaven was opened”. In chapter 11 the ark of the covenant was seen there, that saints might apprehend that God’s covenant of blessing was secured in Christ in heaven. But here it is unmingled judgment, and there is no ark seen. “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power”. The temple is opened that the seven angels may come out with their “seven plagues, the last”. Judgment is God’s last resort; He holds it back until a moment comes when longer delay would not be mercy but indifference to lawless evil. It is impossible that God should allow the wilfulness and perversity of His fallen creatures to go on permanently unchecked.

REVELATION 16

Revelation 16

The temple is seen here as the source of judgment; there is no ark of the covenant as in chapter 11. We have come to God's last dealing with open rebellion and apostasy before setting it all aside by "the thunder of his power". The seven angels here "came out of the temple, clothed in pure bright linen, and girded about the breasts with golden girdles". It suggests what is morally suitable to God, and divine righteousness. Everything in the kingdom of the beast stands in contrast to this, and therefore it must come under judgment.

When the first angel poured out his bowl on the earth, "there came an evil and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and those who worshipped its image". I think, in a certain sense, the wickedness of man will become its own judgment. We can see it in the government of God even now; a man's snare becomes his scourge. It is so even with the people of God; if you or I have any special snare, and do not maintain practical self-judgment as to it, most surely will that snare become our scourge. "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their way, and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1: 31). I have no doubt that principle will work out in the public ways of God, so that what man chooses, and for the sake of which he gives up truth and righteousness and God, will become his scourge. Man will be made to suffer from the very things which his heart has run after. This has a present solemn voice. The working of man's will becomes the source of his misery. When men give up all truth and righteousness and knowledge of God they will plunge themselves into inconceivable misery.

The principles which will lead to this are working today. "The mystery of lawlessness already works". It is the ideal of many today to do what they like without restraint. A train passed through this town with a banner flying from one of the windows, "No God, no master". The result of the working of that principle will be untold distress. It will bring "an evil and grievous sore upon the men". Instead of man being satisfied and brought to rest and happiness by having his own way, he will find it to be the most terrible thing that ever happened. It is a delusion to suppose that there will be any true happiness under the beast and the antichrist. I do not believe that a single expectation that men will entertain when they receive these great agents of Satan will ever be realized. No doubt it will be declared by many voices, as it is already by some, that the great barrier to human happiness and liberty is the restraint of God's will and of divine institutions. And men will believe this, only to find

themselves under a tyranny truly awful, and in such miseries as the world has never known before.

"And the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea; and it became blood, as of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea. And the third poured out his bowl on the rivers, and on the fountains of waters; and they became blood". "The sea" would seem to be a figure of the widespread general state of men; "the rivers and the fountains of waters" would represent things which would be normally beneficial to men, or sources of natural refreshment. Whatever is of God is healthful to men. His government in the world is beneficial; so is His law, so far as its obligations are recognized; also His ordering in regard of marriage and natural relationships. Such things as benevolence, kindness, friendship, are favourable to man's happiness. I am not speaking of conversion, but of the course of man's life on earth. The ordering of things under righteous government is good for men. Whatever tends to maintain the integrity of what God has instituted or recognizes in natural relationships, or in connection with man's responsibility to his neighbour, is a "fountain of water". "The work of the law written in their hearts" leads to the practice of things which are favourable to men as creatures here.

But under "the lawless one" the wicked spirit of idolatry will return, and seven other spirits worse than himself, and they will enter in, and dwell, "and the last condition of that man becomes worse than the first" (Matthew 12: 43 - 45). In such conditions everything that is in itself wholesome and of God will be corrupted. When God is shut out of everything the result will be that man will corrupt everything until it becomes loathsome to himself. I think we can sometimes see examples of such a state of things even now. We see men give themselves up to what they call pleasure in every kind of corrupt way, and it often issues in everything becoming so loathsome to them that a suicide's grave is the end of it.

We are familiar with 2 Timothy 3, but perhaps we have not sufficiently weighed it as an anticipation of the time when the rivers and fountains of waters will be turned into blood. It shews us how far things have gone in that direction even now. We ought to read it very slowly so as to realize the terribleness of it. "But this know, that in the last days difficult times shall be there; for men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, evil speakers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, profane, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, of unsubdued passions, savage, having no love for what is good, traitors, headlong, of vain pretensions, lovers of

pleasure rather than lovers of God; having a form of piety but denying the power of it”.

Remember that these words describe a condition of things within the christian profession before the rapture of the Church! If things come to this before the rapture, what will they be under the reign of the beast? We may be sure that everything that has been of God, and for man’s true comfort as His creature, will be turned into moral death. I would not deny that in the kingdom of the beast what is scientific and mechanical, and on the line of human genius in a material way, may be developed to an immense degree. But everything that has in it what is really healthful for man will be turned into death. Even today every scientific discovery and every mechanical invention at once finds its highest development for the purpose of destruction. That shews what man is morally. We ought to have our eyes open to these things.

There are two solemn responses to the action of the third angel. “The angel of the waters” speaks first. “Thou art righteous, who art and wast, the holy one, that thou hast judged so; for they have poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; they are worthy”. It is of interest to know that there is such a person as “the angel of the waters” — one, I suppose, who has administrative charge of the things which are naturally a refreshment and comfort to man. He cannot see this terrible retribution without commenting on the righteousness of it. God has given providential rivers and fountains of waters to men, but He has also given spiritual rivers and fountains of waters in His “saints and prophets”. But men had literally turned them into blood by slaying them, and in righteous retribution they are caused to drink what is morally death. The word “worthy” occurs in this book in various connections, but in none more solemn than this one — “they are worthy”.

Then *the altar* speaks. We have *seen* the altar several times in this book, but we have never *heard* it before! It utters a solemn “Yea”. The altar reminds us of Christ in death, of God glorified about sin, so that a way of approach might be opened up to Him for those who had been sinful men. But now the altar says, “Yea, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments”. The death of Christ has proved that sin is intolerable to God, and if in His mercy to men it has been dealt with sacrificially in that death, that very fact necessitates that His righteous judgment must fall on the impenitent.

“And the fourth poured out his bowl on the sun; and it was given to it to burn men with fire”. The sun represents the supreme authority in the sphere which is in view, and in this case that sphere is the kingdom of the beast. I understand it to mean that authority will become so burdensome and

oppressive that men will be, as it were, scorched by it. "And the fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast; and its kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues with distress". What a fearful result of the setting up of the ten-kingdomed league of nations, and the unifying of everything under a great imperial head! (See chapter 17: 12, 13). The kingdom of the beast will be darkened. I doubt whether there will be any true philanthropy in the kingdom of the beast. When government is of Satanic origin and character it will not be marked by either righteousness or mercy. Orphanages and hospitals, and other institutions that tend to ameliorate the miseries of men, are really the product of the influence of Christianity.

Of Christ it is said, "He will do justice to the afflicted of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.... He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy: he will redeem their souls from oppression and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight" (Psalm 72:2; Psalm 72:4; Psalm 72:12-14). But the antichrist, though there is a certain imitation of Christ in his having "two horns like to a lamb", speaks "as a dragon". It is said of him that "it cast down the truth to the ground" (Daniel 8: 12); "he shall destroy marvellously ... and shall destroy the mighty ones, and the people of the saints. And through his cunning shall he cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he will magnify himself in his heart" (Daniel 8: 24, 25). "Whoso acknowledgeth him will he increase with glory; and he shall cause them to rule over the many, and shall divide the land to them for a reward" (Daniel 11: 39). The character of the beast is sufficiently indicated by the fact that as a political power it has "great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the rest with its feet" (Daniel 7: 7), and viewed in regard to the saints it makes war with them and kills them; it will be a time of unrelenting persecution.

The kingdom of the beast will be visited by divine wrath so that men will be burnt up with great heat, and will gnaw their tongues with distress, but there will be no movement of repentance. They will blaspheme the name of God — the God of the heaven. When God approaches man in grace, as He is doing today, man despises it; when God acts in judgment he blasphemes. It is well to note that. They will not then deny that there is a God, but in hardened enmity they will blaspheme Him. They will throw the blame of their misery upon God, just as men are ready to blame God today for the miseries that are the outcome of their own lawlessness. It is very solemn to consider the possibility that millions of people living on the earth now may suffer these things.

“And the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared”. The Euphrates has been the dividing line between the western world and the eastern. That barrier or frontier will be removed, in view of the universal gathering of kings “to the place called in Hebrew, Armagedon”. We can already see signs of its removal. The coming of Japan into world politics, and the awakening of the east generally, are facts obvious to all.

But when the sixth bowl is poured out it will be followed by a combined effort on the part of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet to muster the world’s forces for the last great conflict — the last desperate attempt to hold the earth so that Christ the Heir may not have it for His inheritance. The false prophet inspiring the apostate Jews, the beast stirring up the combined forces of the Roman earth, and Gog and Magog rolling up from the north like a mighty flood; a vast league of nations combined with one thought and purpose to destroy whatever is of God, that men as energized from the abyss may possess the earth. It will be a grand concentration of men in open and defiant rebellion against God.

They will stretch out their hand against God, and strengthen themselves against the Almighty (Job 15: 25, 26), but it will be for their own destruction. Instrumentally they will be gathered by Satanic agency, and they will shew the state of their own hearts in being thus gathered, but God will be behind it all, gathering them for judgment. The Old Testament prophets speak of this from different points of view.

Just at this point there is a little parenthesis. A Voice speaks for any who have ears to hear. It is the voice of Jesus. “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments, that he may not walk naked, and that they may not see his shame”. He is coming, all unexpected by the world. But there will be those who will have the faith and testimony of Jesus, and the watchful saint will keep his garments. In the world there will be nothing seen but naked flesh — flesh shewing its true character openly. But in the presence of such a terrible exposure the saint is blessed if he watches and keeps his garments so that nothing that is of the flesh comes into evidence. It is a word as much for us as it will be for them.

“And the seventh poured out his bowl on the air”. The whole atmosphere of the world will take a character that is the result of divine judgment. There is a moral atmosphere of which Satan is prince now, for he is “the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2: 2). That is the atmosphere which is breathed by the sons of disobedience; it is their life breath. They do “what the flesh and the thoughts

willed to do", and this is the evidence that they are by nature children of wrath. This will have worked out in full result when the seventh bowl is poured out, and it will come under the manifest wrath of God. "And there came out a great voice from the temple of the heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done". The lawlessness of six thousand years has reached its last hour; the long-suspended judgment — the time of dealing with all evil — has come. It is a solemn contrast to the "It is finished" of the cross.

Then "there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth"; a greater overturning than has ever been known. "The great city" was divided. Two cities are spoken of in this book as "great"; one is Jerusalem, when it becomes spiritually Sodom and Egypt (Revelation 11: 8), and the other is Babylon, where Gentile apostasy is consummated. God will divide the great city into three parts, preparatory to her utter destruction. It indicates that God will destroy the unity of what man has attempted to build up, just as He did at Babel. His judgment will fall on all human attempts at unity, whether in the religious or the political sphere.

"And the cities of the nations fell". Cities are political and commercial centres; their fall would be indicative of a collapse of everything on which the system of the present world rests — its government, the credit which is the basis of its commerce, and all its social order.

Then "great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath". The next two chapters dwell with much detail on this special object of divine vengeance.

REVELATION 17

Revelation 17

In chapter 21 “one of the seven angels which had had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues” shews John “the bride, the Lamb’s wife”. In this chapter one of the same angels shews him “the sentence of the great harlot”. The contrast between the two must arrest the attention of every reader. One is the true church — holy, heavenly, luminous with divine glory. The other is “great” but unfaithful and corrupt. She “sits upon the many waters”, and as these were explained by the angel their meaning is not uncertain. “And he says to me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (verse 15). This shews the wide extent of her influence. But she not only influences peoples but kings. “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication”. She has had baits to offer to kings and courts which have made it worth their while to court her favour that they might secure them. In this way she has enhanced her own wealth and glory by ministering what was attractive to others, much as Tyre — which is also called a “harlot” (Isaiah 23) — did with her commerce (Ezekiel 27). But all such influence in the world must be at the cost of fidelity to Christ. It can only be achieved by being untrue to the church’s place as the suffering witness to a rejected Christ. She is a “great harlot”.

Then “they that dwell on the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication”. She has brought men under idolatrous influences. And this is peculiarly obnoxious to God, as coming in after the full revelation of Himself in His Son, and after the gift of His Spirit to shed His love abroad in the hearts of believers. Such idolatry is infinitely worse than that of the heathen.

“And he carried me away in spirit to a desert”. What a contrast to the elevation of chapter 21: 10! It is an appropriate scene for what yields no refreshment or spiritual food. All the magnificence of Babylon — though it is the concentration of human pride and glory — is a moral desert. No refreshing springs are there.

“And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns”. The beast is thus identified with the first beast of chapter 13; it is the political system, the revived Roman Empire in its last form of ten kingdoms — the toes of the image of Daniel 2. The woman is the corrupt religious system. The beast is a blasphemous power; he will allow the woman to sit upon him as long as it suits his purpose to do so, but in the end he will hate her, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh and burn her with fire (verse 16). It is perhaps doubtful if Babylon will ever again have the real ascendancy that she has had. A so-called “church” which has

position and influence amongst men is useful to governments. But I have no doubt that the tendency will be for the secular power to become more and more averse to religious pretensions, and at the bottom to "hate the harlot", though allowing her a place for a time.

"The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and had ornaments of gold and precious stones and pearls". She had glory where Christ had reproach and rejection. It is really Satan's masterpiece that what calls itself the church should have become a crowning glory of the world. The things mentioned here are often used as figures of what has divine value and beauty, but on "the mother of the harlots, and of the abominations of the earth" they can only represent fleshly and worldly glory and attractiveness. The golden cup in her hand is "full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication".

The blessing of this chapter lies to a great extent in the contrasts which it suggests. One can hardly think of the cup in the harlot's hand without being reminded of "the cup of the Lord". His cup is full of new covenant blessings, the divine and spiritual portion of His saints. It speaks of the remission of sins, and of the knowledge of God revealed in love through the death of His Son. It is filled with spiritual blessings, all secured through redemption, and subsisting in a risen and glorified Saviour. It ministers peace to the conscience, and divine satisfaction and joy to the heart. But the harlot's cup is "full of abominations" — the common Scripture word for what is idolatrous; that is, it is "the cup of demons" (1 Corinthians 10). And it also contains "the unclean things of her fornication". Being unfaithful and corrupt herself, she can only bring men under the influence of unholy intimacy with the world.

Babylon began with Nimrod (Genesis 11). It is the ancient seat of man's glory and ambition, and independence of God. Abraham was called out of the country where Babel was set up to know the God of glory and to wait for His city. It is terrible to think of all the principles of Babylon developing in the profession of Christianity. They will take their final form there after every living member of Christ has been taken out of it by the rapture. But all the moral features of Babylon are present now, and they are to be judged and avoided by the people of God wherever they may be found.

Then, further, we read, "I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus". We cannot be surprised that John "wondered, seeing her, with great wonder". He had not wondered when he saw the dragon, or the beast, or the antichrist. To behold *them* active in evil was no wonder to the seer. But to see that which had borne the Name of Christ having such a character might well make him wonder. He had known the Lord's judgment of idolatries and corruptions which were germinating and

developing in the assemblies (chapters 2 and 3). He had known what it was to see a Diotrefes ruling in the assembly, refusing his authority, and casting the faithful out (3 John). But he could hardly have conceived that things would ever come to the state depicted in Revelation 17 and 18.

With the history of christendom before us, we know how true is the picture. And we can understand what it will be in that awful coming day, when there will be no longer, as in Thyatira, a remnant of true saints to preserve some divine features in the midst of surrounding corruption. There have always been, and there still are, many true saints even in those great professing bodies which have been most corrupt, whether eastern or western. But in the days of Revelation 17, 18, this will no longer be the case. All saints of the assembly will have been translated. The call to "Come out of her, my people, that ye have not fellowship in her sins, and that ye do not receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18: 4), has present force to any who find themselves in that which they can discern to have the features of Babylon. It is also a warning to saints who will be found on earth after the rapture of the assembly.

In answer to John's wonder the angel tells him the mystery of the woman, and of the beast which carries her. The beast is the Roman Empire revived by satanic power; it comes up out of the abyss. "It was, and is not, and shall be present". They who dwell on the earth will wonder to see it revived. The "seven mountains, whereon the woman sits" are also an obvious allusion to Rome. But the beast will not come up again to have a long career; he comes up and goes into destruction (verses 8, 11). The ten horns "receive authority as kings *one hour* with the beast"; their time is a very brief one. It is cut short by the heaven opening and the "King of kings, and Lord of lords" coming forth followed by the armies which are in heaven (chapter 19). The last act of the beast, and of his confederate kings and their armies, is to gather together to make war against the Lamb at His appearing. The issue of that conflict is that "the Lamb shall overcome them", and their doom is declared in chapter 19: 20, 21.

But before that last act of open rebellion, the ten horns and the beast will be used of God to destroy the harlot. The corrupt religious system will be destroyed by the secular power. "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 with fire". How completely does God over-rule everything! Though the way the ten kings give their power to the beast is a crowning point of man's lawlessness, the complete apostasy of power, it is seen to be subservient to the will of God. The very fact of their unity is attributed to God. "For God has given to their hearts to do his mind,

and to act with one mind ... until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (verse 17). It is an immense stay to the heart to see that even Satan himself is God's servant, and that what he does only fulfils God's words. This great triumph of Satan, this immense confederation of powers, this vast league of nations, will fulfil God's word, and execute His long-deferred judgment on the hateful harlot. It gives one a profound sense of how completely everything is under the mighty hand of God. He allows this great concentration of unified imperial power for His own purposes, to bring in judgment on the great harlot. We may be sure that what bears the Name of Christ only to dishonour Him is the most hateful thing to God. Nothing in the whole of Scripture is depicted as such an object of abhorrence to God, and to heaven, and to His saints, as Babylon. And because she has sought corruptly to rule kings and peoples, God has ordained that her destruction shall be at their hands.

There is one sentence in chapter 17 which stands in holy contrast to everything which marks the great harlot. "They that are with him called, and chosen, and faithful". How blessed to think of such a company! There are those who will be "with him" in glory, but before being with Him there they have been with Him in reproach and rejection here. They have been "harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation". They have appeared "as lights in the world", not as having earthly or worldly glory, but as carrying the moral beauty of what is heavenly. They have not ministered to the lusts of men, or corrupted them by what was idolatrous, but they have held forth the word of life.

Such have been "called". They have been the subjects of a powerful and effective operation of God in the sovereignty of His love and mercy. They have been called out of the idolatrous Babel world even as Abraham was, to be in the light of the God of glory, to be strangers and sojourners here, and to wait for God's city. If we really know the God of glory, idolatry will be excluded from our hearts, and we shall understand the character of His city; we shall not be deceived by the carnal glory of Babylon.

Then those who are "with him" are "chosen". I take "chosen" here to refer to the choice of complacency, because it comes after "called". If it were the choice of sovereignty it would have come first. Christ is God's elect One — the Object of His delight and choice. It is written of Him, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people" (Psalm 89: 19). And the saints are spoken of as "the elect of God, holy and beloved", in the same sense of God's choice because of His complacency in them. As "the elect of God" they put on "bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against

any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye. And to all these add love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body, and be thankful"

(Colossians 3: 12 - 15). How beautifully does this describe the true adornment of the assembly! What a contrast to being "drunk with the blood of the saints"! If the moral loveliness of this establishes itself in our affections in the power of the Spirit, it will preserve us from being captivated by the spurious adornments of Babylon.

And, lastly, the saints "with him" are described as "faithful". They have kept the word of Christ, and have not denied His Name; they have used the treasure with which He entrusted them for His gain; they have kept the faith. Such features as these are entirely absent in Babylon. The "great harlot" is gaudy and attractive in a natural way; the "bride" is attractive because she comes out in the character and moral beauty of Christ. These chapters are written as divine warning against an idolatrous system where every influence really shuts out what is of God and of Christ. It is dreadful to contemplate such a picture, but it should lead us at every point to the contrast in "the bride, the Lamb's wife".

The church is holy and heavenly, and her influences are divine and life-giving; she has "rivers of living water" in having the Spirit. There is a river that makes glad the city of God — the blessed power of the Spirit making good in the affections of the saints all that God is as revealed in the grace of redemption, and all the fruits of divine love. There is no desert there: it is the garden of God. The attractions of Babylon have no divine element in them. The attractiveness we should covet is to be able to present what is of God and of Christ. We do not want fine buildings and music, and things that appeal to the natural man. But we should covet to be attractive to souls that fear God; there should be that about us which would attract thirsty souls with spiritual needs and exercises. The assembly is the circle on earth where God is known, where the unsearchable riches of Christ can be found, where the Holy Spirit dwells. It is God's city. The contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem challenges us at every point. What are we delighting in, and cultivating, and exhibiting? The features of the great harlot, or the features of the bride? If I am on the line of what ministers to vanity and self-exaltation, either in myself or in others, that is the line of Babylon.

REVELATION 18

Revelation 18

In chapter 17 we get the prophetic history of Babylon, and her doom. The historical facts are stated. In chapter 18 her moral state is enlarged upon, and the effect of her downfall. The announcement by an angel out of heaven that "Great Babylon has fallen, has fallen", is anticipatory of her actual fall. It is to bring about that the whole system which Babylon stands for shall be "fallen" in the estimation of the saints before it actually falls. It is to be a judged thing for the people of God even now. Hence there is a call to "Come out of her, my people, that ye have not fellowship in her sins, and that ye do not receive of her plagues".

It is her moral fall that is spoken of in verse 2. She has become "the habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird". What a contrast to being "built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit"! There is a structure formed of spiritual material where God dwells. In the assembly, according to the truth, there is no place for the glory of man; God dwells there. But when the Holy Spirit lost His place, and the Headship of Christ was no longer held in spiritual power, the mind of man began to work in connection with divine things. But the mind of man is essentially unholy, and this prepared the way for what was idolatrous. We only preserve holiness by giving place to the Spirit. Babylon becomes "the habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit". Instead of the holy influences which are found where God dwells, and where His Spirit is ungrieved, all becomes unclean.

"Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" are the fruit of the Spirit. Paul spoke much of the cross and the Spirit to the Corinthians because the cross shuts out man after the flesh, and the Spirit brings God in. Man after the flesh has no place in God's assembly; his mind and his manners must be excluded, or he will only open the door for what is idolatrous, and that lets in demons. But if God has His place by the Spirit, there is power to edify because love is there. The house of God is the assembly of the living God; it is where God dwells, and where He moves; His activities are known there. I trust we covet to know more of this. What is of man and of demons can only be kept out by giving place to God and to His Spirit.

I am anxious that as we read this chapter we should get the truth of the assembly before us in its positive blessedness. That will preserve us from Babylon, and nothing else will. The fact that there is a call to come out of Babylon in this chapter confirms the thought that things are looked at morally

here. At Corinth it was the beginning of Christianity, and the world was full of idolatry. The saints were called to come out of it, and be separate (2 Corinthians 6). But in Revelation 18 saints are called to come out of what is corrupt and idolatrous in the Christian profession.

Israel's first unfaithfulness in the land was that Achan saw among the spoils of Jericho "a beautiful mantle of Shinar", and he coveted it and took it. It was of Babylonish origin. What answers to that in the New Testament is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. They did not do wrong in keeping back the money. Their sin was that they wanted to have a reputation amongst the brethren of being more devoted than they were, and to secure this they lied to the Holy Spirit. It was a Babylonish garment which they coveted. Achan would have adorned himself with a beautiful mantle; Ananias and Sapphira would have clothed themselves in the glory of spurious devotedness. That was the beginning of Babylon in the assembly. I know that there is vanity and vain-glory in my flesh; but if I judge it there, and refuse it, I can go on serving Christ, and receive honour from His Father. But if I allow it, and minister to it, I fall under the influence of what is Babylonish.

We are called to the fellowship of God's Son, to the fellowship of the body and blood of Christ, to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of the brethren "one with another". What is Babylonish strikes at the very root of all this; it entangles one in a fellowship which is opposed to all that is spiritual. The sin of Achan and the sin of Ananias both met with signal judgment, as though God would warn His people at the very outset in the most solemn way against the Babylonish intrusion. We have to judge Babylon morally now wherever we find it — in ourselves or in the christian profession. The desire for a glory that is not divinely conferred is the root principle of Babylon. The germ of it appeared in the assembly in Acts 5; the full development appears in Revelation 17 and 18.

Babylon glorifies herself, and lives luxuriously. Christ glorifies the assembly; she has no need to glorify herself. He has given her His Spirit so that she might answer to His mind and heart, and be His counterpart, that she might be formed in every quality that is glorious in His eyes. It should be our great desire to answer to what the assembly is in the thought of Christ. Her delight is to glorify Him. The more she learns the thoughts of His love the more she covets to correspond with them. It is because the glory that Christ has put on the church is not known that the spirit of Babylon comes in. The false church glorifies herself in the place where He is not. She sits a queen, and is no widow; she does not feel bereft of Christ at all.

The assembly has been left here to be the companion of Christ's rejection, and to witness to a suffering Christ until He returns in glory. She is to be a "widow indeed" as feeling that Christ has died here, and that He is not here, and that He is not wanted here. As our souls are nourished upon what comes from the Head we shall instinctively turn from that which carries the glory of man and ministers to it. It comes simply to this, Have we affection for Christ? The bride's thoughts and affections are bound up with Christ; she measures everything by Him; she is devoted in heart to Him and for His interests. Every time the Lord brings us together to eat His supper it is to bring us afresh under the influence of His love, and to teach us the place the assembly has in His heart. So that each time we may go out into the world with a deeper sense of being there in true widow character.

Rebecca took a veil and covered herself. The church covers herself as conscious of what she is to Christ; she only wants Him to be seen and glorified. In that way she appears in the true character of the bride. She holds Christ as Head; she looks up to Him with reverence and affection; she derives from Him, and she answers in mind and affection to Him. God can look down and see hearts in this world that treasure Christ, that are exercised to give Him pre-eminence, to answer to Him, to express in some feeble measure what is of Him. May each one of us be more set than ever to be here in the true character of the bride. Soon Christ will present her to Himself a glorious assembly without "spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things". And after the marriage of the Lamb she will descend from God as "the holy city, Jerusalem" having the glory of God, to be the light of the millennial earth. This we shall see in chapter 21.

A great part of chapter 18 is taken up with the lamentations of the kings of the earth, and the merchants, and those who trade by sea, over the fall of Babylon. It may seem strange that the secular power should destroy her, and yet that there should be such general grief over her fall. I suppose that the consequences of her overthrow will not be realized until the deed is done. She has appropriated to herself all the glory and luxury of the world, and has ministered in an immense degree to the commercial prosperity of the world. Men will not realize how deeply she has become part of the whole system of the world, socially and commercially, until they have destroyed her. Think what the effect would be of the destruction of all the religious buildings of Europe, the spoliation of all church property, and the complete ruin of all who have had their part and living in connection with the religious world! It will be found that a fatal blow has been struck at the very life of the world, but it will be impossible to undo what has been done. Men will have been the instruments of the action, but the destruction of Babylon will be the irreversible judgment

of God. "Rejoice over her, heaven, and ye saints and apostles and prophets;
for God has judged your judgment upon her".

REVELATION 19

Revelation 19

The opening verses of this chapter impress upon us the profound interest of heaven in the assembly. It is that which leads to a threefold "Hallelujah" over the judgment of the great harlot. And, on the other hand, we see the joy of heaven over the marriage of the Lamb having come, and His wife having made herself ready.

I put it to my own heart, and to yours, Are we sensitive as to things that corrupt the assembly?

Heaven is very sensitive as to such things, so that there is an immense outburst of praise when the corruption falls under judgment. Are we sympathetic with that feeling? Have we such a sense of what the assembly is — as the wondrous company called out in the day of Christ's rejection, to be indwelt by the Spirit, and to be the vessel in which the love of God and the perfections of Christ are to be set forth — that we can rejoice in the thought of everything that has corrupted it being brought under judgment?

The time for the public judgment of all that is false and idolatrous in the christian profession has not yet come, but the judgment of such things should be in our souls morally now. Great jealousy should be awakened in our hearts by everything that is of a corrupting nature. The assembly is cherished in the heart of Christ according to all the thoughts of divine love, and if we have seen what it is as cherished there it will make us very jealous in regard of corrupting influences. And we shall be ready to say, Hallelujah, when we see such influences brought under judgment morally. If I see a Christian awakened by divine grace to judge, and escape from, some corrupting influence that has acted on him, or that has contaminated his associations, I may well say, Hallelujah!

Heaven has such a sense of the glory and beauty of the assembly — of what it is to be as the Lamb's wife and as the tabernacle of God — that there is a mighty "Hallelujah" there when that which embodies every corruption has been judged. Men on earth will be full of dismay at the desolation of Babylon, because she has succeeded in binding up with herself the glory and prosperity of the world, but heaven will rejoice. God's judgment of her will cause His salvation and glory and power to appear. He is coming in to deliver His creation from every evil influence, and He deals first with the great harlot. To rid the earth of such a thing is really God's salvation as well as His glory and power.

We have to begin by judging all the elements of Babylon in our own hearts. I do not believe that there is a corruption in Christendom of which I could not find the germ in my own heart. For instance, vanity and the disposition to seek honour or glory on earth where Christ is rejected and dishonoured, are the very essence of Babylon. If "the pride of life" works in me I have to judge it as Babylonish. We have to flee from all that is idolatrous. I do not need to worship an image or a piece of bread to be an idolator; many other things may come in and rob God of the place in my heart which is due to Him.

At Corinth men were speaking with tongues, not to edify the saints, but as a kind of glory for themselves. Paul corrects that by exhorting them to follow after *love*, which would not think of distinction for self, but of the good of others. And he encourages them to prophesy, which is to speak in such a way that consciences are set in the presence of God, and searched by His word. To prophesy as in 1 Corinthians 14 does not mean speaking of future events, but bringing to bear on saints what is of God, so that intelligent spiritual exercise is produced. I cannot set another in the presence of God if I am not there myself. To prophesy one must be *with God*, and when there man's glory withers up, and that destroys the root of Babylon.

Paul was a characteristic bit of the holy city; he was marked by transparency and divine light and glory, and the entire absence of self-exaltation. He says, "I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls". What for? To get a place, or be well thought of by the saints? No! "If even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved" (2 Corinthians 12: 15). That is not Babylon. By way of contrast look at Diotrephes! "Who loves to have the first place among them" (3 John 9). He was really a bit of the "great harlot".

It is God's salvation and glory and power when any corrupting influence comes under judgment. It will do so actually very soon, but the light of God is thrown upon things now that they may be judged morally. Think what the effect would be if every corrupting principle were judged in the souls of God's people now! All saints would be drawn together in holy love, and in separation from what is evil. The characteristics of the assembly — holiness, truth, and unity — would come into evidence. Christ as Lord and Head would have His place. The Holy Spirit would be ungrieved. Everything that is of God would shine; the divine nature would be in activity, knitting all together.

"And a second time they said, Hallelujah. And her smoke goes up to the ages of ages". It would appear that there will be some abiding witness of God's righteous judgment of the harlot. Something that will correspond with the last verse of Isaiah. All through the millennium there will be a witness of God's judgment on the wicked.

The elders and the four living creatures add their "Amen, Hallelujah". It is the last action and utterance of the elders in this book. And, finally, a voice out of the throne says, "Praise our God, all ye his bondmen, and ye that fear him, small and great". The circle of praise is very wide in verse 1; it is a smaller circle in verse 4; and, finally, it is One voice in verse 5. Christ is the first to praise when redemption is accomplished, the assembly takes up the note, followed by "the great congregation" of Israel, and, finally, "all the ends of the earth" (Psalm 22:22; Psalm 22:25; Psalm 22:27). But here the order is reversed.

When the great harlot has been judged, the bride comes into view. There is a vast "Hallelujah" to celebrate the fact that "the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to himself kingly power". The One in whom all God's rights as "the blessed and only Ruler ... the King of those that reign, and Lord of those that exercise lordship" (1 Timothy 6: 15) will be asserted, is about to come forth in victorious power. But before He does so "the marriage of the Lamb" is celebrated in heaven. The bride whom He has wooed and won by His suffering love, and by all that has been made known of Him by the Spirit while He has been hidden in heaven, will be united to Him. The interval between His death and His appearing has been productive, through divine grace and power, of the bade, and of those post-rapture saints who will be among the "Blessed" as "called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb".

By suffering love He has won the heart of His bride, and in royal glory He will own and display her. But she is first of all *for Himself*; it is "the marriage of the Lamb", and "his wife has made herself ready". There is an analogy with Psalm 45, but what we get here is more personal and intimate. The bride is not seen here as made ready for display, but ready *for Him*. Her thought is to be agreeable to Him, to suffice for His heart. In Ephesians 5 the assembly is viewed as the wife of the Christ, the Anointed Man; it is there the last Adam and the true Eve. But here He is "the Lamb" — the meek and holy Sufferer who went into death for the glory of God. In having His wife He gets the answer to what He suffered as the Lamb. Then I think the fact that the assembly is "the bride, the Lamb's wife", indicates that she is suitable to Him *in that character*. She has been prepared to suffer meekly in the presence of the power of evil. To be like a lamb is to be not much accounted of in this world; it is not men of that type who get to the top here. Men took advantage of the lamb-like character of Christ to deprive Him of everything. He suffered it meekly, "and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers", and it is in the character of "the Lamb" that He gets a wife. The saints are called to patient suffering, and thus they become suitable in spirit for companionship with the Lamb.

Having “made herself ready” probably signifies that the judgment seat is passed. She has had His estimate of everything, and she is perfectly with Him as to all that did not answer to His mind in the responsible course here. Nothing remains on her but what He approves, and what has value and beauty in His eyes.

“And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints”. Her adornment is all of grace, for it was “given to her”; but it is a beauty which had come out here by the Spirit of Christ in the face of difficulty and contrariety. There is a clothing — “of wrought gold” (Psalm 45: 13), which is, I suppose, the new creation side — what is divinely wrought on the line of purpose, in answer to Christ having been made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5: 21). But what we have here is rather the “raiment of embroidery” (Psalm 45: 14); it is what has been worked out stitch by stitch as saints have brought forth “the fruit of the light in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5: 9). In that sense the bride is making her wedding dress now. It is the outcome of the presence of the Spirit, and the result of His activities in the saints. Of course, the clothing “of wrought gold” and the “raiment of embroidery” ever go together.

We have to take up now the exercise of making ourselves ready; we should always have in view being suitable to Him. “Wherefore also we are zealous, whether present or absent, to be agreeable to him” (2 Corinthians 5: 9). One who is in the embrace of the love of Christ comes to the judgment “that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and has been raised”. There is an answer of affection to the love of Christ, and the righteousness of living to Him is recognized. It is owned to be righteously due to Him that we should live to Him. There is really a bridal touch about every bit of true righteousness, for it is the act of one espoused; it flows from affection for Christ. One can understand, in the light of this, how “the righteousnesses of the saints” become the marriage attire of the Lamb’s wife; such raiment is suitable to the occasion.

When the love of Christ is known, movements of response begin, and they will all be gathered up to constitute the adornment of the bride. It is sweet to think of it. No one can tell the value to Christ of a little act that flows out of affection for Him. How delighted Jehovah was in Old Testament times with every bit of response from His people! “I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness” (Jeremiah 2: 2). They went *after Him*; that was what He remembered. These things should turn us to the Lord with desire that His love

may be in freshness and power in our hearts, so that responsive affections may bring forth "righteousnesses" in us.

I would refer to Luke 7: 38 as an illustration of "righteousnesses". The woman's tears, her washing His feet, her wiping them with the hairs of her head, her anointing with myrrh, all told that "she loved much"; and her love brought forth a beautiful cluster of righteous acts. Then in Luke 8: 3 we read of certain saints by name, "and many others, who ministered to him of their substance". He had become their glory, and I do not think it would be too much to say that they were His glory. (Cf. 2 Corinthians 8: 23). Such things as they did constitute "righteousnesses", and the Lamb will delight to see His wife adorned with them.

In Psalm 45: 10, 11, we read, "Forget thine own people and thy father's house; and the king will desire thy beauty". This suggests another aspect of righteousness. The beauty of separation to Himself is very attractive to Christ. Then it is righteousness to love the saints; the root of it is that we love the One to whom they belong. When Christ is the Object of the heart, all the activities begin to be in relation to Him; self drops out, and something of the true character and beauty of the bride appears.

Every little act of service, every kindness begotten by the love of Christ, every prayer for His interests, every time we eat the Lord's supper as maintaining what is due to Him, we are adding to those "righteousnesses" which will adorn the Lamb's wife in the day of His marriage. I was deeply touched by the inscription on a monument erected in memory of two martyred women in Scotland. It said that they died "to maintain the rights of Christ in His assembly". So far as that was true it was a noble act of righteousness. One can understand how suitable it is that the bride should come out in the adornment of such acts in that glorious coming day. To maintain what is due to Christ as Lord and Head in relation to the assembly will cost something. It will mean reproach; it will mean going with a few instead of with a crowd; but it will come out all right in another day.

"The righteousnesses of the saints" are not legal righteousnesses, but things done in relation to One we love. "All glorious is the king's daughter within" (Psalm 45: 13) refers to what she is in the royal apartments before she is brought forth publicly. The moral beauty of the assembly is under the eye of Christ now, but it is hidden from the world.

Those "called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb" would include, I suppose, Old Testament saints, and all those saints in heaven who are not of the bride. Every family in heaven will be deeply interested in Christ and the

assembly. They will be “blessed” as made to participate in the joy of the occasion.

“The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus”. That gives us the key to all prophecy; it is the testimony as to the kind of man that will do for God. This is most important. People who study prophecy often get taken up with events, and miss the spirit of it. JESUS is the Man that God will have to be in evidence, and every kind of man that is contrary to Jesus will have to go out. Take all the nations that appear in prophecy as subjects of divine judgment! Each of them is characterized by some feature, or features, that do not at all correspond with Jesus. That is why they come under judgment. Who are going to be blessed? The meek, the humble, the merciful, the gracious, the righteous — those who are like Jesus! The Name Jesus speaks of all that He was in lowly grace and obedience here — the Man delightful to God. “The life of Jesus” is a life in Manhood which is the perfect answer, in conditions such as this world presents, to the glory of God. The whole spirit of the prophetic word is the testimony of that Man. God is going to displace every other man, and bring in universally what will be according to Jesus. To see this makes all prophecy, in a sense, very simple, and gives it great attractiveness to those to whom the Name of Jesus is sweet. It is our privilege to be amongst the “brethren who have the testimony of Jesus”.

The coming in of Jesus meant glory to God in the highest; He would maintain that at all cost. And it meant peace on earth, for in Jesus there was no discordant element, no lawless will seeking freedom to pursue a course of sin. And it meant good pleasure in men, because He would have a generation after His own order. God would have us to hold the testimony of Jesus. All the pride and glory of man will have to go out; and lowliness, obedience, dependence, confidence, love to God and love to man, and every other grace and moral beauty that was seen in Jesus, will come in. The glory of the Son of man is that He would fall as “the grain of wheat” into the ground and die that He might bear much fruit. He will, through His death, fill the scene with fruit for God — fruit of the same character and order as Himself. The love revealed in His death becomes the seed of life in human hearts, so that a generation may be brought forth like Him.

The Word came forth once “full of grace and truth”. God put Himself very near to men so that men might come under the influence and attraction of His grace, and in receiving the Word might have the right to be children of God. But now the same Person comes forth in victorious power for the execution of judgment on his enemies (verses 11 - 16). It is very solemn to think of the Lord being “faithful and true” in such a connection. There will be nothing

arbitrary about the judgment of God; it will be in faithfulness and righteousness, the necessary subjugation and setting aside of what is contrary to God.

"He judges and makes war in righteousness". What is of God will overcome; it has been presented in testimony, and men have derided it; but it will overcome. Everything will be searched out by those eyes which are as a flame of fire. *Now* they are searching the assemblies, as we see in Revelation 2 and 3, but *then* they will search the nations.

The time has come in this chapter for diadems to be on *His* head. In chapters 12 and 13 diadems are on the heads of the dragon, and on the horns of the beast. But the prince of this world is now to be cast out publicly and manifestly. And all the power of the beast — the concentrated ability of man in the fullest development of his powers, energized by the dragon — is to be overthrown. It is all usurped power; kingly rights belong to Christ. The many diadems — symbol of supreme authority — are on the brow of the Lord Jesus.

He comes forth in His divine majesty. He has an uncreated renown that no one knows but Himself. It speaks of His proper Personal divine glory which no creature could compass. His "garment dipped in blood" is a terrible contrast to the "myrrh and aloes, cassia", which mark all His garments as bringing in the kingdom in precious fragrance. But this garment is necessary as preliminary to that; it speaks of unsparing judgment of all that is unsuited to His kingdom. The ground must be cleared. And I believe that every one who falls under the judgment will be convinced that he deserves it. The sharp two-edged sword that goes out of His mouth is now being used to search out everything in His saints, and to expose what is contrary to God (Hebrews 4: 12, 13). But it will be used then to smite the nations. I understand this to mean that conviction will be brought home to men; they will realize — perhaps for the first time — that they deserve the judgment. Their true state will be brought home to them by the sharp severity of that sword which will act then in divine judicial power.

This has been called the warrior judgment. It will be followed by the sessional judgment of Matthew 25, when the Son of man will sit upon His throne of glory, and all the nations shall be gathered before Him. This would indicate that the world will contain many people beside those who will be actively hostile to Christ under the beast and the kings of the earth. So that after the latter have been destroyed, the former will be judged according to their treatment of those whom the Lord speaks of as "My brethren"

— His Jewish brethren who will be the bearers of His world — wide testimony in that day. And the "sheep" of that judgment will inherit the earthly kingdom;

while the "goats" will depart "into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels", their final judgment.

His shepherding the nations with an iron rod (verse 15) is in view of His taking possession of His inheritance. See Psalm 2: 8, 9, Revelation 2: 27. It is the exercise of authority in an indisputable way, so that He may have all that the Father has given Him. Then treading the winepress is the complete crushing of every element of rebellion and apostasy.

All this is connected with the assertion of those rights which pertain to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords". That is the true imperial idea. It is very blessed to see that every conception of dignity has come into being that it might be taken up by Christ. We get that in Colossians 1: 16. "By him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible". But the things specified are "thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities". They are conceptions of rule and dignity which did not originate with men at all. They have taken form as created by the Son of the Father's love. Men may have usurped positions of dignity, or even been allowed of God to hold them, in His government of the world, but all such conceptions have been created "by him and for him". He is "the head of all principality and authority", and all will be taken up by Him, and every subordinate dignity will be derived from Him. "King of kings, and Lord of lords" is a divine conception of dignity. It may be imitated as far as possible by the beast; but it is a title which will never have its full realization until it is written upon the garment and upon the thigh of God's Anointed.

The closing section of this chapter shews us that the appearing of Christ will be the occasion for the last desperate effort of the beast and the kings of the earth to resist His authority. There will be no uncertainty as to the issue of that conflict. If human armies meet there is a struggle to decide the victory, but there will be nothing like that in this battle. As to the lawless one, we are told, "Whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and shall annul by the appearing of his coming" (2 Thessalonians 2: 8). The beast and the false prophet will be taken, and without passing through death will be cast into the lake of fire; and the rest will be "slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which goes out of his mouth".

When His enemies came to take Him in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "I am he", and "they went backward and fell to the ground". By the same power will all His adversaries perish in a day that is not far distant. The world in which we live will shortly be the theatre of these solemn actings of divine judgment. The knowledge of it is designed to have a profound effect upon us.

“What ought ye to be in holy conversation and godliness? ... Be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3: 11, 14).

REVELATION 20

Revelation 20

We come now to the closing scenes of this world's history. Satan bound; the suffering and martyred saints recompensed in being made to live and reign with Christ a thousand years; then the final outbreak of evil when Satan is loosed, and its complete overthrow by divine power; and, lastly, the great white throne set up in eternity for the judgment of those who have died in their sins. Satan is the evil being who has been the prime mover behind the scenes throughout all the history of human wickedness. But after the judgment of his two chief agents — the beast and the false prophet — he will be bound for a thousand years. The different names by which he is here described bring out the different characters in which he has acted.

As "the dragon" he has sought the destruction of the Man Child, and of the woman who bore Him, and of the remnant of her seed. He has also under this title sought to usurp the rights of Christ as to the kingdom. "The ancient serpent" carries our thoughts back to the garden of Eden, and reveals him as the great beguiler and deceiver, the one who knows how to awaken, and appeal to, men's lusts, and get power over them in that way. Then "the devil" is the great traducer and slanderer, the one who has through all ages slandered God to His poor fallen creature, and who has ever been the accuser of the brethren. "Satan" is the adversary; the one who has always opposed and hindered the actings of God to the utmost of his power. Whatever God has been doing, Satan has always been resisting and fighting against, both in the world and amongst the people of God. There could hardly be a greater deception than for the ancient serpent to persuade men that he does not exist. Persons who deny the personality of the devil are themselves examples of how he can deceive. But the time is coming when all these activities will cease. Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss.

"And I saw thrones; and they sat upon them". What a contrast is before us here! Satan bound, and the saints enthroned! It reminds one of the word, "But the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16: 20). In Revelation 5: 10 these saints reigning is the fruit of redemption by blood; it is the Lamb who has brought it all to pass, and He alone is worthy. But here they sit on thrones as God's righteous recompense for their sufferings. They are "counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (2 Thessalonians 1: 5), for they have been "beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus, and on account of the word of God". They had "not done homage to the beast nor to his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and hand". They will have

gone along with the testimony of the Man accepted by God during the time that the man rejected by God was in the ascendant, and they will have suffered for it even to death. Men will refuse that kind of mind altogether, and behead them. But they will sit on thrones, and no one will be able to challenge their right to do so, for they will have suffered to death in the maintenance of fidelity to the principles which will be supreme in their reigning time.

Saints of the assembly do not appear in this chapter; it is martyred saints of the tribulation period. Of course, saints of the assembly will reign too, and we have to hold today the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4: 10). If we are to reign the question of competency is raised. How many cities could you rule over for Christ? What have you learned in the school of God that you could bring to bear on others as a divine influence? It is that little bit that has cost you something that is really effective; what you have suffered for, you can administrate. The administration of the world to come will be perfect; no person will take any part in it without being qualified to do so. In principle it is so today; the Lord does not send incompetent servants. He gives them spiritual competency for the service He intends them to render — a competency which is not of themselves but of God. Paul's three years in Arabia, Peter's trance on the housetop, are illustrations of how servants are prepared for their work. The incidents of Luke 8 were a wonderful preparation for the sending forth of the twelve in the next chapter. It was a course of education to teach the disciples the ability of Christ to deal with the most difficult and hopeless cases, so that they might go forth without any misgiving. They were qualified by what they had learned of Him. In this connection it is important to notice that these saints in Revelation 20 *lived* as well as *reigned* "with the Christ". They will be in association with Christ in life, and those who live with Him are qualified to exert influence of the same character as His; they can reign with Him.

"Priests *of* God, and *of* the Christ", is different from "priests *to* his God and Father" in chapter 1: 6, and "*to* our God" in chapter 5: 10. Priests *to* God would suggest priestly service Godward, but priests *of* God would rather be what they are in priestly activity towards men. There will be the administration of succour and priestly support, so that the kingdom will not be marked by exaction, but by the supply of all that man needs to sustain him in his relations to God and to his neighbour. What God is and what Christ is will be ministered to men. Even the Lord will be "a priest upon his throne" (Zechariah 6: 13). *We* are sustained in a scene of contrariety; *they* will be sustained in a scene of blessing; they will not be self-supporting even then.

If we are learning to administrate as kings by acquiring the ability to distinguish both good and evil, and by suffering for righteousness, we are learning also how needful priestly support is by the experience of our own weakness, and of the grace of Christ in sustaining us. And I think God is teaching us in contact with our fellow-saints to exercise priestly service towards them in a ministry of comfort and support. Melchisedec is the great type of Christ as the Royal Priest, and he brought forth bread and wine; he ministered support and joy to those who had come victoriously through conflict. Christ will do this in the coming day for saints on earth who have come through the terrible conflict of the last days as overcomers. And the saints who have a place on thrones as reigning with Him will also have part in priestly service towards men as "priests of God and of the Christ". Christ will exercise His kingly power in priestly grace, and His saints will take character from Him. We are learning in our relations with one another now how to bring divine and spiritual influences to bear on others; that is the reigning side. But we are also learning how to minister support to all that is of God and of Christ in His saints, and this is the priestly side. It is all qualifying us for the place which we shall fill in the world to come.

"When the thousand years have been completed" there will be one last and terrible proof given of man's awful condition as fallen. In some respects it will be more dreadful, because of its universality and wilfulness, than anything that has taken place before. Not in some limited spot, but "on the four corners of the earth", there will be an outbreak of rebellion against the rule of Christ and the saints. As soon as Satan is loosed from his prison, men far and wide will be ready to respond at once to his deceptions. The awakening of the lawless lusts of men will make them antagonistic to the holy and righteous rule of the kingdom of God.

Some might be inclined to ask, "How could they possibly experience the blessedness of Christ's reign, and then rebel against Him?" But have we not known what is, in a smaller sphere, quite as dreadful as this? Have we not seen children sheltered under the care of christian parents from the evils of the world, and from many of Satan's snares, and who seemed to be happy in a circle where the influence of Christ was known, who have gone fully into the world as soon as they were tested by its attractions? Have we not seen persons appear to enjoy the blessings of grace, and to find their interests and happiness in Christ and His saints, and then seen them get into a state where they have thrown off, at any rate for a time, all divine restraint? Then have we not found out what the flesh is in our own experience? Its rebelliousness may have been checked, through infinite mercy, but we know its inward workings. In spite of all that we have tasted of what pertains to the household of faith,

we know that in our flesh good does not dwell. "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be" (Romans 8: 7). Nothing but mercy keeps any one of us, and the deeper the sense we have of this the safer we are.

God will shut up Satan for a thousand years, and in the absence of his deceivings and temptings many men will submit to the rule of Christ, and enjoy its external benefits, without being born again. But even a thousand years of millennial blessedness will not change the flesh. God has allowed us to see this plainly, that we may "not trust in flesh". And it also raises solemn exercise as to whether we are merely going on with divine things outwardly. External privileges — christian parentage, baptism, the breaking of bread, the company of the saints, abundant ministry — are no security of blessing. There must be real heart and conscience work, a personal having to do with God.

Verse 9 would intimate that the saints will be found together even in the millennium. "The camp of the saints" suggests this. "The beloved city" is, I suppose, Jerusalem — the city whose name shall be Jehovah Shammah, "Jehovah is there" (Ezekiel 48: 35). The saints will find a centre of attraction in the temple and the city just as the tabernacle was the divine centre of the camp in the wilderness. One would gather from the prophetic word that God will work specially in Jerusalem and in Israel, and that the mass of truly converted people will be found there. "Thy people also shall be all righteous they shall possess the land for ever — the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified" (Isaiah 60: 21). "All Israel shall be saved. According as it is written, The Deliverer shall come out of Zion; he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11: 26). Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, will be the divine centre of administration on earth, and hence this attack of the rebellious nations.

With the destruction of these nations, and the final judgment of the devil by his being cast into the lake of fire, the history of the present earth ends. Then in verse 11 we come to the last solemn scene in connection with that history — the judgment of the wicked dead. This is outside time, and its issues are eternal. The earth and the heaven flee from the face of Him who sits on the great white throne. The whole order of things as we know it will have gone in fiery destruction, as 2 Peter 3: 10 tells us. The material world will disappear, but the persons who have inhabited that world remain to be judged according to their works.

How little men recognize their responsibility to God! Yet they will carry it with them into eternity. They cannot divest themselves of it. Men may, thank God, find their failure in responsibility met by infinite grace, if they wake up to it

now. Their sins may be forgiven, everything blotted out that was against them, and the Spirit given as power to do what is right in God's sight. But if man's responsibility is not met by grace it must be given account of in judgment. Those who will stand before the great white throne are those who have not submitted themselves to God's righteousness when it was made known in the way of grace. They are the unblessed, the unsaved, from Cain downwards, "great and small"; every one is there; and the judgment is according to what is written. The "books" shew that everything has been put on record with method and accuracy. "Another book" is there also — a very different book — "the book of life". But we read nothing here of the judgment of those whose names are in that book. It is those not found there who are dealt with. The saints who have died will not come into this judgment at all. They will have been raised, and reigning with Christ in glorified bodies for a thousand years, when this judgment takes place. "The first resurrection" is of "blessed and holy" ones, but "the rest of the dead did not live till the thousand years had been completed" (verses 5, 6).

"They were judged each according to their works". The small as well as the great are there; the sea and death and hades give up the dead which are in them. And the issue of judgment is that "if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire". The moral characteristics of those whose names are in the book of life are always insisted on. For instance, it is "fellow-labourers" of whom Paul says that their "names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4: 3) — persons engaged in the same kind of works as Paul! It is "he that overcomes" whose name is not blotted out of that book (Revelation 3: 5). It is those who do not wonder at the beast nor worship him who are there (Revelation 13: 8; 17: 8). Sinners are blotted out of that book, as Exodus 32: 32, 33, and Psalm 69: 28 suggest. The thought of a moral character that is pleasing to God always goes along with being found in that book. Persons whose names are in the book of life do not go on with the sinful works for which men are brought into judgment.

These tremendous and eternal realities are dealt with in Holy Scripture in few and simple words.

There is no attempt to make them impressive by enlarging on the terribleness of what is involved. It is worthy of God that it should be so. HE is speaking, and He does not need to emphasize what He says. These weighty words are left with the consciences of men. Not one star-ray of light or hope shines in the long dark night of eternity for those who die in their sins. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men". Paul had a profound sense of the solemnity of the day of giving account to God. The gospel is marvellous

light for men in Christ, but the brighter the light the darker the shadow which it casts. "What shall be the end of those who obey not the glad tidings of God?"

"Death and hades were cast into the lake of fire". Death is an enemy to be destroyed [annulled] (1 Corinthians 15: 26). This is the end of it; it will never more be active; "death shall not exist any more" in the new earth (Revelation 21: 4). The terrible power which has invaded this world through the sin of man, and which is adverse to all God's thoughts for man, is seen here as cast into the lake of fire. Then "hades" is cast there also. A place for departed spirits will be no longer needed, for the wicked will be finally in the lake of fire, and the saints will be in glorified bodies with Christ.

REVELATION 21

Revelation 21

It is striking how little is said about the eternal state; the first four verses of this chapter are the fullest description of it that Scripture affords. Indeed there are, perhaps, but two other verses that definitely speak of it. "We wait for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness" (2 Peter 3: 13). "But when all things shall have been brought into subjection to him, then the Son also himself shall be placed in subjection to him who put all things in subjection to him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15: 28). That is very blessed; *God all in all!* He will fill every vessel. Here the great thought is that "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God".

It was God's original thought to be with man, so we find Him walking in the garden in Genesis 3. But the man was fallen and alienated from God; he could not bear the presence of his Creator. Four thousand years passed, and One was found with men whose Name was called Immanuel — God with us. It was God's primary thought revealed again. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us ... full of grace and truth". God would be known as coming near to men in their fallen state to free them from all that pertained to that state, and to make Himself known to their hearts as the Fountain of all good. In the eternal state the full result of this will be known in an incorruptible scene into which neither sin nor death can ever come. The Word tabernacling among His disciples, placing Himself so near to them without any ceremonial distance, was a little picture of it; yea, more than a picture; it was the reality of it, though on their side the conditions were imperfect.

John had seen "the great city" before, and its terrible fall. Now he sees "the holy city", and he sees it first in relation to the eternal state.

Afterwards he sees it in relation to the world to come (21: 9 - 22: 5), but it appears first in its place in eternity. Rome has been called the eternal city, but this city is the only eternal city.

The holy city is spoken of as "coming down out of the heaven from God". See chapter 3: 12; 21: 2, 10. How blessedly is Christ reflected in the city! He came down out of heaven bringing all that was heavenly down here (John 6). The city will do that in the world to come, and in eternity; the assembly does so morally now. We see her in the full height of her heavenly position in the early part of Ephesians 2, and she comes down, I think we may say, in the holy grace and dignity of her heavenly position to be the habitation of God down

here, and to be morally adorned for her husband. All believers would admit, I suppose, that the assembly is heavenly as to her *destiny*. But God would have us to understand that she is heavenly in *origin*.

We have seen the Lamb's wife in chapter 19: 8 adorned with "the righteousnesses of the saints". That is a garment which was acquired here, and taken up to heaven; her wedding dress was made here. But in chapter 21: 2 we learn the true source and origin of her bridal beauty. It was all out of heaven and from God. It was acquired through exercise, and through spiritual affections, here, but it was all heavenly and divine in origin and character. And hence her bridal beauty is incorruptible and unfading; it is as fresh at the end of the thousand years as it was when He presented her to Himself glorious. She comes as the true Rebecca from Isaac's country, and she is kindred with Him. Her beauty is eternal because it has its source and origin in heaven and in God, and therefore it is perfectly suited to Him for whom she is adorned.

The heavenly saints will be "the tabernacle of God" in which He will dwell with men. His people in the new earth will have Him near; He will "be with them, their God". But they will know Him as dwelling in a tabernacle. How blessed to think of God dwelling in His saints eternally, and being known as dwelling in them! He will dwell *in* the heavenly saints, and be *with* His people on earth eternally. The sending of the Son of God into the world and the accomplishment of redemption was in view of the Spirit coming so that God might have a habitation here. And John says, "If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4: 12). Many things have come in, through the unwatchfulness and unfaithfulness of saints, that have obscured the fact that God has a habitation here. But it is still true that God dwells in His house, "which is the assembly of the living God", and whatever is known of God on earth today is known through His saints. And God will be known eternally as dwelling in His saints; there will be no hindering elements then.

I do not know that Scripture tells us who the "men" will be with whom God will tabernacle, but I suppose they will be the saints remaining on earth at the end of the thousand years who will be transferred to the new earth. They will be no longer Jew or Gentile; those names belong to the time state; they will simply be "men". The conditions will be all new; "the sea exists no more".

Verse 4 speaks of the passing away of "the former things". The only positive feature of the eternal state that is mentioned is that "God himself shall be with them, their God". All blessedness is wrapped up in the fact that *God is there*. God would have us to understand the blessedness of the eternal state by knowing Him. It could not be conveyed in any verbal description. When Paul

was caught up to the third heaven he “heard unspeakable things said, which it is not allowed man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12: 4). They could not be communicated in human language, or in our present condition. It is very suggestive that in verse 4 all is negative. We are told what will *not* be there. A great man spent twelve years in writing a history of the world, and it was a very imperfect one. But the world’s history could be written in the five words that are found in this verse — tears, death, grief, cry, distress!

Such things are not in accord with Him who sits on the throne, and His glory requires that all shall be made new. The very presence of such things is like a challenge to the throne. People have been blaming God for thousands of years as if He were responsible for the miseries that have come in. But they have come in through the creature listening to the tempter, and falling into sin, and so opening the door to death and every woe. God will shew His power in a new creation where all things will be made new. Such a creation exists spiritually even now, for we read, “So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away, behold all things have become new: and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5: 17, 18).

If sin and death have come into the creation of God His glory requires that all shall be made new. And this is to be *written*; it is to be put on record for a testimony. Verses 5 - 8 are the *present* testimony rendered by God to man in view of what is eternal. His words are true and faithful; indeed “It is done” suggests that all is present to the divine mind as accomplished. God “calls the things which be not as being” (Romans 4: 17); and it is the privilege of faith to have the new creation system of eternal things present as a blessed subsisting reality. It is below the horizon of sight, but it becomes real to faith and hope. God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end”. Everything began with Him, and will end with Him. He had the first word in creation, and He will have the last word in reconciliation and new creation. He will put everything into suitability to Himself so that it will be “very good”. It is very simply stated here, but how much is involved in it!

Then God gives a present word to three classes of people. “Him that thirsts”; “he that overcomes”; and “the fearful and unbelieving”, etc.

“I will give to him that thirsts of the fountain of the water of life freely”. It is a blessed thing to *thirst* in relation to God. It is an exercise which comes into view in John 4 and John 7. It is not exactly the sense of guilt, or distress because of things which press on the conscience — though this may be present also — but a longing to know God. Thirst is the consciousness of being without God, and the craving to have Him. “He is a rewarder of them

who seek him out" (Hebrews 11: 6). God is ever dealing with men universally to awaken thirst for Himself; "that they may seek God; if indeed they might feel after him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us"(Acts 17: 27).

There is nothing so blessed as the knowledge of God. To know Him in His love, and to see how His love has acted in perfect consistency with all His attributes in order to make Himself known in blessing to His poor needy creatures, is the deepest satisfaction of which the human heart is capable. The very purpose of its creation was that it should be capable, through infinite mercy, of having that satisfaction.

"The fountain of the water of life" is, I believe, the love of God. It is the very spring and source from which all blessing flows. We read later of "a river of water of life" (Revelation 22: 1), which speaks of what will flow out, but the Fountain is the Source from whence the river flows. It has been God's great purpose and delight to reveal Himself, and it is the one who thirsts who gets the blessed satisfaction of that revelation. Nicodemus was not content with seeing miracles; he wanted God. "We know that thou art come a teacher from *God*". He was an illustration of the effect of new birth, though he did not understand it. Many were coming by day to see miracles, but *he* came in the stillness of night to be alone with the One who could tell him of God. He thirsted, and the Fountain of the water of life burst forth to quench his thirst; the love of God was made known to him as it had never been made known before. Then the woman in John 4 thirsted too, and the Lord proposed to give her living water. "The water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life". Her affections were all in disorder, as ours have been, but Christ gives the Spirit so that, instead of the affections wandering in many directions in search of a resting place they can never find, they are gathered up under divine control, and made to move in the direction of eternal life.

When we drink of the Fountain of the water of life the love of God is known as shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit, and there is power to overcome. The one who drinks discovers the imperative necessity of being an overcomer. He finds all the influences in the world and in his own flesh are hostile to God, and to the divine satisfaction which he has tasted. He cannot give way to these influences without being robbed of that which has become his chief joy. The knowledge of God in the heart which comes by drinking of the Fountain puts one on the line of overcoming, because we have got a resource in Him which we can avail ourselves of for support and victory. The strength of the saint for overcoming lies in the fact that he knows God as revealed in love,

and that he can count upon God for support against every evil. The very fact that he thus knows God puts him in conflict with everything that is contrary to God, but he gets divine support in that conflict; "I will be to him *God*". In the last half of Romans 7 the man wants to do right, but has no power until he can say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord". He has to learn that God is for him, and that there is a Husband who can support him by the Spirit. Then in Romans 8 the fact that God is for us ensures victory. Every one who is set to be an overcomer proves this word true: "I will be to him God". How blessed! To prove what God can be to a creature who cannot take a step, or deal with a single foe, without Him!

The overcomer enters into possession of what is blessed and eternal. "He that overcomes shall inherit these things". If saints are not overcomers they do not inherit much in any real sense at the present moment. If we allow what is of the world or of the flesh to overcome us we do not enjoy what is of God. The great hindrance to spiritual enjoyment is not that we are defective in doctrine, but practical workings of the flesh are allowed, and what is of the world creeps into the heart. These things war against the soul, and if they are not overcome there is no present possession or enjoyment of the divine inheritance.

The overcomer enjoys his divinely given portion, and he becomes an object of delight to the heart of God. "He shall be to me son". It is not only that he has received sonship as the gift of divine love, and the Spirit of God's Son in his heart, crying, Abba, Father, but he has become a son in developed affections and intelligence, so as to be to God what "son" means to Him. It is most blessed.

The last class spoken of are "the fearful and unbelieving", etc. "The fearful" are persons who have not thirsted, and who have not been overcomers. They have yielded to the influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil. They have been ashamed to confess Jesus as Lord. They have not got divine support because they have not wanted it; they have been "unbelieving". They are found in company with abominable persons, "murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars"; and of such it is said, "Their part is in the lake which burn's with fire and brimstone; which is the second death".

We now return to contemplate the holy city in its relation to the millennial earth. Chapter 21: 9 - 22: 5. For it is said, "And the nations shall walk by its light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory to it.... And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations to it" (verses 24, 26).

We cannot but feel the exceeding blessedness of what is before us; it is the display of the accomplished result of the work of God in His saints. We could hardly contemplate anything more calculated to affect our hearts. It is the

obvious contrast to chapter 17, where John was called to view the harlot, the city where every corruption was found, where there was nothing that was of God. The scene of that vision was appropriate to its subject it was a desert where nothing could be found that was pleasing to God or advantageous to men. But here we see the blessed contrast in a city where everything is of God, and which becomes the greatest possible gain to men as the centre of divine administration. John was set "on a great and high mountain" to contemplate this city. It can only be viewed from a spiritual elevation. It is far above the level of the world, or of human thoughts.

John had been left here to see the defection of the assemblies, and to write the Lord's estimate of them as fallen and corrupted, but he was also the one to give us this wonderful vision of the assembly as she will come into display in the world to come. He gives us to know what the assembly will be as the vessel of light and administration, that we may understand what she is being formed for now. It is intended to impress our hearts, and to give character to our exercises and prayers.

This city is never called "great"; it is always "the holy city". It is the full answer to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 that the saints "may be filled even to all the fulness of God"; and where he also refers to the assembly as the shrine of divine glory. "To him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen". Here we see the answer to that prayer in a vessel adequate for the display of what God is! What a blessed work of God by His Spirit, what formation in the divine nature, is needed to bring about such a result! "All the fulness of God" was in Christ, but the assembly is to be filled to it so as to be adequate for the setting forth of God. It is truly wonderful that it should have been God's purpose to have a holy vessel, entirely the product of His own work, in which His glory shall shine forth. The holy city will be the light-bearer in the world to come. All that may be seen and known of God will shine there in undimmed purity. It has all been ministered to her in the glad tidings, as set forth in Christ, and she has been filled to it by the Spirit's working in the divine nature. We see here, too, in its fulness the result of Christ having been made sin for us, in the saints having become manifestly God's righteousness in Him.

It has often been said that Paul takes the church up to heaven and gives it a place there, but John brings it down to give heavenly light here. The saints have been taken into heaven at the rapture; now they come down out of heaven to be the light of the nations. "Her shining was like a most precious stone, as a crystal-like jasper stone". We have spoken of the jasper in considering chapter 4. (See page 76).

The "great and high wall" of the city has a prominent place in the description. It secures and preserves the city from the intrusion of anything that is not of God. It is exclusive of all such things as are mentioned in verse 27. "And nothing common, nor that maketh an abomination and a lie, shall at all enter into it". "Common" things would be such things as are according to the mind of man. Such things had been admitted at Corinth, for the saints walked "according to man". What is "common" is in contrast to what is of the Spirit of God. Then what "maketh an abomination" covers every element of idolatry; everything that does not give God His place, or that obscures His glory. And "a lie" would stand in contrast to all that Christ is as "the truth". Every form of evil that has ever intruded to corrupt what is of God comes under one or other of these three heads. They will not be allowed to enter the city. And God has given us the light of this description for present exercise, that we may be in moral keeping with it now.

The "twelve gates" indicate the administrative character of the city, and the names inscribed shew that the outgoings of the city are towards "the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel". They will be the ones on earth to first get the gain of what is administered by the city.

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". It is noticeable that the foundations are connected with the wall; it seems to convey the thought that the wall secures everything; if the wall stands firm the city does. And the foundations carrying the names of the twelve apostles would indicate that the great principles of the kingdom of God are the basis on which all rests. If those principles are not well and truly laid in the souls of saints there is no foundation for the wall, and there will be nothing that has true assembly character. The principles of the kingdom of God are preservative. They involve separation from evil, and its permanent exclusion.

It is said of Zion in the coming day of her glory that "thou shalt call thy walls Salvation" (Isaiah 60: 18). The wall represents the defence of the city. Those principles which are founded on the ministry of the twelve apostles are the preservative enclosure of the holy city. It is not a legal or merely outward separation, but a separation founded on Christ being known in the diversity of His moral beauty and perfection, as set forth in "every precious stone". What is not in keeping with that must be excluded. "And the building of its wall was jasper". The whole substance of the wall is divine in character; it is according to God's nature and attributes. Evil is excluded because it is contrary to divine love and holiness.

The wall includes the whole city. In maintaining separation individually, what saints have in view is to preserve the holy character of the assembly. In Nehemiah's day we read that the priests and others each built the wall over against his own house, and of one man that he built "over against his chamber". This individual exercise is most needful in a day of ruin, but each builder had in view the whole city. Even in Romans the saints are viewed as "one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other". Each one is to take up his individual service in view of the whole.

There is something positive about "building". It is a pity if saints are better known by what they testify against, or what they separate from, than they are by being manifestly built up in all that is of God, and in the knowledge of the preciousness of Christ. The "jasper" and "every precious stone" speak of positive enrichment and adornment. They speak of being built up in the knowledge of God, of being formed in the divine nature, of Christ having become the preciousness to those who believe.

The blessed light of God shone perfectly in all its completeness in Christ. But it was in divine purpose that it should shine out in *men*, and this required a vast company. It required "twelve apostles" for the foundations, the ministry of each characterized by the preciousness of Christ in a distinctive way, as set forth in these precious stones (verses 19, 20), so that the administration of that preciousness might be perfect. And it required a vast result of divine workmanship standing in relation to the twelve apostles, which is set forth in the city measuring "twelve thousand stadia: the length and the breadth and height of it are equal". The numbers are all multiples of twelve; they shew that the city is perfect in view of its administrative place in the world to come. It is the assembly viewed in its completeness as the result of God's workmanship, God's building; in no other way could it have come up to full measurement by the "golden reed".

It is of deep interest to know that the divine work is going on at the present time which will issue in the city, but it is productive of much exercise also. So far as the work of God is effected in saints, and they have become God's workmanship, the city exists today. I do not doubt that there is that today which can be measured with the golden reed — that which God can take account of as being of Himself. But in the chapter before us we see the full result in glory. "The city lies four-square, and its length is as much as the breadth". It is all in perfect proportion and adjustment. A great deal of our exercise today is caused by things being out of square, and the necessity of getting the mind of God, and of giving it practical effect, so that there may be divine adjustment. It is in this way that the saints are preserved in the truth,

and the truth preserved in them, in due proportion and symmetry. It is a comfort to consider that all that is gained in this way — even if only by a few — is gained really by divine favour for the whole assembly. Many may not get the gain of it — so far as we can see — at the present time, but it has been gained for them, and when the assembly appears in glory she will appear in the value of it. We must get away from narrow and sectarian thoughts as to spiritual blessing. If gifts are given they are for the whole assembly. If a few saints become possessed of divine light and truth it is for all the Christian company. If assembly principles are learned through exercise, and there is divine adjustment of defective thoughts, it is all in view of the assembly coming out in the value and result of it in the day of display. This gives immense importance to things which may seem to be worked out now in a very limited sphere. They are being worked out in view of the whole assembly being in the value of them in that day.

The wall being “a hundred and forty-four cubits, man’s measure, that is, angel’s”, brings in the thought of creature perfection. There is not only seen in the city the glory of God, and the diversified perfections of Christ in the precious stones, but all that is proper to intelligent creatures is seen there also. There is but one standard of perfection for creatures, whether men or angels, and that is *obedience*. The city includes that element, and it is seen as complete in view of administration in the twelve-times-twelve cubits of the wall.

The twelve precious stones in the foundations give us the thought of how varied are the aspects in which Christ can be known, and in which divine light has shone forth in Him. The ministry of the twelve apostles was the setting forth of what they had apprehended in Him by the sovereignty of God, who gave each his place in relation to all that would shine out in the city. There was diversity; for instance, Peter’s epistles are not like John’s; but all stood together in perfect unity. In principle it is so with all saints. Each one who walks with God, and follows Christ, has his own measure of apprehension, and takes up his own ray of divine light so as to be coloured by it. Each one who comes under the personal influence of Christ becomes a precious stone. It is only He who can give us the colour and character He intends us to have. Under His influence we are formed for our place in relation to the testimony. We do not look for all saints, or all servants or ministries, to be alike. But we look — and, I trust, pray — for an impression of Christ to be made, and come into view in ourselves and in the brethren. However diversified the beauty and glory of Christ, it all subsists in one Person. And however varied the apprehensions of that Person may be as realized in millions of hearts by the one Spirit, they cannot fail to subsist in perfect unity. Discords must arise from

the intrusion of something that is not Christ. But the wall of the city, if known in its spiritual reality now, would exclude all such things.

The twelve gates being twelve pearls — “each one of the gates, respectively, was of one pearl” suggests that the outgoings of the city will be characterized by what the assembly is to Christ. All those who come under her administration will know what she is to Him. The pearl speaks of her unity and beauty as under His eye. He says, “They ... shall know that I have loved thee”. If enemies will be made to know this, how much more the subjects of His kingdom? There will be a blessed witness in the gates to what the assembly is to Christ, and to a unity which is the product of the working of divine love. “And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me” (John 17: 22, 23). That prayer will be answered when the city descends in her glorious state.

“The street of the city pure gold, as transparent glass”. The street is the place of movement. There will be no movement in that city save in the divine nature; no element of alloy will be there; all will be “pure gold”. And therefore all will be transparent. There could be no transparency in the world; people have to be opaque; it would never do to disclose their motives. And our minds are habituated to suspicion here, for we do not know what people’s thoughts and motives are, and we have often found ourselves deceived by what had every appearance of genuineness. But all will be transparent in the street of the city, and therefore no element of suspicion or distrust will remain. One would like to get a little more on to that line now. We see it in Paul when he said, “We ... have been manifested to God, and I hope also that we have been manifested in your consciences” (2 Corinthians 5: 11). His motives were not such that they had to be hidden; they were “pure gold”. There is a bit of gold in every true saint, but not many of us have come to “pure gold” yet. The important thing is to judge every element of dross that comes to light, and to refuse it. If there were more spiritual reality we should confide in one another more; we should be more ready to confess our faults to one another, and not to try to give more favourable impressions of ourselves than are justified. We should get on much better together, and we should get the help of each other’s prayers as to our real state, and suspicion and distrust would die for want of material to feed on.

We are disciplined that the elements of alloy may be purged, and the “pure gold” come into prominence. God says of Jerusalem, “I will turn my hand upon thee, and will thoroughly purge away thy dross, and take away all thine alloy”

(Isaiah 1: 25). He puts His people into the crucible, not to expose how much dross is there — though this comes to light — but to secure the gold in purity. It is blessed to see saints in beautiful freedom from what is of the nature of alloy, judging all in the light of God, and moving in the divine nature. I think one has seen something like this in saints who have matured under divine teaching and discipline, and God would have us to come to it as self-judged and formed in the divine nature. So would “the street of the city” be anticipated. It should surely be with each one of us a cherished object of desire and exercise. But there cannot be “pure gold” without a refining process. It is in suffering that we are refined. God says to Israel, “I have refined thee, but not as silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48: 10). “The Lamb’s wife” is the wife of the One who suffered, and she is called to suffer too, but the suffering is for refining so that she may come forth as gold. The Spirit encourages suffering saints not to faint (Hebrews 12).

John seeing no temple in the city shews that all there are in immediate nearness to God. “The Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb”. There is no longer any need to “inquire in his temple”. The temple is the place of the oracles, the place where intelligence of God’s mind is gained at a time when such intelligence is not universal, when it is limited to those who enter the temple. It supposes that certain ones are privileged to draw near, and to be in the secret of God’s mind, while others are not. “Mystery” is a characteristic word in Christianity; it refers to things which are known only to the initiated; it is a temple idea. Saints today have temple character (1 Corinthians 3: 16). It is amongst saints that there is inquiry and intelligence as to God’s mind. But the very fact that *inquiry* is connected with the temple suggests that things are partial. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect has come, that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Corinthians 13: 9, 10). “We see now through a dim window obscurely”; there must be continual inquiry and learning; every question that arises amongst saints brings home to us that we only know in part. But *then* all will be “face to face”; there will be immediate vision. The unclouded knowledge of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will fill the city. All will be unveiled; there will be no longer anything that retains the character of “mystery”.

“The Lord God Almighty” is a millennial title which is in keeping with the position in which the city is here seen. God is known there according to all that He will be and do for Israel and the nations in the world to come. We do not get the assembly’s own relationships unfolded here, but what she will be as the Lamb’s wife in relation to Israel and the nations. It is the administration of a city where there is the unveiled knowledge of the Lord God Almighty and the

Lamb. The intelligence and the shining of the city is according to all that lies in those Names. God will vindicate Himself publicly as to everything that has had the character of "mystery" through the ages. It has been beautifully expressed in the lines,

"God and the Lamb shall there
The light and temple be;
And radiant hosts for ever share
The unveiled mystery". (74:7)

Then "the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon, that they should shine for it; for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb". The tendency today is to magnify natural light, to make much of what man can arrive at by reason and by scientific investigation, and to make little of divine revelation. But the great thing to be sought is the knowledge of God, and if God is to be truly known it must be in the light in which He has revealed Himself — the light of redemption. It is one of the saddest proofs of Satan's power over men that so many are found who really hate the thought of redemption. This will culminate in the last act of the ten kings and the beast; they will "make war with the Lamb".

The glory of God will enlighten the city; it will be diffused throughout the city; but it will emanate from the Lamb. It will all be concentrated there; "the lamp thereof is the Lamb". It is God revealed in the Lamb — in One who suffered and died — that is the light of the city. This shews that what is mediatorial still has place. We sing today, "O God we see Thee in the Lamb", and this will still be true in the holy city. The Lamb is a title which stands in relation to "the former things". The Lamb is the One in whom and by whom the glory of God has been maintained sacrificially in relation to all the things which sin had touched. The millennial period is the time of God's public vindication in relation to "the former things", before they finally pass away.

The holy city is the answer in glory to the cross. The resurrection of Christ is God's necessary answer to the Person who died. The Son of the living God could not be holden of death; He could not see corruption. But the holy city, and the vast expanse of the universe of bliss, both in the age to come and in eternity, will be the answer to the work of the cross. God will shine in light divine as having established His glory on an imperishable foundation in the Lamb. His glory will shine out in the assembly; He will be vindicated and His triumph displayed. "We boast in hope of the glory of God". That does not mean in hope of going to heaven, but in hope of the glory of God shining out in the city in the very scene where the ravages of sin and death have been.

"The nations shall walk by its light". They will regulate all their course by the light of the heavenly city. There will be an end of policy and diplomacy, and of rivalry and ambition. All the course that the nations take will be directed by the influence of a city where the light of God and of the Lamb shines. And there will be response. "The kings of the earth bring their glory to it.... And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations to it". There will not only be perfect administration from the city, but responsive tribute and revenue will be freely and gladly rendered. All will be so affected by the shining of the city that kings and nations will give, not their worst or least, but their very best — their glory and honour. God will secure response; He will have what is due to Him. Men will be in true glory and dignity then as subject to God, but it will be all brought as tribute to the holy city. Every one will own then that "glory all belongs to God". The assembly as the city will administer the kingdom, and will receive its revenues. All will have to own her glorious place according to divine purpose.

Think of the glory of the earth responding to the bright world above! It is the worthy result of all that God has wrought. The coming here of the Lamb, the accomplishment of redemption, the gift of the Spirit, all the blessed workings of God in His saints, the power that will raise and glorify them, will bring about that there will be such a vessel of light and glory as the holy city. And there will be, too, the far-spread power of the kingdom of God and of His Christ on earth, bringing kings and nations not only to serve Israel as their head in millennial glory according to Isaiah 60 and many other scriptures, but to own and pay tribute to the heavenly city. What a vindication of God before the history of this present earth closes!

REVELATION 22

Revelation 22

we learn from the closing verse of the previous chapter that none will enter the city "but those only who are written in the book of life of the Lamb". Those recorded as having life alone can enter, for everything there is living; it is "the city of the living God". Every living desire, exercise, and activity that is found in saints now belongs to the holy city. For every bit of the work of God in saints is effected by "the Spirit of the living God" (2 Corinthians 3: 3). At the present time God's house is "the assembly of the living God" (1 Timothy 3: 15); His activities are found there by the Spirit dwelling in His saints.

So that there is even now that which corresponds with the holy city — which is the city morally. How could there be dead formality in "the assembly of the living God"? There is no place there, surely, for what is "common", or for what "maketh an abomination and a lie!" The consideration of this awakens much exercise that a living character of things should be maintained. The tendency is for things which were once living to become formal, like a once-living animal becoming a fossil, retaining its form without vitality.

In the "river of water of life, bright as crystal", and in the "tree of life, producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit", we have the Sources of perennial freshness and vigour. Nothing will ever be decadent in the city. There seem to be indications in Scripture that there may be decline on the earthly side of the world to come. During the feast of tabernacles, which is figurative of that period, thirteen young bullocks were to be offered on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, but one less on each succeeding day until the seventh day of the feast (Numbers 29: 12 - 39). This seems to imply a measure of decline. Not exactly departure, for they offered seven bullocks on the seventh day. They will not actually get away from the perfection of Christ, but the decreasing number seems to indicate that things will not be maintained in the same vigour throughout the period prefigured in that feast. This is very exercising, for it manifestly indicates a condition which may be found amongst saints highly favoured of God. There may be no giving up of truth, no actual departure from Christ, no allowance of positive evil; and yet a progressive decline in spiritual apprehensions of Christ, so that there is not the same wealth or energy in the affections Godward as before. Are we not conscious that things often droop with us when there is no actual departure? "Seven" bullocks indicate, no doubt, a blessed apprehension of Christ, but it is not the superabundance of "thirteen". May God give us an intense desire not

to decline, or — if we are conscious that we have declined — for His reviving grace and power!

In the heavenly city blessed Sources of life are in perennial activity, and there will be no decline. The river and the tree are within the city, and they maintain all in freshness and vigour, so that the end of the thousand years finds the bride with no sign of diminished beauty. She is still “as a bride adorned for her husband” (chapter 21: 2). If we want to be preserved from decline we must continually drink of the River, and feed on the fruit of the Tree of life. The River speaks of all the vital refreshment and joy-giving power that lies in the Holy Spirit. That is the “river the streams whereof make glad the city of God” (Psalm 46: 4). The sustaining resources of the city are available for us now. How blessed to think of it! Who would not wish to prove their value and power?

The Tree of life is CHRIST known as filling the year with His precious fruits. To know Christ in one aspect is not sufficient to sustain perennial vigour. However sweet and precious it may be, it is given, not to be final but to prepare us for that which will follow “in each month”. It is blessed to think of a spiritual year in the heavenly city, each succeeding month of which will yield fresh fruit of Christ to maintain the vigour of those who enter!

The Lord gives this a present moral application in verse 14. “Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city”. The washing of robes is what we do; it involves the discovery through watchful and prayerful exercise of any spot of worldly or fleshly defilement which may have been contracted. It signifies the cleansing of personal habits and associations by the word. All believers have a measure of desire after Christ, but there is often a lack of purpose and diligence to get rid of things that are really spots on the robes, and which hinder one practically from having the support and joy of His fruits. Those that wash their robes have right to the Tree of life with its continued succession of fresh fruits.

Israel had a festive year — a succession of feasts from the passover to the feast of tabernacles. We have to learn Christ in the varied aspects in which the different feasts present Him. We need to know Him, not only as the Passover, but in relation to the feast of unleavened bread, and as the Wave sheaf of first-fruits, and as known at Pentecost, and in the feast of tabernacles. There must be a spiritual lack at some point if we do not go the full round of the festive year. Decline in Israel was in proportion to their giving up the feasts, or failing to celebrate them with due heartiness. The feast of tabernacles was probably given up when Joshua died (Nehemiah 8: 17). It has been said that

as a tree declines the top shoot goes first! Then there was another marked decline after Samuel's day (2 Chronicles 35: 18); and probably the sabbatical year ceased to be observed about Solomon's time. As decline progresses, one apprehension of Christ after another is enfeebled so that it is no longer held in joy with God.

But in the heavenly city the whole year discloses in perennial freshness the fruits of Christ. There is a completeness of supply which is in accord with the administrative place which the city occupies, and which is adequate to sustain those who enter, so that they are preserved in the full vigour of life. Fresh appropriations of Christ continually will mark the city.

It is even so today for those who love Him. "I will love him and will manifest myself to him"(John 14: 21) is a very precious word. Do not let us lose the expectation of it, or the desire to realize it, or the sense of the freshness and new character of every such manifestation. I would suggest that each manifestation gives some apprehension of the Lord peculiar to itself. It yields a distinct manner of fruit, if we may apply the figure in that way. Each manifestation of the Lord to His own after His resurrection had its distinctive character, and it could hardly be otherwise with One so great and varied in the forms of love which He wears. Each time He comes into the midst of His own it is to disclose Himself in some peculiar way to those who have spiritual vision to discern Him. You may have had a manifestation of Christ ten or twenty years ago that made a great impression on you, but it will not sustain you in vigour today. The life of the affections is sustained by renewed manifestations. Even in the city He yields fruit "in each month". That is "life's perennial food". What wonderful possibilities are within our reach!

It is of deepest interest to see how the "street" and the "river" and the "tree of life" are identified. It intimates that all the movements in the divine nature, of which the "street" speaks, are sustained in the freshness and vigour of life by the Spirit, and by the appropriation of the varied fruits of Christ. I think we may get some idea what the "street" is like by reading Acts 2 - Acts 4. Blessed movements of the divine nature — love in activity — all pervaded and energized by the Holy Spirit, and all taking character from Christ! Such is the life of the heavenly city! Then "the leaves of the tree for healing of the nations". The nations have been wounded and torn; they are full of sores today; but the leaves of the Tree will be applied to them for healing. Ezekiel 47: 12 gives us what corresponds with this, but there it is the earthly side of the world to come. The leaves are the clothing of a tree, its outward beauty. It is all that was seen in Jesus as the meek and lowly One, the ever-obedient One, who never asserted His own rights, but was ever in confidence in God.

How comely the nations will be when the leaves of that Tree have been applied to them! Discontent and envy, jealousy and strife, fill the earth today; the nations are full of hostile feelings towards one another. But when the leaves of the Tree of life are applied to them they will be healed. All discontent will be removed, because they will be happy with God's ordering. There will be no quarrels or jealousies, no distrust or enmity; they will learn war no more.

The nations are not healed yet, but one is entitled to expect to see healing amongst saints — the removal of elements of distrust and enmity. There is power for the healing of wounds and sores where the grace of God is, and as we move on together in the manifestation of the life of Jesus these things disappear.

"And no curse shall be any more". All will be blessing from God. In Genesis 1 we see that God's first moral action was to bless. But sin came in and curse consequent upon it. Now in Revelation 22 the throne of God and of the Lamb is seen established; everything that brought in curse has been removed sacrificially; blessing remains, and no curse. God can righteously bless; He can return to what is according to His nature, and to His original thoughts.

It is in unmixed *blessing* that "his servants shall serve him" in priestly nearness and suitability. "Thy praise their service is". This is during the thousand years. No doubt the saints will serve eternally, but it will be as sons.

"And they shall see his face". They will be in the most blessed favour; the light of God's countenance will shine upon them and be their joy. And all that God is will be reflected in them; "his name is on their foreheads"; the image of God will be impressed on them; His original thought to have man in His image will be fully realized.

"And night shall not be any more". Night is symbolical of a state in which God is unknown. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"; when He shines and is known there can be no night. "A lamp" represents "the prophetic word" (2 Peter 1: 19), which will be no longer needed in the city. "Light of the sun" is the most splendid figure which creation affords of divine glory. But even the most glorious symbol which God has ordained in nature is not needed where "the Lord God shall shine upon them". We can say now that "the darkness is passing and the true light already shines" (1 John 2: 8), but in the heavenly city no element of darkness will remain; "God shall shine, in light divine, In glory never fading".

The Father's house is where a place is prepared for us by the Son, His own place of relationship, the home of divine affections. It presents quite a different thought from the city, which sets forth the place which the assembly

will have in administration. The persons who form the city will be in the Father's house, but the two thoughts are quite distinct. This book does not speak of God as our Father; it does not present the saints as in family relationship.

If we want to be spiritually happy we must keep "the words of the prophecy of this book" (verse 7). Prophetic testimony in the Old Testament is largely in relation to Israel. The assembly does not properly belong to prophetic tinge; she belongs to heaven, and has her place outside the scene of prophecy. But the place of testimony which she has had on earth for a time has brought her into contact with the scene of prophecy, and God would have His bondmen enlightened as to the things "which must soon come to pass" in that scene. Alongside the assembly, as the product of divine grace and working, the system of Babylon — which dates back to Genesis 11 — has developed in the christian profession to an extraordinary degree. This is a new element in the scene of prophecy, and it is of the utmost importance that this corrupt and corrupting system should be seen by all saints as a judged thing.

Then it is most essential that there should be no misconception in our minds as to the course and end of this evil age. God would have us to view the prophetic future, not only in the light of the Old Testament, but in relation to the conditions brought in through the failure and final apostasy of the christian profession. And all this is really to clear away wrong thoughts and expectations — wrong hopes as to the future of this world — so as to leave the hearts and minds of saints free to take in, and respond to, this blessed utterance of the One we love — "Behold, I come quickly".

Those who have kept the words of the prophecy of this book have been blessed in all ages. In times of seeming prosperity the assembly has needed this book to warn it against delusive hopes. In times of distress it has needed it for cheer and comfort, and to turn its heart more simply to the Coming One. Saints have not always had clear or right thoughts as to prophetic events, but in reading this book they have always got moral instruction, and comfort and encouragement, and they have seen that God would ultimately triumph, and that Christ would have His bride, and all His kingly rights on earth in a coming day. For us the whole future turns on these three words, "I come quickly".

The fact that the truth of the rapture was lost sight of very early in the history of the church — I suppose when Christ ceased to be held in affection as Head, and the Spirit was practically displaced by human arrangements — greatly hindered saints from understanding the prophetic word, and brought in confusion between the earthly promises which pertain to Israel, and the heavenly hopes of the assembly. But all this has been cleared up in the mercy

of the Lord, so that the thoughts and affections of the saints might be free for the Coming One. Instead of looking for an improved state of things on earth, and becoming earth-dwellers, the Lord has been setting His own free to hear His word, "Behold, I come quickly".

John was profoundly affected by what he heard and saw. He fell down to do homage before the feet of the angel who shewed him these things. It was wrong for him to do homage to a creature, and this has its own solemn voice to us as being the last recorded act of a saint. There is ever the tendency to give an undue place to the creature. We may give an undue place to a servant who unfolds wonderful things to us — a gifted teacher or preacher. To do so is to miss the true gain of his service. The angel says, "Do homage to God". The effect of reading this book should be to produce worship in our hearts in the sense of the deep wisdom of God's ways. The angel is a "fellow-bondman" of John, and of John's brethren the prophets. The angels "execute his word, hearkening unto the voice of his word" (Psalm 103: 20). These things are suggestive of the spirit in which "the words of this book" are to be kept — the spirit of obedience and worship.

In the case of Daniel's prophecy he was told to "seal the book, till the time of the end" (Daniel 12: 4). There was to be a long period before the time of the end. But now "the time is near", and the words are not to be sealed. People often say this is a sealed book, but that is just what it is not. The title of the book shews that it is an unveiling, an opening up of things that are close at hand. The Lord intended His coming to be an ever-present hope. There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest a prolonged interval. In the parables it is the same servants to whom the Lord committed things when He went away who have to give account when He returns. He would have the thought of His coming to take account of His servants to be always near.

Things are just on the verge of taking final permanence. In a very brief moment things will be fixed as they are. "Let him that does unrighteously do unrighteously still; and let the filthy make himself filthy still; and let him that is righteous practise righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still". Should I like to be when He comes what I am today? If not, I must quickly take up a different character. There is no time to lose for either believer or unbeliever. If I would not like to be found doing unrighteously, or making myself filthy, I must abandon such things at once. I must be now what I would wish to be when He comes. There is still a moment for moral adjustment, but it will soon pass.

Nothing will be lost that is on the line of righteousness and holiness. The Lord says, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one

as his work shall be. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end". It is a Voice that calls each faithful heart to see that every activity begins and ends with Christ. These are the things that merit reward, and that will abide in the universe of bliss.

Washing our robes is to be done now. To have right to the Tree of life, or to enter the city, our garments must be washed. Not a spot of the flesh or the world must be left uncleansed; it emphasizes the necessity for moral suitability. Worldly and fleshly gratifications and unholy associations are like spots on the robe; they disqualify the saint for spiritual privilege. The Pharisee may be particular about externals because he wants to maintain a reputation with men. But the saint is conscious of obligation to be careful as to his habits, his manner of life, his associations, because he has in mind the Tree and the city. He would not like to deprive himself of the fruits of Christ, and one with a defiled robe cannot enjoy Christ.

I wonder how much we know of going in "by the gates into the city"? It is to be known in a spiritual sense now by entering into assembly privilege. We have come "to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12: 22), but the right to enter that city pertains to those who wash their robes. Jude speaks of "hating the garment spotted by the flesh", and James says that "to keep oneself unspotted from the world" is part of "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father". It is good when a Christian wakes up to the fact that something has hindered spiritual prosperity and progress, and that it must be set aside. The "Praise" gates of the city are never shut, but we are not always in a state to go in.

These are exercising words for the conscience, but they are accompanied by a sweet appeal to the heart. "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star". It is "I Jesus" who speaks. He takes that sweet personal Name by which He first made Himself known to us in saving love, and which is dear to every heart that knows Him. He is the Root of David. Royal promises — everything that will make glad the earth in the day of glory — are connected with David, who was typically God's Anointed to fulfil all His will. Every promise that made David great had its Source and Root in Jesus, which identifies Him with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. All was derived from Jesus "whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5: 2).

And then He is also the Offspring of David. He came into Manhood as the Seed of David to inherit all those glorious promises, and to bring them into effect

through death and resurrection. David could not bring the promises into effect; he had to say,

"Although my house be not so before God". But he had prophetic vision of his great Offspring, and could say of Him, "He shall be as the light of the morning, like the rising of the sun, a morning without clouds" (2 Samuel 23: 4, 5).

In Old Testament prophecy He is "the Sun of righteousness", but "in the assemblies" He is known as "the bright and morning star". Before the dawn He arises and shines in the hearts of His saints as the bright Star of the coming day (2 Peter 1: 19).

When this is the case there is preparedness to say, Come! The bride says Come! because she knows Him, and all that His coming means. How blessed that "the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" At the very end we see the bride, not submerged in the world, not asleep or settled on her lees, but in harmonious concert with the Spirit! Her heart expresses itself in that one word, Come! It is characteristic of the bride to say, Come!

All saints are not actually joining in the cry. Hence the word, "And let him that hears say, Come". That would apply to a believer who is not in concert with the Spirit and the bride. He is called upon to say, Come! to fall into line with the Spirit and the bride. It cannot be acquiesced in that there should be a single believer on the face of the earth not saying, Come! All must join, for all are going up together at the assembling shout of the Lord to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4).

Then there are also souls "athirst". Those in whom God has wrought exercises and desires which have not yet been met. The answer to them all is CHRIST, and the thirsting one is called to come and find deepest satisfaction in that blessed One. All His fulness is still available for thirsting hearts.

And, finally, grace goes out to the widest limits; "he that will, let him take the water of life freely". He may not even thirst. It supposes one with whom there is but little depth or earnestness of desire, but if he is willing he may take the water of life freely. It is not even said that he is to *come*. He has not to move a single step; the water of life is flowing freely close to him; he has but to *take* it. It is the final call of infinite grace.

The order in which the books of the Bible are placed is not inspired, but it is morally suitable that the Revelation should have its place at the end, for it gives the final issues of evil and good. And the solemn warning against adding to or taking from "the words of the book of this prophecy" can be applied in principle to all Scripture, for it is divinely inspired (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). The "words" are to be preserved in their integrity, and they are words "written" in

a "book". Another scripture speaks of "words ... taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2: 13). God has connected His authority with *written words*, and has safe-guarded those *words* by the solemn statements of verses 18, 19. Let Christians beware of those who call in question the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

"He that testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly". That word has been in His heart ever since. It is, as it were, the next thing before Him, never absent from His thoughts. In John 14: 3 He says, "I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be". It is not exactly "I will come", but "I am coming". It is in His heart all the time, always cherished there, always present to His affections. And that is what He looks for it to be to us. Do our hearts say Amen to what is in His heart? "Amen; come, Lord Jesus".

"I come" is in the heart of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God. "Amen; come, Lord Jesus" is in the heart of each faithful and responsive lover here. And every moment that intervenes, before we hear His voice and see His face and are for ever with Him, will be filled up by the experience of His grace. "THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH ALL THE SAINTS".