

Revelation - Commentaries by Thomas Blackburn Baines

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 14:6-12: The Three Angels (14:6-12)

Having refreshed our gaze with a glimpse of the glories awaiting the saved remnant when the Lamb is seated on mount Zion, the ever-shifting series of visions returns to the troubles and woes of the great tribulation. In the two preceding chapters we have seen the visible agents at work; but though God's hand is not yet disclosed, He is guiding all things silently for His own glory and His people's salvation, making the wrath of men, and even the malice of Satan, all to praise Him. Not yet being in acknowledged relationship with His people, He speaks through angels, and in this manner forewarns them of the judgments about to come upon the world.

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Rev. 14:6-7).

Such is the first angelic voice. In the midst of man's wickedness God gives a call to repentance. While man is turning to idols, and worshipping the creature more than the Creator, God asserts once more His rights as Creator to the worship of those whom He has made. It is not here the gospel of His grace, but "the everlasting gospel," the claim of God on man as his Creator independent of all dispensations.

Neither we nor the millennial saints could worship God simply on the grounds on which His claim is here made to rest. We worship Him as a heavenly people redeemed by grace; the millennial saints will worship Him as an earthly people redeemed by grace; the remnant, during the great tribulation, will worship Him as the God of the promises, from whom they look for deliverance and blessing. But in this message to the dwellers upon the earth, whose hearts are now given up to idolatry, God asserts the double claim which Paul pressed upon the people of Athens—His claim as Creator, and His claim as Judge. He demands the worship now diverted from Him to idols, and warns them that the hour of His judgment is at hand.

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Rev. 14:8). If God's judgment is coming on all the earth, there are two systems specially marked out for visitation. In the address to the Church at Thyatira. We saw "the depths of Satan" in connection with a profession of Christianity, and learned the dreadful doom awaiting those who had corrupted themselves with Jezebel. As long as the Holy Ghost is on earth evil is more or less restrained; and during this time no religious system, however corrupt, is called "Babylon." but after the Holy Ghost is withdrawn the empty profession comes out in all its falsehood and rottenness. Then it is that the nominal Church, no longer seasoned with the salt of true believers, becomes the offensive mass of corruption to which the name Babylon is given. Then it is that God's judgment on the false system is executed. Here we have the warning given, the details and instruments of the judgment being recorded in a future chapter.

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:9-12). Offensive as Babylon is to God, there is something even worse. The idolatry and blasphemy of the Beast, the direct agent of Satan, is the climax of human apostasy and rebellion; and terrible is the judgment here foretold as awaiting it. Is this, then, a mere fancy picture?

Alas! it is not even a picture of far-distant events. We are told to be looking for the Lord's coming to take believers to Himself. Then "the door is shut." This may be at any moment, and what then? Satan's energy for evil redoubled; the Holy Ghost's energy for good withdrawn; man given up to his own will; strong delusion, judicially sent by God to blind the eyes of those who had refused the truth; the followers of the deceiver lost forever. Well may this gloomy picture sustain the patience of those who keep God's commandments, and hold the faith of Jesus! They may suffer grievously for their refusal to worship the beast and his image; but what are these sufferings compared with the eternal torments of those who, listening to the voice of present ease, become partakers in this blasphemous idolatry?

There is a manifest connection between the voices of these three angels. The world is divided between a lifeless superstition, having the form without the power, the name without the spirit, of Christianity, and a horrible, blasphemous form of creature-worship organized by Satan and his instruments. God first meets this by calling upon men to worship Him as Creator, the One who as man's Maker has a claim on his service, and as man's Judge will soon visit the world. He next warns men of the two things on which the lightnings of His judgment will descend with their most scathing force, the two forms of evil already spoken of. The fall of Babylon, the corrupt remnant of the Church after true believers are removed, is first announced; and then the awful doom of those who follow the delusions of the false Christ, and become the worshippers of the beast and his image.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying [unto me], Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and [or "for"] their works do follow them." This passage is often quoted with respect to departed believers, nor would anybody question its general applicability. But if we would rightly divide the word of truth we must beware of supposing that all the texts which are applicable to Christians were written about them. Here the words "from henceforth" show that a particular time is referred to, and that something more is meant than a mere general statement of the truth concerning the blessedness of the believing dead.

Nor, if we understand God's dealings at the period here spoken of, will there be any difficulty in seeing the special meaning intended. A thick cloud of moral and spiritual darkness is at this moment brooding over the earth, the Holy Ghost withdrawn, Satan working with awful energy and success in blinding the eyes of men, and human presumption and rebellion against God rising to its highest pitch. In this chapter we have revealed the blessed lot of those who hold the truth through this period of darkness, and then the dreadful fate of those who follow the two classes of delusion prevailing in the earth. But there is another class, those who hold the truth and yet perish during the miseries and persecutions of this disastrous time. These are the blessed dead here spoken of. They have had to choose between receiving the mark of the beast and death, and have chosen death. What then will be their portion?

This might seem an easy question, and if the reference were to our dispensation it could hardly have arisen. At present believers are a heavenly people, and should they die before the Lord comes, it is only another mode of being with Christ — "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." But in the time of which this part of the Revelation treats, believers are not a heavenly people. Instead of waiting to be taken to heaven, they are waiting to be blessed on the earth. This is their proper Scriptural hope. Moreover, though quickened, they are not sealed with the Holy Spirit, and have, therefore, neither the full assurance of salvation, nor the earnest of an inheritance to be shared with Christ. Death, accordingly, comes to them, not as a fulfillment, but as a frustration, of their hopes; not as introducing them to, but taking them from, their own proper promises. Hence a special word is needed, and is here sent, from God, to assure them of blessedness in another form. True the fruit of their labors is lost here, but it will be reaped in heaven, "for their works do follow them," and in the meanwhile all their toils and sufferings down here are brought to an end.

Having shown the blessings of the faithful survivors, and also of the martyrs, during this period; having warned men of the solemn retribution about to fall upon Babylon and the followers of the beast, another class of judgments overhanging the world is now unfolded. They are of two sorts, represented respectively under the figures of the harvest and the vintage of the earth.

THE HARVEST. "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (Rev. 14:14-16).

A prophecy in Joel will cast light on this and the next vision. "Let the Gentiles be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the Gentiles round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down, for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision (or threshing): for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:12-17).

It is clear that the scenes in the Revelation are taken from this prophecy, and describe the accomplishment of the events here foretold. We learn, therefore, the time, connection, and object of these judgments. The time is the advent of the day of the Lord, the period when He judges the Gentiles and restores Israel. Here, therefore, we see Israel to be the center of His purposes, Jerusalem the center of His interests, Zion the center of His government. The Gentiles, who have long oppressed them, are gathered for judgment, and the power and glory of Jehovah are manifested on the side of His chosen people, and issue forth from His chosen city. God has permitted the Gentiles to have their day, and the pass to which they have brought things is the terrible blasphemy and wickedness of the beast acting under Satanic inspiration. At this point He must intervene in judgment — "the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Everything is connected with Israel and the Messianic reign. It is an angel coming forth from the temple — that temple in the heavens where the ark of God's covenant was lately beheld — that bids the judgment commence. It is the Son of Man that executes this judgment. This is the title in which Christ takes the kingdom from God's hand (Dan. 7:13,14), intervenes for the deliverance of His chosen people (Psa. 80:17,18; Luke 21:27, 28), and has all things put under His feet. (Psa. 8:4-6; Heb. 2:5, 6). As Son of Man He now sits upon a white cloud, as He had foretold that He would come for Israel's salvation. As the Anointed of God He wears a golden crown, and carries a sharp sickle as the executor of righteous judgment on the earth. By Him "the harvest of the earth is reaped."

THE VINTAGE. "And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and he cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. And the wine-press was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the wine-press, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (Rev. 14:17-20).

There are two kinds of judgment spoken of by the prophets and our Lord — the one a judicial process discriminating between the wicked and the good; the other a terrible outpouring of wrath against open and avowed enemies. The nations summoned before the throne of glory where the Son of Man sits, and divided into two companies on the right hand and on the left, are dealt with in the former way. The armies of the beast and the false prophet, of the Assyrian and of Gog, are dealt with in the latter. These are the two sorts of judgment foreshadowed in these two visions. The figure of the harvest suggests the judicial inquiry, the separation of the wheat from the tares, and the binding up in separate bundles. The figure of the wine-press suggests the desolating and unsparing storm of divine indignation which shall devour His adversaries. The angel who bids the harvest commence comes out of the temple, a fit place from which to demand a holy, discriminating judgment. But the angel in the vintage scene comes "out of the altar," the place of consuming judgment, and has "power over fire," the symbol of devouring wrath. In the discriminating judgment Christ appears as the Son of Man, the character in which He will summon the Gentiles to His tribunal, and divide the sheep from the goats. In the second He appears only in His angelic character, as the Psalmist prays, "Let them be as chaff before the wind, and let the angel of Jehovah chase them" (Psa. 35:5).

The passage in Joel clearly shows that the subject is the judgment of the Gentiles. The harvest judgment has, as we have seen, at least a part of its fulfillment in the scene described in Matthew 25, where the Gentiles are arraigned before Christ's tribunal, and dealt with according to their treatment of the faithful Jews. The vintage judgment takes place outside "the city," and as no other city has yet been named, this can

only be Jerusalem, where the Lord's open and avowed enemies are gathered in hostility to His chosen people. The wine-press is trodden there, and blood flows for a "space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" — a vivid and awful picture of the wholesale destruction of the armies assembled against Jerusalem, through the two hundred miles, or whole length, of the Holy Land. In both cases it is a judgment of the Gentiles, the enemies of Jerusalem and of God's chosen people, preparatory to the establishment of the Messianic reign.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:1-3: The Things Which Are - the Preface (1:1-3)

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John, who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, [and of] all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:1-3). Such is the preface to this book, which is entitled, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." These words, however, do not mean His predicted revelation or manifestation to the world, but a revelation or prophetic communication which He receives from God and transmits to His servants. This shows the character in which the different persons, divine and human, are here presented. God is not looked at as the Father of believers, or even of Jesus Christ, but as sovereign Creator and Judge, communicating to Christ His own counsels. Jesus Christ, again, is not seen as "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," and acquainted with all that is there hidden, but as the servant, who knows and does nothing of Himself, the dependent man to whom God's purposes concerning the judgment of the earth and the coming kingdom are entrusted. He is thus seen in Mark's gospel, where He says, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).

To His disciples also He does not here show Himself as Head of the body, nor even as the Friend opening to them His heart, but as the Lord giving directions to His servants concerning "the things which must shortly come to pass." This "He sent and signified by His angel unto His servant John." Now angels were God's medium of communication with Israel. Stephen says they "received the law by the disposition of angels" (Acts 7:53); and in Hebrews, "the word spoken by angels" is contrasted with God speaking by the Son. (Chapter 1:2; 2:2). There is, then, a return to Jewish modes of communication perfectly suitable to the character of a book which unfolds God's dealings with the world when He restores to favor His earthly people; a book which regards the Church, not in its privileges, but in its responsibilities as a witness for Christ, a branch grafted into the good olive tree, which must either bear fruit or be broken off.

It is said the things "must shortly come to pass;" for the Church period is always left indefinite; and though the Lord, "not willing that any should perish," has hitherto mercifully postponed His coming, still His word is, "Behold, I come quickly," and His disciples are to have their "loins girded about, and their lamps burning," and to be "like unto men that wait for their Lord" (Luke 12:35-36).

The angel gives the message to John, "who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, — all things that he saw." There is no "and" before the last clause. He does not bear witness to something that he saw in addition, to the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ, but to all that he saw of them. Here again Christ is not the Son revealing the Father, but the faithful witness testifying God's word. And this word is earnestly commended to our study. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Of such value is the book in God's eyes. There is a blessing both upon reading and hearing; for the truth is practical, and must be held fast because its accomplishment is near.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:4-20: The Introduction (1:4-20)

The introduction comprises — first, the greeting (vss. 4-6); next, the general purport of the book, the coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory (vss. 7, 8); and lastly, the vision of Jesus as the Son of Man in His judicial vesture, walking amidst the golden candlesticks. (vss. 9-20).

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:4-5).

Here is the usual salutation, "Grace be unto you, and peace;" but not, as in Paul's epistles, "from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." On the contrary, God is here named the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come." This is the New Testament equivalent for Jehovah. He is the "I am," the self-existent One, and therefore the expression "which is" stands first. But as the "I am" He was from eternity, and will be to eternity; so it is added, "And which was, and which is to come." This phrase, "is to come," does not refer to His future coming in judgment, but to His eternal existence as the One who always is, always was, and always will be. This is not the way in which God elsewhere reveals Himself in the New Testament; it is a return to the character in which He shows Himself when declaring His ways concerning the world in the Old Testament. It harmonizes therefore with the general scope and object of the book, which unfolds God's actings in government towards the world, and towards the Church, as a professing system in the world.

Again, the Holy Ghost is described as "the seven Spirits which are before His throne." Afterward He is spoken of under the figure of "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 4:5), alluding to the seven lamps of the golden candlestick in the sanctuary. The number seven, so often used in this book, is a well-known Scripture symbol of heavenly perfection. The Spirit therefore is here looked at in reference rather to the complete circle of His activities than to the oneness of His person, which is so strongly insisted upon in connection with the Church considered as the body of Christ. The place of the seven Spirits, moreover, "before the throne," shows them to be connected with God's ways in the government of the world, not in the formation of the Church.

Further, in this salutation the name of Jesus Christ does not, as is usual elsewhere, follow that of God. He is looked at, not in His divinity, but as the Son of Man. He is "the faithful witness," giving to His servants the revelation He has received from God — "What He hath seen and

heard, that He testifieth" (John 3:32). But as man He is now the risen One, "the first-begotten of the dead;" and in this character He receives dominion, and is made "the prince of the kings of the earth," just as in Philippians 2:8-10, because He went down into death, "therefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." These three characters, which Jesus bears throughout this book—the faithful witness, the One who was dead, but is alive again, and the rightful ruler and judge—none of them relate exclusively to His connection with the Church; while the last clearly shows Him as the Messiah, the man of God's purposes for earthly government.

In all these titles and attributes, whether of God, of the Spirit, or of Jesus Christ, we see a departure from the Church position maintained in the New Testament, and a return to the principles, symbols, and associations of the Old. We are taken from the heavenly dispensation entrusted to Paul, and brought back to the earthly counsels and purposes unfolded in the Psalms and the prophets. All this, as before remarked, is in perfect harmony with the scope and character of this book.

But here a beautiful interruption comes in. Though in the style of the Old Testament, the salutation is to the seven churches, and the Church must respond to the name of Jesus. Suddenly therefore a chorus of praise bursts out — "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father [or, more correctly, "a kingdom, priests unto His God and Father"]; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:5, 6).

The Church is built on Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16-18). The word Father, which in this book is never applied to God's relationship with believers, is only used five times of His relationship with Christ. And in none of these passages is Christ regarded as Judge, but as connected with the Church or an elect people. Here it is the Church's joyous response to the mention of His name and titles. In the next three instances it occurs in promises to the overcomers in the different churches. It is used once again in connection with the saved remnant who stand with the Lamb on mount Zion, "having His Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1). There He is seen as God's anointed King seated in Zion, and declaring the decree, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

It is beautiful to observe how believers cannot think of Jesus even as Judge without exulting joy. For them the judgment has no terrors; for they know Him as the One "that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." This gives peace to the conscience, and confidence to the heart. They can add, too, "And hath made us a kingdom — priests unto His God and Father." Peter calls believers "a royal priesthood." They are entitled to reign with Christ, and are priests "to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5,9). They are also the depositaries of God's counsels concerning Christ, and can, even during His rejection, ascribe to Him "glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The salutation is followed by a statement of the grand purpose toward which the whole book is directed: "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). This is not the Lord's coming for His saints; for then He will appear only "unto them that look for Him" (Heb. 9:28). Nor is it His coming at the end of the world to judge the dead before the great white throne. The coming here spoken of is that which, as recorded later in this book, precedes His thousand years' reign over the earth.

This is clear from a comparison with other Scriptures. Jesus said to the Jews, "Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39). In the passage before us however the Jews do see Him; for "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." Now this is a quotation from Zechariah, describing the effect of Christ's appearing on the faithful remnant of the Jews at the time of their national deliverance: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom, they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zech. 12:9-10). This quotation shows that the time here spoken of is when the godly remnant of the Jews, lamenting their sin in the rejection of the Messiah, own Him as the One "that cometh in the name of the Lord." Then Jerusalem's deliverance and Judah's blessing will be accomplished, for God will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

But though a day of repentance and deliverance for the godly Jews, it is a day of solemn judgment for others. "Behold, He cometh with clouds," recalls the words spoken, certainly not as a promise, to Caiaphas and the Council, as representing the unbelieving mass of the people. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Nor is it only to the Jews that this appearing will be a solemn event. To unbelievers everywhere He will come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8).

"I am Alpha and Omega, [the beginning and the ending], saith the Lord "[or rather "the Lord God"], "which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). Here it is not Christ that speaks, but the Lord God-Jehovah-Elohim-the Almighty. Now the names of God are not arbitrarily used, but are titles suited to the character in which He is acting. In human matters everyone knows how differently the same persons address each other according to the relationships they occupy at the moment. Take two brothers, both in Parliament, and one the mayor of some borough. In familiar intercourse they call each other by their Christian names. In corporation business the one would address the other as "your worship." In the House of Commons they would speak of each other as the honorable member for so and so. Each title would be suited to its own place, and quite unsuited to the others, and everybody would understand from the name or title used whether the one speaking was addressing his brother as a brother, a mayor, or a member of Parliament. Scripture is assuredly not less accurate in the use of the titles applied to God than men are in the use of the titles they give to one another.

It is important therefore to observe that many of the titles given to God in this book are never found elsewhere in the New Testament, while they are of constant occurrence in the Old. Thus the name "Almighty" is never used in any other book of the New Testament, except once in a quotation. So the name "Lord God," often used in the Revelation, is never found elsewhere in the New Testament (for 1 Peter 3:15 should read "the Lord Christ"), except in citations from the Old, or in prophecies like that of Zechariah relating to Israel, which bear throughout an Old Testament character, and are largely made up of Old Testament quotations.

What, then, is the import of this departure from the New Testament style of speaking about God, and this return to Old Testament titles? These titles have a significance. God said to Moses, "I am the Lord [Jehovah]; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by My name Jehovah was I not known unto them" (Ex. 6:2-3). Thus "Almighty" was the title under which God

entered into covenant with Abraham; Jehovah Elohim, "Lord God," was the title under which He entered into covenant with Israel. Both these covenants are connected with the earth, and have their fulfillment in the earthly reign of the Messiah. The significance, then, of this return to the Old Testament titles is exceedingly great. It marks that God is now reverting to His purposes concerning the earth, and that the character in which He here reveals Himself is not that in which we now know Him, but that which He will take after the Church is caught up to heaven, and when He resumes His long-suspended dealings with Israel and the world in preparation for the Messiah's reign.

The third part of this introduction is the vision of Christ's glory. "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9). John was banished to Patmos for his faithfulness to the truth. Writing to believers, he styles himself their brother; but he was also their "companion in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ." The words are singularly, but most expressively, grouped. First, there is the companionship of believers in Christ's sufferings. This suggests that "if we suffer we shall also reign with Him;" hence, after the "tribulation," comes the "kingdom." But the kingdom is not yet. Christ has not yet taken His throne, but is seated at God's right hand, waiting "till His enemies be made His footstool." Now they are triumphant, and His people are called upon to share His patience. That they had kept the word of His patience is one of His highest commendations to the church of Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:10). In all these things, the tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patience, it is the servant's privilege to be associated with his Master. The tribulation and the patience are his present portion; the kingdom will come in God's time.

"I was [or became] in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet" (Rev 1:10). This does not describe his usual spiritual condition, but a state in which he was, under the Spirit's power, receiving inspired communications from Christ. "The Lord's day" is not "the day of the Lord," from which in the original it differs in form as widely as in meaning. The day of the Lord is the time of Christ's power and glory on earth. But the Lord's day was a day which John spent in Patmos. In creation God appointed a day of rest, and in His covenant with Israel marked it specially as His own. The covenant is gone, and the rest of the old creation broken. God therefore, instead of calling us to share His rest from the old creation, calls upon us to share His joy in the new. The day on which this new creation began, by Christ's resurrection from the dead, is called "the Lord's day." It is not a transfer of the sabbath from the last day of the week to the first, for this would destroy the meaning of both, but an entirely new thing, resting on an entirely new foundation.

Being thus "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," he adds, I "heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, [I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and,] What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches [which are in Asia]; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea" (Rev 1:10-11). The words in brackets are omitted here by the best authorities. The trumpet signifies God speaking with power and majesty. It was with the sound of a trumpet that He gave the law on mount Sinai; it is with the sound of a trumpet that Christ will summon the believing dead to meet Him in the air.

Looking round, John beholds the form from which this voice proceeds. "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev 1:12-16).

Here Christ appears as Son of Man, clothed in judicial robes. He is "in the midst of the seven candlesticks," which, as we afterward learn, "are the seven churches" here addressed. (Rev 1:20). His majesty befits the One to whom all judgment is committed. The "garment down to the foot" is the judicial robe, as distinguished from the warrior "vesture dipped in blood," with which He afterward comes forth to execute judgment (Rev. 19:13); since here judgment is only pronounced, and not executed. He is "girt about the paps with a golden girdle," the symbol of divine righteousness; for when he acts in judgment, "righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins" (Isa. 11:5).

His person is as indicative of judgment as His robe, and shows His divine glory as well as His human exaltation. "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." In Daniel's vision, when the judgment of the earth began, "the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool" (Dan. 7:9). The glory therefore which in Daniel belongs to the Ancient of days, is here seen investing the "One like unto the Son of Man."

"His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." Both figures signify judgment. Brass was the material of the altar on which the sacrifice was burnt to meet the claims of God's righteousness. The eyes like fire show searching, discriminating judgment; for fire is what tests, purifying the good, destroying the bad. Thus in Malachi, Christ comes "like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2), and when Israel is restored, the Lord will purge "the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning" (Isa. 4:4). Paul, too, says that "every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13).

"And His voice was as the sound of many waters." This figure is eminently expressive of majesty and power, and is so used by our own poets, as Wordsworth says of Milton: "Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea." In Ezekiel 1:24 the sound made by the wings of the cherubim is compared to "the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty;" and afterward, "the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east, and His voice was like a noise of many waters" (Ezek. 43:2). A voice like the sound of many waters is, therefore, a Scriptural figure of the glory and majesty of God, and it is in this glory that Christ, though man, now appears.

"And He had in His right hand seven stars." These are afterward said to be "the angels of the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). Whatever the force of the expression, the power which Christ here holds in His right hand is clearly nothing less than complete authority, whether for ministry or government, over the churches.

"And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." The Word of God is likened to a sharp two-edged sword, and though this refers to its power on the conscience, it is no less sharp in judgment also. "He that rejecteth Me," said our Lord, "and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). He threatens the evil-doers in

Pergamos to “fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16); and the followers of the beast are “slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth” (Rev. 19:21). So Isaiah, foretelling His coming, says, “He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:4).

“And His countenance was as the sun shineth in His strength.” Nothing can more strikingly picture His power and glory than this figure of the noonday sun. As the greatest of God’s visible works, it is the symbol of supreme authority, “the greater light” which He has created “to rule the day.” This was the glory in which John and his companions beheld Him when He “was transfigured before them, and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). The transfiguration was the testimony which God gave to chosen witnesses of “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:16); and in this book, where His coming “with clouds” is the great climax to which everything tends, we behold Him clothed in the same glory.

Such are the judicial robes and majesty of Christ in connection with “the things which are,” as walking “in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.” They are suited to Him as judging in the house of God, but are not the insignia either of “the prince of the kings of the earth,” or the executor of God’s counsels concerning His earthly people. When He appears in these characters, as connected with “the things which shall be after these,” the vesture and titles we have been examining are changed for others of a totally different kind.

“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17). No wonder! Who can behold Christ judging the Church according to its responsibility, without feeling the dreadful failure? But His words dispel all dread. “And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth [or, “the living One”]; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hades and of death” (Rev. 1:17-18). What reassuring words. True, Christ is judge, and is clothed in majesty befitting His office; but to John He says, “Fear not.” And why? Because He, the first and the last, the living One, has become man, has died, and has risen. He “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Thus “we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). He has robbed Satan of his power, death of its sting, the grave of its victory, and He now has in His hands “the keys of hades and of death.” This victory, wrought by His death and resurrection, sets the soul at rest, and dispels the fear of judgment.

The Lord then charges John: “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” [or, “after these “]. (Rev. 1:19). “The things which thou hast seen” are those already related. There remain therefore “the things which are, and the things which shall be after these.” In the fourth chapter (Rev. 4:1) John is bidden to come up into heaven, and behold “the things which must be after these.” “The things which are,” therefore, comprise those named in the second and third chapters; “the things which shall be after these” comprise those named in the following chapters. The first were seen by John on earth, the second in heaven.

The symbols are then explained: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks [which thou sawest] are the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20). There has been much discussion as to what is meant by the angels. They are clearly not angels in the ordinary sense; for there is no Scripture showing angels to have charge of local churches; and who can suppose that Christ would speak to angels through the prophet? The angel, too, is here identified with the moral condition of the Church, and must therefore be a part of it, some person or persons holding towards it a place of special responsibility. Some have inferred that it means a clergyman or official minister, like those now found through nearly the whole of Christendom; but this is mere assumption, and an assumption which is contradicted by all other Scripture. Had God instituted such a ministry He would have revealed it plainly, not left it to be surmised from a passage whose mystical character appears upon its face. The word angel carries the idea of representation, and seems to be here used figuratively to describe those who are responsible, from their gift or influence, for the condition of the Church. These doubtless included teachers and rulers, but no information is given as to their appointment or functions. This must be gathered from other parts of the Word.

The seven golden candlesticks — a figure borrowed from the seven lamps of the tabernacle-symbolize the seven churches. They are “golden;” for the Church is founded on God’s righteousness, and so bears the stamp of its divine origin. But they are candlesticks, not candles. The Church is not a source of light, and the claim to be so has been one of the most fruitful seeds of evil in Christendom. It is, however, responsible for holding forth the light; and if it fails in this, it is useless. Hence the threat that the candlestick will be removed out of its place.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 20:7-10: Satan Loosed a Little Season (20:7-10)

The blessings of the earth during the Messiah’s reign, the fulfillment of the prophecies to Abraham and to David, the removal of the curse on creation, the new covenant with Israel and Judah; these and other subjects of deep interest are abundantly treated of in the prophets, and are alluded to in the New Testament. But they are all omitted here. The glories of the heavenly Jerusalem and the heavenly bride are recorded; those of the earthly Jerusalem and the earthly bride are passed over in silence. For in this book the earth is always a scene of judgment. And now a very solemn fact is mentioned. “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them” (Rev. 20:7-9).

Such is man, and such is Satan. A thousand years confinement in the bottomless pit has not changed the character of the deceiver. A thousand years’ blessedness under Christ’s rule has not changed the nature which greedily listens to the deceiver’s voice. Gog and Magog are here used in a wider sense than in Ezekiel, and their invasion differs in time and details, though agreeing in character and object, with that which he foretells. Ezekiel predicts an incursion by a great northern power called Gog, which, from certain geographical indications, is easily identified with Russia. In the Revelation, however, Gog and Magog are used to designate the nations, not merely from the north, but from all parts, “the four quarters of the earth.” Again, the invasion named by Ezekiel is at the beginning of Christ’s reign; that in the Revelation at the end. The hosts in Ezekiel, too, fall on the mountains, and their bodies are buried; whereas the forces assembled in the

Revelation are devoured by fire from heaven.

The judgment is instantaneous. Christ's reign is a reign of righteousness, during which evil is not tolerated as now, but promptly crushed. Fire from heaven here, as with Sodom and Gomorrah, overwhelms the gathered hordes, and thus in hideous and hopeless ruin ends the last vain attempt of man to act in independence of God.

The people of Israel are here owned as "the saints," and Jerusalem as "the beloved city." Taken in connection with Old Testament promises and prophecies this presents no difficulties. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Psa. 48:2). "They shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isa. 60:14,15). "Be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people" (Isa. 65:18, 19). It is only when these clear statements are discredited, and an interpretation contrary to their plain meaning adopted, that difficulties begin to appear.

This rebellion against Christ is Satan's last triumph, and the last outbreak of man's enmity to God. We have seen how the nations are at once swept away by the fiery tempest which bursts upon them. We now see the final doom of their malignant deceiver. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and [they] shall be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). He had previously been shut up in "the bottomless pit;" now he is cast into the "lake of fire"-that awful abode into which the beast and the false prophet were hurled a thousand years before; that "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," to which the "cursed" ones, placed on the left hand of the Son of Man in His judgment of the living nations, are hopelessly consigned.

There "they" (that is, the beast and the false prophet, as well as Satan) "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." What do these words mean? Setting aside this book, the New Testament only uses them in ascribing praise to God in such texts as, "To whom be glory forever and ever." In the Revelation they are applied to the reign of Christ, but their commonest use is to designate the eternal existence of God, who is repeatedly spoken of as the One "that liveth forever and ever." Why is it so used? Clearly because Scripture language contains no phrase equally strong to describe continued, immutable existence. Now, if the strongest phrase that can be applied to the eternal existence of God Himself is here used with respect to the torments of Satan and the companions of his doom, it is surely meant that these sufferings are eternal in the fullest and largest sense of the word, everlasting, enduring without cessation and without end.

No doubt the phrase means "to the ages of ages," and when applied, as in the Old Testament, or in reference to Christ's kingdom, to the things of this world, it means, of course, during the ages of this world; that is, as long as the world lasts. But in the passage before us this application is impossible, since at this very time the world comes to an end, the punishment of Satan being at the close of the thousand years' reign, which is the last stage in the world's history. No limitation therefore to the term of this world's existence is here possible. The words are spoken on the threshold of a boundless eternity over which no measuring line of dates and epochs is thrown. In that eternity the self-existent God is declared to live "forever and ever." In that eternity the torment of the lost is said to endure "forever and ever." Surely it becomes those saved by grace, instead of replying against God, silently to bow our heads before this unfathomable mystery, and adore the goodness which has delivered us by such a ransom from so fearful a doom.

Nor are these words used of the three great offenders alone. Those who worship the beast and his image "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night" (Rev. 14:10, 11). These, many of whom are "slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse," are raised for judgment after the world has "fled away," so that any limitation of the punishment by the ages of the world's existence is, in their case as in the other, impossible. Their doom therefore, like that of the beast and the false prophet, is an eternity of suffering. And this surely removes all question as to the sense in which the other phrases used on this subject are to be interpreted. "These shall go away into eternal punishment" must mean the same punishment which others, cast into the same lake of fire, undergo, and this is, as we have seen, in the fullest sense of the words, "forever and ever."

It is easy to quibble about phrases. "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," is, no doubt, a figure; but is it a figure of transient or of unending suffering? Does our Lord in thrice repeating these solemn words mean that, though the worm dies not, the people on whom the worm feeds do die? that, though the fire is not quenched, the people who are tormented in it cease to exist? Surely this is trifling with the words of God. What does a man sentenced to a limited term of imprisonment care whether the prison in which he is confined is a permanent or temporary structure? What does a man condemned to be stretched on the rack care whether the rack will last for an indefinite time, or will be destroyed immediately after he has been tortured? All they are concerned about is the time during which they suffer. So, if the worm and the fire are figures of punishment, how can it affect those doomed to a limited period of such suffering to know that after they have ceased to suffer the instruments of their torment will exist forever? If words are to be understood in their ordinary sense, the torment spoken of is eternal, unending, as the existence of God Himself.

This understanding of the words "forever and ever," throws an appalling gloom over the scene which next rises before us. Christ "must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." The judgment of the quick has already been completed. It only remains that the dead should be summoned before His tribunal also. The believing dead have had their part in the resurrection to life a thousand years before the end of the world, but "the rest of the dead" are still, throughout the thousand years' reign, in their graves, for they live not again until the thousand years are finished. Now, however, is come "the time of the dead that they should be judged."

"And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before [not "God," but] the throne; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and Death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death [even the lake of fire]. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:11-15).

The end of the world is now come. Before the face of Him that sits upon the great white throne, the earth and the heaven fled away. Nature is dissolved, the present order of creation disappears, to make way for that new creation which God will bring in upon the ruins of the old. The time has come when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). This is the last act in "the day of the Lord," and at this supreme moment we have now arrived. All that man has been living for, the world and his own works in it, his riches, his greatness, the mighty monuments of his skill, the cities he has built, the empires he has founded, all on which his pride and his affections were fixed, vanish as a waking dream—"there was found no place for them."

But though man's works are gone, though the very earth has melted away, man himself has not perished. Those yet in their graves belong to Christ, not, alas! for salvation, but for judgment. "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (John 17:2:) Some are given to Him that He may bestow upon them eternal life; but He has power over all flesh; all is His. He has not redeemed all, but He has purchased all, the lost as well as the saved. Thus Peter speaks of false teachers, "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). His rights, by virtue of the cross, extend to all, and all must bow the knee to Him "of things [or beings] in heaven, and beings in earth, and beings under the earth" — all, heavenly, earthly, and infernal, must own His lordship. The redeemed own it in grace; the rejecters of grace must own it in judgment.

He has bought their bodies as well as their souls, and now the hour is come in which all that are still in their graves must hear His voice and come forth to the resurrection of judgment, to be judged according to the stainless purity of the great white throne. On that throne Christ, not God, is seated; for though God is "the Judge of all" (Heb. 12:23), He "hath committed all judgment unto the Son," and that "because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:22,27). It is God's judgment, because Christ, as the perfect man, perfectly executes God's righteousness; but it is before "the Son of Man" that "the dead, small and great," are here arraigned.

And now the great assize begins. "The books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life." These are figures found in Daniel, and drawn from the proceedings of human tribunals. There are two books — one containing the works of the dead, for they were "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works," the other registering the names of those ordained to eternal life. The dead now raised may be divided into two classes, those who died before the reign of Christ, and those who died during that reign. As to the first, their fate is painfully evident. "They that are Christ's" are raised at His coming for His saints. Those who die in the Lord between His coming for His saints and His coming to reign have also part in the first resurrection. All, therefore, that have died "in the Lord" from the beginning of the world to Christ's reign, have already been raised a thousand years, and "the rest of the dead" consists of persons who were not "in the Lord." These are judged according to their works. Their names cannot be in the book of life. Its silence can only witness against them. For them, therefore, there can be nothing but the second death; for "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

As to the other class, those who die during the reign of Christ, Scripture is not so explicit. We read in Isaiah "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed.... For as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. 65:19-22). It is clear, then, that death during the millennium will, in certain cases, be inflicted as a judgment, and of course sinners thus cut off will be raised for condemnation. But is it equally clear that death will happen only as a judgment? Doubtless there will be great longevity in Israel, but we are not told that this extends to the Gentiles, or that even in Israel death is excluded except as a penalty. And if there is nothing in Isaiah conclusively proving that believers will not die during this period, neither is there anything in the Revelation showing that their names may not be found in the book of life when raised in the final resurrection.

It is thought indeed by some, that all, if judged according to their works, must be lost. But in the judgment of the quick described in Matthew 25 the Gentiles are judged according to their works, and yet some are saved. Indeed this is always the principle of God's action, for it is said that the dead "shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." Now how can any be said to "have done good," and not to "have done evil"? Merely because their evil deeds are blotted out by the blood of Christ, and only the deeds wrought in them by the Spirit are reckoned. This principle would apply to believers dying — if any do die — during the millennium. Where Scripture says so little, one should speak cautiously; but it seems a somewhat strong inference to conclude that only the wicked die during Christ's reign, or that, because the judgment is according to man's works, none can be saved. The statement that "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" suggests, at least, a different conclusion.

We repeat, however, that if any are saved in this resurrection, it can only be believers dying during the millennial age. Its general, if not universal, character is, therefore, that of doom. It is the solemn knell of the second, the eternal, death. The countless millions of sinners who have perished in their sins, the millions who have heard the word of God's salvation and rejected it, the millions who have been "almost persuaded," but not quite; the millions who have said, "We will hear thee again of this matter," and then turned away to indulge in their lusts; the amiable, the upright, the religious, the self-righteous, who have been too good for Christ — all will be there. Not one can escape. "The sea gave up the dead which were in it." "Death and Hades," the resting-place of the body and the home of the spirit, "delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works." Nor are these merely the works seen by man, for in that day "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:16). To all, except, perhaps, the class already named, there is one fearful doom. "Death and Hades," it says, "were cast into the lake of fire," all their crowded vaults emptied into this gulf of endless woe. "This is the second death."

It is strange that these words, which seem to, bid an eternal farewell to hope, should be urged as an argument against the eternity of punishment. True, fire is a symbol of destruction, but destruction does not necessarily involve annihilation. In this case it has not this force, for the beast and the false prophet, as well as Satan, were cast into the lake of fire, but instead of being annihilated, are there "tormented day and night forever and ever." Again, there is nothing in the second death which implies annihilation. Where in Scripture is death used with this meaning? Does a man dead in trespasses and sins mean a man who does not exist? Does the first death put an end to conscious being? The rich man and Lazarus, to say nothing of the thief on the cross, are a sufficient answer to this question. On what ground, then, can it be

argued, in spite of the plain declaration that the lost shall be tormented “forever and ever,” that the second death means annihilation? Alas that men should rather seek to blindfold themselves to the horrors of the coming wrath, than escape it by casting themselves on the infinite riches of divine grace!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 21:1-8: The Eternal State (21:1-8)

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1). These words are taken from God’s promise to Israel: “Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isa. 65:17,18). But though similar language is used, the New Testament vastly expands its meaning. The state of things in the millennial age so differs from that previously existing, that it is figuratively described as a new heaven and a new earth; but the context shows that the change is only from the present condition of the world to the infinitely more blessed condition it will assume, both physically and morally, under the reign of Christ. This is the scope of Old Testament prophecy; but the New Testament brings us to the shores of the boundless eternity which stretches beyond, and bids us gaze on the new heaven and the new earth of this unending age.

Peter describes believers as “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless,” he adds, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:12,13). In the millennial earth righteousness reigns; but wickedness, though repressed and judged, still exists. It can hardly be said therefore that righteousness yet dwells on earth; that is, has the earth for its suited, settled abode. Moreover the day spoken of by Peter is after “the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” It is not therefore in the millennium, but after both the millennium and the world itself have vanished away. During Christ’s reign the physical condition of the earth will be greatly improved; but in the age spoken of in the Revelation it is entirely altered. Before Him that sat on the great white throne “the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them.” Now all is new. “There was no more sea.” This implies a total reconstruction of the globe and its atmosphere, as well as of the physical organization of those inhabiting it. These new heavens and new earth are therefore quite different from those named by Isaiah.

Another striking feature may be noticed. In the verses we are now to look at the Lamb is not mentioned, only God. This is quite different from the millennial earth, where Christ reigns, having had it put in subjection to Him as Son of Man. The order of events sketched by Paul will explain this. He says, “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith, All things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:21-28).

Now this passage explains the order of events. Death having entered by man, Christ takes His place as man to bring in resurrection. He Himself rises the first-fruits of the new creation, then His people at His coming. His reign follows, lasting till every enemy is subdued. In this reign He is still the subject man, receiving dominion and power from God, and exercising it in obedience to God. The last enemy subdued is death. Now this is the stage at which we have arrived in the Revelation — His reign has been sketched, His enemies subdued, and last of all death itself defeated and destroyed. What comes then? Christ yields up the kingdom to the Father, and God, not the Father, but God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is “all in all.”

When God is adored as Creator (Rev. 4) the Son is unseen; God alone appears. And as in the past eternity, before the first heaven and the first earth were created, so in the future eternity, after the first heaven and the first earth have passed away. Then again God will be all in all; not exercising His dominion through a man, even the Son in man’s nature, but in His own eternal sovereignty as God. This is just what we find in the brief description of the eternal state given in the Revelation.

In this eternal state the Church, symbolized as the holy city, and also as the bride, has a glorious place: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:2, 3). It is said of the new Jerusalem in the millennium that “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it” (Rev. 22:3). In the eternal state the Lamb is not seen; for Christ has given up the kingdom to the Father, and God is all in all. But the city will still be, as during the millennium, God’s dwelling-place; for when it is seen coming down out of heaven there comes “a great voice,” saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.”

Paul declares believers to be “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20-22). The Church then is designed to be God’s dwelling-place. Now it is “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” In the millennial age “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.” In the eternal state God, who is all in all, will make it His tabernacle. Such is the marvelous destiny of the Church. It is a “mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:9,10).

But the Church will also retain its glory as the Lamb’s wife. True, God will then be all in all, and to this end Christ, as man, will have given up His rule into the Father’s hands. But Christ, though not administering God’s government as man, will never cease to be man, and will never cease to love the Church, “which He hath purchased with His own blood.” He will still love her as His own flesh, and in the new heaven and the new earth she will still appear “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

The figure of the Church as God's tabernacle recalls the camp in the wilderness, where God, descending from heaven, had His dwelling-place constructed after the heavenly pattern, in the midst of Israel, thus marking them as His people and showing Himself to be their God. The resemblance, however, only extends to the manner in which God dwelt among them in a tabernacle suited to His own glory. In other respects all is contrast. In the wilderness were sin and death, weary wandering and unsatisfied expectations, distance from God and trials of the journey. In this eternal scene of bliss sin and death are unknown, or remembered only as vanquished foes. Here is no more wandering, for all have entered into the rest that remaineth for the people of God; no more expectation, for every longing of the heart has found complete satisfaction. Distance from God is no more known, for the glorified saints are fitted for the presence of Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." And the trials and sorrows of the wilderness have been left for the unclouded rest and joy of the desired land.

How wonderful the change! "And [God] shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful" (Rev. 21:4, 5). What marvels are condensed in these few words! When God created the world and man He saw that all was very good. Alas! the deceiver entered, and fearful havoc was soon made in this fair scene. Sin fell with its withering blight upon creation, and this world, acting in independence of God, became a wilderness of death and sorrow, of tears and pain. But now the Son of God has been made man to redeem a people for Himself and for God, to save them from their sins, and to bring them into that dependence from which alone happiness can flow. Here we see the blessed and eternal fruits of His toil — God, in His infinite holiness, able to take His place in this new creation, and to shed around the blessings of His love to a happy and dependent people; all tears wiped away; death with its dark shadow blotted out of the scene; pain and sorrow forever gone. Such is the blessed lot of those among whom God can dwell. How different from the ruin and misery a world which knows Him not. Do our hearts answer, with a sigh, that such riches of glory are beyond our powers to conceive? How graciously God stoops to meet our weakness and reassure our faith! "And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

How, then, are these blessings to be secured? "And He said unto me, It is done [or, "they are done"]. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all [or, "these"] things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (Rev. 21:6-7). How cheering, after these unspeakable glories have flashed before our eyes, to be told that the Eternal One, the first and the last, is pledged to accomplish them on our behalf, and that they are ours freely. The second death is the portion of man by nature; for "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." But to the thirsting one, whose parched soul feels its need of the gift of God, is given "of the fountain of the water of life freely." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," says our Lord; "but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

There are two conditions, and two only—the thirst and the conquest. "He that overcometh, shall inherit these things." But does not this imply some power, some merit, on the part of man? Not at all. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Israel overcame Pharaoh's host, not by their own strength, but by God's. To us, as to them, the word is, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13). When Satan accused the brethren before God, "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;" that is, by their faith in the work of Christ and the word of God. And so against all the array of adversaries that Satan and circumstances may gather against us, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

The Eternal One has pledged His word that they who thirst, and put their trust in Him, poor, empty sinners who come to draw from His infinite fullness, shall inherit all these surpassing blessings and glories which it is the delight of His heart to bestow. Alas! however, there is another side to this picture. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whore-mongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Rev. 21:8). How solemn the contrast. We are now in God's eternity, after all the ages of this world have rolled their course; in that trackless ocean of time which stretches out into the immeasurable future. In this limitless expanse two classes, each living, each fixed in its present condition "forever and ever," stand before us. The thirsting one whose lips sought the water of life, who leaned on the might of God for victory, shall inherit nameless glories and blessedness in His presence forever. The unbeliever, the doubting one, who refused the message of God's grace, or, left to himself, pursued the desires and follies of his own corrupt heart, will receive eternal perdition, the unending misery of the second death.

Not one ray of light struggles through the blackness of this dense cloud. It is the final, irrevocable doom. Restoration and annihilation are the wrecker's fires by which Satan seeks to deceive his victims till they are dashed to pieces on the rocks of eternal judgment. God holds out the steady light of His Word to save men from these false guides, and to direct their eyes to the true channel, His own way of salvation, by which alone they can escape the wrath to come. He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, and still the voice of Him who died for the lost goes pleadingly forth, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Thus in hopeless gloom for the unbeliever, and in cloudless glory for the believer, ends this brief vision of the eternal state. "The second death" shuts in its jaws the refusers of grace, those who "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." The presence of God, including in itself all other blessings, sheds an eternal radiance of joy and glory over those who have believed in Him. Scripture furnishes no other light with respect to this period, this boundless stretch of future existence in which God is all in all. We are set for a moment on its shores to gaze into its fathomless immensity, permitted to catch one glimpse of its surpassing glories and one wail from its unending woes; then the curtain is dropped, and the prophet's vision turns away to other scenes.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 21:9-22:6: The New Jerusalem (21:9-27)

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9). The sudden change of scene and person shows that this is not a continuation of the vision we have just been looking at. A new person comes as John's guide, perhaps the same that had shown him the harlot before, but not the one in whose presence he had just been. This guide opens to him a new sight; one, indeed, which he had already beheld in a general way in his vision of the eternal state, but whose detailed glories are now to be fully unfolded to his eyes.

One great feature of the seven vials was the fall of Babylon, which prepared the way for the marriage of the Lamb, and the appearance of the bride. The angels, therefore, who poured out these vials are fitting messengers sent to show, first the judgment of the false wife, and next the glories of the true. It was one of them which came to John, and talked with him, saying, "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (Rev. 17:1). It is one of them which now again comes and talks with him, saying, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." The similarity is not accidental. It shows a connection which intensifies the contrast between the two things thus symbolized. What is the direct opposite of the false church which, however widely spread, has its roots in Rome? Surely the true Church, which has its roots in heaven, where Christ, its life, is. To contrast Jerusalem under the Messiah's reign with the false system of religion which has borne the name of Christ, would be altogether without point. The false thing must be contrasted with the true, the counterfeit with the genuine.

Both the false and the true Church are set out under two very different symbols. Looking Christward, the false church is the harlot, and the true Church is the wife. Looking manward, the false church is Babylon, the habitation of confusion, and the true Church is Jerusalem, "the habitation of peace." The harlot is decked out in a gaudy robe fitted to dazzle the world; the bride is arrayed in a white garment, pleasing to the eye of Christ. The great system framed according to man's will is a moral chaos; the great system molded according to God's mind is the display of perfect symmetry and order. No doubt the symbolic description of the true Church is borrowed from Jerusalem, just as the symbolic description of the false church is borrowed from Babylon. But this no more proves the real Jerusalem to be meant by the one description than the real Babylon to be meant by the other. On the contrary, if we admit Babylon to be a figure, we must admit Jerusalem to be a figure also, each morally perfect, but not to be confounded with the reality.

Indeed that this New Jerusalem is not a real city seems obvious, for it is described, not as the dwelling-place of the bride, but as the bride herself, whose marriage with the Lamb has already been celebrated in heaven. Its form too, as shown in the following verses, though exquisite as a symbol of the divine symmetry of the true Church, is impossible as the shape of a real city. Besides, the description of the millennial Jerusalem given by Ezekiel, while bearing some resemblance, is for the most part a striking contrast, to the glorious vision here beheld.

"And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem [or "the holy city, Jerusalem"], descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:10, 11). When he saw the judgment of the harlot, he was carried "away in the spirit into the wilderness, "the home of desolation and death. When he sees the glories of the bride, he is carried "away in the spirit to a great and high mountain." Mountains, in Scripture, are often used, both symbolically and literally, as the scenes of glorious visions. It was from a mountain height that Balaam was forced to exclaim, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" It was from a mountain height that Moses saw stretched beneath him the glorious land he was not permitted to enter. It was on a mountain height that the Lord Himself was transfigured before the eyes of His bewildered disciples. The figure here is taken from Ezekiel's vision, when he was carried to the land of Israel, and set "upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south" (Ezek. 40:2). But the resemblance only brings out more clearly the difference of the two visions. In Ezekiel the earthly character of the scene is marked. The place of observation is "the land of Israel," and the city is on the earth. John's place of observation is not connected with Israel, and the city is not on earth, but "descending out of heaven from God."

The symbol of a city being adopted, the name given is naturally that of the city in which God will have His delight, the city of peace, Jerusalem. But it is the heavenly Jerusalem in contrast with the earthly, and blessed and glorious as the earthly city will be, what are its blessings and glories compared with those now set forth in connection with this holy city descending from heaven? It has "the glory of God." Its light is "like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." In an earlier chapter, He that sits upon the throne is "to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone" (Rev. 4:3). The Church appears, therefore, in the glory of God Himself. All the brilliancy of the jasper, all the transparent purity of the crystal — "the glory of God," meetness for "the inheritance of the saints in light," such is the Church after Christ has presented it "to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" but "holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

"And [it] had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates" (Rev. 21:12, 13). In Ezekiel the city is also quadrangular, having twelve gates, three on each side, named after the twelve tribes of Israel. (Ezek. 48:30-35). In both cases there is complete order and symmetry; in both cases a connection between the city and Israel. But in Ezekiel's city it is an earthly connection; in the city in the Revelation it is a heavenly connection, for at the gates are twelve angels. The gate is the place where the judges sit, and it was promised the apostles that "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). We know not, indeed, how the saints will exercise judgment, and the vision here is manifestly symbolic. It agrees, however, with our Lord's promise in showing some kind of connection between the Church, or heavenly Jerusalem, and the earthly government of God having Israel for its center.

The "wall great and high" suggests separation and security. Everything defiling must be shut out from God's dwelling-place as out of the tabernacle of old, and perfect security beyond the reach of evil is the blessed portion of God's redeemed people. "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the [twelve] names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). The Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Some may ask, Where is Paul, the special depository of Church truth? In a literal description it would of course be necessary to make the numbers accurately agree with the number of apostles. This description however is not literal, but symbolic; and in symbolic descriptions this literal accuracy is not needed. Twelve is often used as a typical number where it is not strictly adhered to in fact. Thus Scripture always speaks of the twelve tribes, when in reality there were thirteen; and our Lord promises that the twelve apostles should sit on twelve thrones judging Israel when one of them was a "son of perdition." In common usage convenient typical numbers are retained as descriptions, though the actual numbers may differ. Thus in many trades a dozen is used, not to mean twelve, but some arbitrary number deviating from twelve. "A hundred" was at first a division of our own land inhabited by a hundred families.

The name is still kept, though perhaps not one division has now the hundred families from whence it was originally derived. So here the perfect symbolic number is used without reference to the individuals which make it up.

The wall is what fences a city off from the world without; the gate is what gives it communication with the world without. In that which marks the exclusive distinction of the Church the apostles appear; in that which marks its relationship with the world the twelve tribes appear; for the apostles are the foundation course of the Church, whereas Israel is always God's first thought in His government of the world. In that which symbolizes the going forth of the Church's authority towards the world Israel therefore naturally comes into prominence.

"And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel" (Rev. 21:15-17).

Once more we note the symbolism of Ezekiel, both as to the measuring reed in the hand of the man who shows him the city (Ezek. 40:3), and as to the quadrangular form of the city itself. But again the differences are thrown into bolder relief by this designed parallelism. In Ezekiel the measuring reed is of ordinary construction, suited to an earthly city; in the Revelation it is a golden reed, the type of divine righteousness, suited to the dwelling-place of God. In Ezekiel the city is large, becoming a splendid earthly metropolis; in the Revelation the city is vast beyond all possible earthly limits. In Ezekiel it is of the quadrangular form, often used in Scripture to indicate perfect earthly symmetry; in the Revelation there is another dimension, a height equal to the length and the breadth, showing a perfect cube, a still higher order of symmetry, heavenly in character, and manifestly unsuited to the earth.

It is surely no mere coincidence that the Holy of holies in the temple was of the same cubic form. "The oracle in the forepart was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold" (1 Kings 6:20). Now David gave to Solomon "the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit of the courts of the house of the Lord" (1 Chron. 28:12). His plans therefore, like those of Moses, were formed after a heavenly model, and had a typical signification, so that the cubic form of the holiest place in the temple was an inspired type of the perfect symmetry of that "habitation of God" which formed the pattern of these earthly structures. Here too the number of administrative perfection twice appears in the twelve thousand furlongs which is the length of the side, and in the twelve times twelve, or one "hundred and forty and four cubits," of the height of the wall.

The measure is "the measure of a man, that is, of the angel." The standard therefore is after the measure of man, not in his earthly body, but in the body he will have after resurrection, when he is clothed upon with his house which is from heaven. In these "spiritual bodies" the "children of the resurrection" are said to be "equal unto the angels" (Luke 20:36), and it is to this new condition that the standard of measurement is conformed. The scene, though all symbolic, is throughout symbolic of the heavenly, and not of the earthly. The symbols are, of course, borrowed from the earth, but each has a heavenly stamp impressed upon it.

"And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass" (Rev. 21:18). Jasper, as we have seen, is symbolic of "the glory of God." Gold typifies the righteousness of God, not in His government, but in His nature. Thus the Church shares the righteousness belonging to God, the saints being made morally "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The glory of God, also, the jasper wall, hems it in, at once defending it from all intrusion of evil, and maintaining it in that holy separateness which becomes His chosen habitation. A cube entirely inlaid with gold was the typical dwelling-place which He took in Israel. A cube of "pure gold, like unto clear glass," is the symbolic representation of the "holy temple," the "habitation of God through the Spirit," here set before us in the heavens.

"And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (Rev. 21:19-21). The names of the apostles are engraved on the foundations of the Church, but Christ Himself is the true foundation. As in the breastplate of the high priest the perfections of Christ, gleaming in the precious stones, were linked with the tribes whose names were cut upon them, so here the manifold perfections, and beauties, and glories of Christ, the true foundation, bear up the Church in its heavenly brightness. The foundation of all is jasper, "the glory of God;" for it is on Christ as "the Son of the living God," the One in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," that the Church is built. Then comes the stone on which the elders of Israel had seen God Himself standing, when "there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" (Ex. 24:10). Then, completing the perfect number, follow the varied yet harmonious beauties centering in His matchless person, all sustaining that Church which He has built for His own delight and for God's habitation, that wondrous structure which only divine wisdom could have planned, only divine grace could have erected, only divine glory could uphold.

"Every several gate was of one pearl." The Church itself is the "one pearl of great price," which, on account of its exceeding beauty and preciousness in His eyes, Christ "hath purchased with His own blood." And in every avenue of approach God will have the memorial of this beauty and preciousness preserved. At each portal the "one pearl" meets the eye. If "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor unto it," they cannot approach its gates without beholding how precious this blood-bought assembly is to the heart of Christ. Its streets, too, are "pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The sea of glass occupies the same place in the heavenly temple that the sea of water did in the earthly, the change showing that while on earth there was constant need for purification, in heaven there is fixed, unalterable purity.

So in this scene. On earth, though sin cannot be imputed to the believer, there is constant liability to defilement in his walk, and the washing of water by the word, so beautifully typified in the washing of the disciples' feet, is constantly needed to restore communion. In this scene defilement of walk is just as impossible as imputation of sin. The path for the feet is the gold of divine righteousness, and the transparent glass shows that the need of cleansing is there unknown. All is spotlessly pure, transparently stainless, and the heart and the conscience are free to hold uninterrupted fellowship with God.

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Rev. 21:22). The city itself, or the Church, is a "holy temple," an "habitation of God through the Spirit." There could be no temple here; for a temple is a place where God, though deigning to dwell, is yet hidden. Outside, God is not seen, but only His dwelling-place; inside, one is in the immediate presence of God Himself. Believers even now have access there, into the holiest of all, through the rent veil. There needs no temple, no veil, to separate them from God. So in this marvelous vision. The Church is, as it were, the perfectly-proportioned, innermost shrine in which God dwells, the holy of

holies, of pure gold and heavenly symmetry, in which the throne and presence of God find their habitation.

And as there is no temple, nothing to hinder the immediate glory of the divine presence shining in its midst, so there is no need of any other authority or any other light. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). All created light, all created authority, however necessary here, will be superseded there by the perfect light shining in the glory of God and the person of Christ.

Nor is this all. The Church will radiate the light it receives. "And the nations [the words "of them that are saved" should be omitted] shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor unto [not "into"] it" (Rev. 21:24). Christians are placed here to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). Alas! what poor, dull lights, what faint, glimmering reflections of the glory of Him who came as "the light of the world," even the most devoted and holiest believers are. And what is the power of shining? Not the effort to do so, but gazing upon the glory of Christ. Moses' face shone, though he knew it not, because he had been in God's presence. Believers' faces shine when they, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). But the time is coming when believers will behold Christ face to face, and will bear His image perfectly; when He Himself shall "be admired in all them that believe," and there shall be no dimming of the glorious light in which they shine. "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). And as with believers individually, so the Church as a whole will be the perfect manifestation of God's glory, suited for His own chosen habitation.

"The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor unto it," not into it. They will not enter the Church, but will render it the joint homage which is meet for "the bride, the Lamb's wife;" for when Christ reigns, and "all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him," then the Church will reign as His royal bride, the sharer of His universal dominion and universal homage.

"And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations unto it" (Rev. 21:25, 26). There is perfect security. The night, in which evil can encroach unseen, has no place here. We are children of the day, children of the light. This is even our present standing, though our failure to walk as children of the light should fill us with grief and shame. But there all will be manifested, all will be perfect. Of the Church it will then be true, as of God Himself, that in it there is "no darkness at all;" for it will shine with God's light.

The nations, like their kings, will do homage to "the Lamb's wife" as sharing the throne and glory of the Lamb Himself. This shows that the Church is here seen, not in the eternal, but in the millennial state. Its own condition will indeed be for the most part unchanged in the eternal state; but there will then be no nations on the earth, no kings to bring their glory and their honor to it. All this belongs to the earth in the divided condition which begun at Babel, and continues even during the millennium. But it has no place in the new earth, from which all trace of the failure and sin of the old creation is forever blotted out.

As the figure of a city is consistently maintained, the heavenly saints are spoken of as its inhabitants. "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil;" and if believers are saved, it is only because He has made them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." No evil can exist in the presence of His light. The jasper wall, His own surpassing glory, is a perfect wall of separation between His dwelling-place and all that defiles, all that is abominable, all that is inconsistent with His own holy truth. None can be there but those "written in the Lamb's book of life;" those whom He has fitted by His own grace for His own presence.

But it is not only in authority, not only in glory, that "the bride, the Lamb's wife," is associated with the Lamb Himself. The city will also be as the dwelling-place of God, the fountain-head from which streams of blessing gush forth to the millennial earth. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:1,2). The symbolism here is that of Ezekiel, but with differences which show that the earthly things are only types of the heavenly. In Ezekiel there is a real river of water issuing "from under the threshold of the house eastward" (Ezek. 47:1), and going forth to heal the waters of the Dead Sea. "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine" (Ezek. 47:12).

The earthly things are molded after the heavenly. Thus the earthly Jerusalem is fashioned like the heavenly, four-square; but in size and form suited to this world. The Holy of holies, God's earthly dwelling-place, is fashioned like the heavenly, of the same form and the same material, but with dimensions fitted to its earthly character. From the temple, God's dwelling-place in the earthly metropolis, the waters flow forth to spread life and fertility over the barren parts of the land, and to heal the bitter waters of the sea of death. From "the throne of God and of the Lamb" "in the heavenly metropolis streams forth the river of the water of life; not to the land only, but to all mankind. Trees with fruit monthly renewed "for meat," and with leaves "for medicine," are on either side the stream coming out of the earthly city. But "the tree of life," of which the overcomer shall eat, is on either side the stream of the water of life flowing out of the heavenly city; and besides its fruit for the overcomer, its leaves are for the healing, not only of those in the land, but of the nations. Thus while the earthly Jerusalem is especially the center of blessing to the land of Israel, the heavenly Jerusalem is the center of blessing to the whole earth; for wherever we deal with the earthly things, Israel has the foremost place; but the circle of the Church's interests is wider, and in its blessings Jew and Gentile are alike partakers.

There is no "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," no tree of responsibility now. That tree, whose taste brought death, was withered up by the cross, where all our broken responsibilities were met; and met so perfectly, that we now "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Here therefore "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" disappears, and "the tree of life" alone flourishes. Those dwelling in "the paradise of God" eat of its fruits; but in the millennial earth, where evil, though checked, still exists, "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Here again it is clear that the time described is not the eternal state, when all evil is done away, but the millennial age, when healing is still needed.

"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3, 4). Among the nations of the earth there is still the curse, not constantly

abiding, but occasionally coming in as the punishment of sin; for "the sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20). Here, however, in this heavenly Jerusalem, "there shall be no more curse." How can there be for those who have been conformed to the image of God's Son? They are a people whom God has fashioned for Himself, for His own dwelling-place, and therefore "the throne of God and of the Lamb" is among them. They are His servants, and now none other divides their allegiance with Him. Unreservedly "they serve Him." Serve whom? it may be asked; God or the Lamb? Here, as often in John's writings, no distinction is made; both are spoken of as one. There is but one throne named, but One whom they serve, but One whom they see, but One whose name is written in their foreheads. Everywhere the same truth meets us—"I and my Father are one." They are His chosen companions, seeing as they are seen, for they behold His face; and they are specially claimed as His own, for "His name shall be in their foreheads." They shall then bear perfectly the moral imprint which, alas! it is often so difficult to discern in His saints now. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

"And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). This is, as it were, the summary of the blessings enjoyed by the heavenly saints, the Church, in the millennial state. And what a summary! All darkness gone forever; God Himself, not now through instruments, but in His own person, their blessed source of light, shining upon them in all His glory, and they able to rejoice in the glory; the saints reigning with Christ to the ages of ages during the whole millennial cycle.

Such is the Church, the bride, the Lamb's wife, the heavenly Jerusalem, during the thousand years' reign. The figures used may vary. The affections of Christ may be brought into prominence by presenting it as the bride; its relationship with the earth may be symbolized by picturing it as a city; its wonderful place in the counsels of God may be shown forth by delineating it as His dwelling-place. But whatever the figure used, the prominent thought is the surpassing glory and blessedness of that assembly which God is now calling out to be formed into one body, and to be forever associated in peculiar closeness with the Son of His love. What a contrast the moral glories here portrayed with the sad, ruined, failing condition of even the true Church as we now see it in the world! God's thoughts and love are not deflected from their purpose by our failure; but should not this very fact cover us with shame that our failure has been so great?

The Revelation, strictly speaking, ends with the vision of the New Jerusalem, for the following verses are not so much a part of the Revelation itself as words, spoken by the angel or by the Lord, pressing the truth and value of what is revealed upon our hearts. "And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets [or of the spirits of the prophets] sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:6, 7). No book so marvelously unfolds the heavenly glories awaiting the saints; no book so emphatically repeats the assurance that these things are "faithful and true." The Old Testament name of Lord God, His title of God of the spirits of the prophets, the angel messenger sent, and the relationship of servants ascribed to the saints — all fit in with what we have seen to be the prophetic character of the book. But there is a difference between these prophecies and those of the Old Testament, which they so strongly resemble. In the Old Testament the events foretold are spoken of as distant; here they are spoken of as "things which must shortly be done." The reason is, that the Church period is always counted outside the course of time. It is an interval, a parenthesis, which grace may lengthen, but which at any moment may be brought to a close. Believers are, therefore, to be constantly expecting the coming of the Lord. His word to them here is, "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

What is meant by keeping these sayings? During the Church time the greater part of the judgments predicted in this book are yet future, and how then can the sayings be kept? To treasure up the sayings of God is, however, always profitable. It is not necessary even that they should in every case be intelligently understood, much less that they should immediately affect ourselves. The historical development of the events foretold may not be divinely apprehended; but the great principles of God's righteous judgments, culminating in the glory of Christ, may be clearly discerned through the thickest haze of misinterpretation in which the book can be wrapped.

Has the Church, then, been faithful? Alas! something more than misunderstanding has helped to obscure the truth. The great feature of the book is the failure of Christendom. It stands out in the letters to the seven churches, in the corrupt, apostate Babylon, and in the great Gentile power of the last days which, though embracing none but Christian lands, falls into the most hideous idolatry and rebellion against God. Now this utter failure of the Church as a professing system, though the great feature of the book, is just the feature which Christians have refused to see. The Spirit had warned the Gentiles that they stood by faith, and that if God had not spared the natural branches, the Jews, they must take heed lest He also spare not them. Instead of taking heed, they became high-minded, and did not fear. If God's word be true, therefore, they must be cut off. This the Revelation points out; but the Church, fancying itself secure, has never dreamed that judgment is awaiting it, and, shutting its eyes to the solemn truth, has accepted any interpretation but that which thus appealed to its conscience. Had it bowed to the truth concerning the judgment about to come upon the house of God, this apostacy could never have taken place. But it has failed to keep "the sayings of the prophecy of this book," and high-mindedness, worldly ambition, and departure from its true character as waiting for Christ, have been the sad results.

"And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Rev. 22:8-9). Now, as before, when John fell down to worship the angel, it is the sight of the glories of the Church that overwhelms him. Then he had beheld "the Lamb's wife" "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;" now he has been gazing on the dazzling vision of the New Jerusalem. On each occasion the angel refuses worship, associating himself with John, and his brethren the prophets, and those "which keep the sayings of this book."

"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:10, 11). Daniel was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). This is quite different from the directions here given, where the prophecy is not to be sealed, "for the time is at hand." Neither prophecy has, however, yet received its fulfillment. Why, then, should the first be spoken of as far distant, and the second as at hand? Why should the first be sealed up as papers only wanted at some future time, and the other left unsealed as papers wanted for immediate use? To say that Daniel's prophecy was six hundred years earlier than the other will not suffice; for if two thousand four hundred years is a distant date, so is eighteen hundred years;

and if events eighteen hundred years off are said to be at hand, why may not events two thousand four hundred years off be said to be "at hand" also? The explanation lies in the character of the present epoch, during which no dates are given, and no time is reckoned. None is to put off, even in thought, the Lord's return. This being a momentary expectation, the whole Church period is passed over, and the only time counted is the short interval after the Church is taken. Then God's dealings with the world in government are resumed, and the preparation for the restoration of Israel and the reign of Christ is again carried on.

When that time comes the moral condition of men will be fixed. The unjust will remain unjust, and the filthy will remain filthy, the righteous will remain righteous, and the holy will remain holy. Clearly this cannot apply to the present day of grace. It is a warning that "the time is at hand;" for the day of grace is passing, and no calculation of its continuance can be made. These judgments are therefore to be regarded as near, and when once come, the call to repentance will sound no more, the blessed will be eternally blessed, the wicked eternally wicked.

Hence the speedy return of the Lord is again pressed, and now by the Lord Himself; for up to this point it has been an angel speaking, though sometimes in Christ's name, but henceforth it is Christ speaking in His own person. "[And], behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:12, 13). In the Revelation the two parts of the Lord's second advent, His coming for His saints, and His coming to judge the world, are often spoken of in the same language. Morally they resemble each other, being both acts of judgment towards the world, and both bringing blessing to the believer. The believer is taken to glory by the first act, manifested in glory by the second. The world is left over for judgment by the first act, brought under the execution of judgment by the second.

The important point is, then, not the order of events, but the great fact that Christ is coming, and that when He does come, He "will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). This is the invariable principle of God's righteous dealings, and is in no respect weakened by grace. Grace, it is true, lays our sins on another as our substitute, and credits us with the good deeds wrought in us by God's own power; but this confirms the principle instead of contradicting it. If an upright man winds up his affairs, he collects what is due to him, and pays what he owes. Nor is the justice of this course affected by the fact that certain debts have been remitted, or certain obligations incurred, out of kindness. So God's righteous judgment according to works is in no way impaired by the fact that the believer's sins have been put away, and the believer's righteousnesses have been wrought, by His own grace.

These righteous principles, being as eternal and immutable as God Himself, are followed by the declaration of Christ's own character as the eternal One, "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

The consistency of righteousness and grace is shown in the next verse: "Blessed are they that wash their robes [not as our version has it, "do His commandments"], that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22:14, 15). Thus while righteousness has been declared the principle of Christ's judgment, grace is the foundation on which the blessing of the redeemed is based. The "right to the tree of life," which is in the midst of the paradise of God, is not "keeping the commandments," or any goodness on man's part, but the righteousness of "the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin," because he has washed his robes, "and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This, too, is his title to "enter in through the gates into the city," or to become a member of the Church of God. For unless thus washed, he is in himself defiled, and must remain without, classed among the dogs, or unclean, the sorcerers, the whoremongers, the idolaters, the murderers, the lovers and practicers of falsehood, who have no place in the holy city.

Having thus declared the principles of righteousness on which He will act at His second coming, the Lord closes the book with a few weighty and solemn words. "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16). There is something beautiful in the way in which the Lord, when thus closing His Revelation, speaks to the beloved disciple, not in His official character, but for a moment in that personal name by which he had known and loved Him here on earth. It is as though He had said, True I am the eternal One, the supreme judge; but for all that I am still that same Jesus with whom you walked in Galilee, that same Jesus on whose breast you leaned at supper. He is also "the faithful and true witness," and as such He has, through His angel, testified the coming ruin and failure in the churches. But still He is the hope alike of the earthly and of the heavenly saints. To the earthly saints, whose portion consists in the fulfillment of the promises made to David, He is "the root" of David, or the One to whom all the promises owe their origin, and also the offspring of David, the royal seed to whom they all point. To the heavenly saints, the Church, He is the perennial hope, the harbinger of the coming day, "the bright and morning star."

And this draws forth the response, prompted by the Spirit, from the heart of the bride; "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The true attitude of the Church, the bride of Christ, is always to be waiting for His coming. He is her hope. The declaration that He is "the bright and morning star" naturally awakens the longing of the bride, and the Spirit, speaking through her, joins in the invitation to "come." And still the word of grace is going forth, telling of Jesus as a Savior, so that he who hears may receive the word and be able to join in the cry; "Let him that heareth say, Come." Nor will He who bid the weary come to Him for rest, and the thirsty for water, leave it only to others to proclaim the word. Once more His own voice goes forth in tender solicitation — "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." How cheering these words of grace, these earnest, loving appeals, at the close of this book of judgments. They seem to say, "The day of retribution is fast approaching, but the day of grace still lingers; eternal life is my free gift. Before it is too late, come, drink of this fountain which will satisfy for evermore."

The one-sidedness of man always leads him to set grace and judgment in antagonism, whereas the many-sidedness of God's word gives to each its proper place. After the tender words of invitation just uttered, it is solemnly instructive to see the rampart with which God shelters this book of sevenfold judgments from any intrusion of man's reasoning and unbelief. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book [or from the tree] of life, and out of the holy city [and from the things], which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18, 19).

What is meant by adding to and taking from this book? It does not mean only the open infidelity which refuses it as God's word. No doubt it would include this, but it includes much more. The professing Church has practically set aside this book, not through mere misunderstanding,

which is not here referred to, but because its character and hopes took a worldly instead of a heavenly type. It refused to believe itself under judgment, and thus took from this portion of God's word. It assumed its own universal dominion and triumph over evil, and its own continuance to the end of time, and this added to this portion of God's word. No doubt many of God's children, who reverence His word, have been misled by this false traditional belief, and have in all simplicity and honesty adopted a system of interpretation founded upon it. We need not say that the judgments here denounced against those who tamper with God's word have no application to such. But to Christendom as a whole the guilt is chargeable, and on Christendom as a whole the penalty will fall. Babylon, which, instead of repenting and clothing herself in sackcloth, like Nineveh of old, has "said in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow," will have added unto her "the plagues that are written in this book."

The denunciation only extends to those who shall add to or take from the words of this particular book; but it must not be inferred that God regards a similar treatment of other portions of His word with greater indifference. The fact that this book would be so wrested from its true meaning as to blind men's eyes to the failure and judgment of Christendom, has indeed caused God to invest it with a special sanctity, not only pronouncing a distinct blessing on those who read it, but a distinct curse on those who slight it. But the principle is true of Scripture generally. To add to God's word, or to take from it, must bring judgment. Those who set their minds and wills in opposition to God's can have no part in the tree of life or in the holy city.

And now come the Lord's closing words, words at once of warning and of hope: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). They are words of warning, for is it not time that Christendom should wake from its sleep, and instead of indulging in the dream of universal dominion, own the ruin and failure which its apathy has brought in? They are words of hope, for what can be more cheering to the true saint of God, who sees that all has failed on man's side, than the thought that the Lord is coming to take His waiting people to Himself, and afterward to establish His throne in righteousness on the earth? Hence, when His voice is heard, "Surely I come quickly," the heart response of His people goes forth, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." So closes this book, the writer only adding the parting salutation, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all [or with all saints]. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Conqueror of Death (2:8)

"Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive" (Rev. 2:8).

Though Judge, the Lord never forgets His people; in trial and suffering He is still with them. But His care is not shown now as in the Old Testament. Then He was not known as the Conqueror of death. His way of intervening for His saints was to save them from death, delivering them out of the furnace or shutting the mouths of the lions. Satan might try Job, but a limit was imposed: "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2:6).

Here, however, is no such restriction; they were to be faithful unto death. No deliverance on this side of the grave is promised. And why? Because a believer now knows Christ, not only as able to save from death, but as having triumphed over death. He is the First and the Last—God having all power in Himself. He is also the One which was dead and is alive, for He, as man, has borne death in our place and has been "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4). The believer is therefore totally secure. The death of the body is but a door which opens into Christ's presence. From the second death, the lake of fire, he is already delivered.

T. B. Baines

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation 6:12-17: Sixth Seal (6:12-17)

"And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Of course this is not to be literally taken. Such a convulsion would be the total destruction of the universe, whereas the world exists long after these events. It is then a figurative description, borrowed from the magnificent prophecy of Joel concerning the events preceding the day of the Lord: "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." (Joel 2:30, 31). A portion of the imagery is taken also from the words of Isaiah, describing "the indignation of the Lord upon all the nations" [or Gentiles], where he says, "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their hosts shall fall down, as the leaf falleth from off the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree" (Isa. 34:2, 4). These passages show not only the time and circumstances, but the proper interpretation of the figures used in the Revelation. The time is before the coming of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." The circumstances are God's judgment of the nations. The interpretation of the figures is the overthrow of the powers of the earth by great social and political convulsions. This is the meaning to be attached here to the "great earthquake." The sun, the supreme authority, is obscured, and the lesser powers, the moon and stars, are either disturbed or utterly overthrown. Places of strength and security, the mountains and islands, are removed; and a general shaking of all the kingdoms follows the wars that have raged, and the wretchedness and anarchy they have brought in their train.

This vast disruption fills all hearts with dismay. Christ's return in judgment had been foretold; and though the world then scoffed, this wide-spread overthrow recalls the prophecy, and a shudder of coming judgment seizes the people. There is no repentance, no cry for mercy, merely a terror of vengeance, and a frantic desire to escape shown by their calling on the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the dreaded wrath. But their horror is premature. The judgments preceding the great day of wrath have begun; but not the day itself. Man will be allowed to go on a little longer in his sin to show that this fear does not change his heart, but that with him, as with Pharaoh, each judgment, when passed, only increases its desperate hardness.

There is something fearful in the thought of a world crying out to be sheltered "from the wrath of the Lamb," the wrath of the meek and lowly One, who "was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." But it is a solemn truth. The same voice which now says, "Come unto Me," will, if His tender invitations are refused, at length say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed." Now is the day of salvation; then will be the day of judgment; and surely every shaft of judgment will be barbed by the memory of slighted grace.

After the sixth seal comes a pause, during which we see a faithful remnant who are saved on earth, as we have already seen one saved for heaven. This remnant consists of two companies; first, a definite number from Israel; and next, a countless multitude from the nations.

I. We see the saved remnant of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:1-8): "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (Rev. 7:1-3).

The "four angels standing on the four corners of the earth" are the ministers of God's judgments, occupying even the remotest regions of the world. "The four winds of the earth" are those disturbing elements existing in all quarters, which God can at His will let loose in judgment. Thus Gog, the great hostile power named in Ezekiel, is said to "ascend and come like a storm" (Ezek. 38:9); and Jehovah, when delivering Israel from her enemies, is described "as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest" (Isa. 32:2).

What, then, is signified by the earth, the sea, and the trees? The earth in Scripture is used for the nations under settled, stable government; while the sea is a figure naturally suggestive of multitudes, especially of people in a disorganized condition. Thus among the few symbols explained in this book we read that "the waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Rev. 17:15). In another chapter the last Gentile monarchy is described as rising "up out of the sea" (Rev. 13:1); and in Daniel all the four beasts which represent the four Gentile powers come out of a weltering scene of confusion and anarchy, where "the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea" (Dan. 7:2). The figure is in frequent use, as where the Psalmist speaks of the Lord as stilling "the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people" (Psa. 65:7). A tree, on the other hand, is a well-known Scripture figure of a great one of the earth: "The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan" (Isa. 12:13). The meaning of the imagery therefore is, that God is about, through His providential agents, the angels, to let loose various elements of social convulsion on the nations under settled government, the troubled mass of the peoples, and the great ones of the earth.

But before this vast upheaving begins God remembers His elect, and provides for their safety. For their deliverance an angel ascends "from the east." The east is the quarter of the sunrise, and how will God's elect then be occupied? They will be looking for "the Sun of righteousness to arise with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2). In our dispensation the believer is to look to the east, to have his eye fixed on the "bright and morning star," the herald of the coming day. In the time described in this scene the east is still the quarter of hope, and though the Lord Himself does not yet appear for His people's deliverance, His angel ascends to mark them in the forehead with "the seal of the living God." This is not "the Holy Spirit of God" sealing "unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). The Spirit will not then be given as now; but the angel, one of those "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14), sets the seal of the living God, the pledge of life and deliverance, in their forehead. It is as "the Son of the living God" that Christ builds a church secure against the power of hades. It is as sealed by the living God that these later saints will be secure against the power of death. The shafts of death and hades glance harmlessly aside from those who are protected behind the shield of "the living God."

"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand" (Rev. 7:4-8).

Here the number is clearly symbolic, twelve being the number of administrative perfection, as seven is of mystical or heavenly perfection. Thus there are twelve patriarchs, twelve apostles, and here twelve thousand sealed from each of twelve tribes. Why the tribe of Dan is omitted can only be conjectured. It is not because the tribe is cut off; for, in the new division of the land foretold by Ezekiel, Dan occupies the northernmost portion. (Ezek. 48:1). Looked at historically, this remnant doubtless represents the Israelite believers in the early Church; but the historical fulfillment is, as we have seen, only a subordinate one, and the main scope of this prophecy is still future. What therefore we here learn is, that before the woes about to fall on the earth after the sixth seal, a remnant out of the twelve tribes of Israel will be specially marked out by God for deliverance.

II. But besides this sealed multitude from Israel, we see another countless throng of Gentiles, also reserved for blessing. (Rev. 7:9-17). "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-10). This multitude are "clothed with white robes," the symbols of righteousness, and "have palms in their hands," the symbols of victory. Their song ascribing deliverance to "God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," is very different from the praise of the Church — "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood;" and from the song of the elders in proclaiming the worthiness of Him who was "slain, and hast redeemed to God by thy blood out

of every kindred." These victors say nothing of the blood or redemption, but merely ascribe salvation to God on His throne, and to the Lamb. Yet we afterward see that they had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Whence, then, the silence on this subject in their outburst of praise?

It arises from their circumstances. The throne before which they stand is not one of mercy, but of righteousness, and the Lamb is here seen, not as slain for sin, but as executing judgment. As the souls under the altar prayed that their blood might be avenged, so these saints have been crying for deliverance by the judgment of their adversaries. Christ's coming is to them deliverance from earthly tribulation and establishment in earthly blessing. The prophet's eye looks forward to the complete result, when their praise ascends to God and to the Lamb, as having thus intervened for their salvation. The grace of God in giving His Son, or the love of Christ in redeeming them with His blood, is not here the subject of their thoughts, but rather the delivering might which has interposed in judgment on their behalf. This is the constant theme of the Psalms. "Therefore shalt Thou make them turn their back, when Thou shalt make ready Thine arrows upon Thy strings against the face of them. Be Thou exalted, Lord, in Thine own strength; so will we sing and praise Thy power" (Psa. 21:12-13).

The angels' response to the cry of this multitude is in a like strain. "And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 7:11, 12). Comparing this with the song of the angels in Rev. 5, we no longer find "the Lamb that was slain" to be the prominent object. No doubt Christ as man takes the kingdom by this title. Here, however, the subject is not the title, but the fact. The angels give praise that God's kingdom is at length established in manifest power and glory, while the deliverance thus wrought is the subject of thanks to the palm-bearing multitude.

But the true character of this scene unfolds as we advance: "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:13, 14). These victors, then, are persons who have come out, not merely of "great tribulation," but of "the great tribulation." Now "the great tribulation," which is the true reading, is an era as definite as the day of the Lord, or any other clearly-marked Scripture epoch. It is the period mentioned in passages already quoted from Jeremiah, who calls it "the time of Jacob's trouble," and declares that "he shall be saved out of it;" the period spoken of by Daniel, who says it is a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book;" the period named by our Lord Himself, who also emphasizes its unparalleled character.

This is "the great tribulation" out of which these Gentile victors come; for the sorrows, though having their focus among the Jews, reach out to "all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Whatever secondary application therefore this prophecy may have to the Church in the early period of persecution, its principal reference is to another and very different class of sufferers. The Church will never enter into the "hour of temptation." These, then, are believers existing on earth after the Church is taken, and looking for the coming Messiah. Though not of Israel, they trust the word specially spoken of that day, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32). They have therefore "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Now why is "the great tribulation" named here? And why are we shown a vision of those who pass victoriously through it? The introduction of such a subject would be wholly unmeaning if it were not that the narrative has now brought us to the very verge of this dreadful epoch. The judgments described under the first six seals are providential visitations of a terrible nature, but they are only "the beginning of sorrows." The heavier judgments attending "the great tribulation" are about to commence, and two things are therefore first displayed. The one is the sealing of a definite symbolic number from the twelve tribes of Israel, showing that they shall still be preserved, and preserved in administrative perfection, through all these impending judgments. The other is a vision from which we learn that a countless multitude of Gentiles will also pass victoriously through this period, and be dignified with special marks of God's favor.

Everything here agrees with God's ways of dealing with the world after the Church is taken. The distinctive blessing of the Church is, that it does not come into the great tribulation; while the blessing of those here named is that they come victoriously out of it. Their praise, too, is quite different from that of the Church, referring, not to redemption through Christ's blood, but to salvation through His power. It is the acclamation of persons delivered, not from their sins, but from their oppressors. Besides, while the Church consisted of a remnant of Israel, together with saved Gentiles, they were, when once converted, "baptized by one Spirit into one body," and formed in Christ "one new man;" whereas nothing is more marked in this scene than the prominence given to Israel, and the difference between God's ways towards these tribes and towards the Gentiles. The hundred and forty-four thousand are sealed beforehand as the special objects of God's care; the others only appear at the close, when the marks of victory are seen upon them. This is natural; for in the judgments preparatory to the Messianic kingdom Israel will be the peculiar object of God's counsels and love. That they should be sealed before the judgments is therefore quite consistent with the principles on which He will then be acting, while it is also consistent that multitudes of Gentiles will be saved though not thus specially distinguished.

But some may think that, since this multitude stand "before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," they must be in heaven, instead of being a saved remnant on earth. We must remember, however, that the scene is symbolic, and so regarded, it is quite consistent with their being in the world. If it is on earth that they wash their robes, and make them white, why should it not be on earth that they wear them? If they are conquerors on earth, why should they not carry their palms on earth also? The multitudes in heaven are said to stand "around the throne," but these are said to stand "before" it. This position does not imply that they are in heaven. During Christ's reign God will have His earthly throne, and Christ's glory will be manifested on earth. Even now believers can "come boldly unto the throne of grace" without being in heaven, and surely similar language might be used about God's people when His presence is vouchsafed to them as it will be at that time. Standing "before the throne and before the Lamb" may therefore only mean special nearness of access to God, such as Moses enjoyed, in the way in which He will then be approached.

The association in which they are placed also favors this conclusion. The sealed thousands of Israel are manifestly delivered, and reserved for earthly blessing; for the object of their sealing is that they may be uninjured by the judgments. Now though the Gentile multitude is separately named, yet its association with the Israelites shows that it forms an outer circle to this sealed remnant, sharing the same kind of

salvation. Indeed the words, "came out of the great tribulation," can only refer to persons brought through it, not to those falling in it; for deliverance from this time always means escaping with life, not suffering death. Moreover, in the case of the souls under the altar, and those afterward slain by the beast, their martyrdom is distinctly mentioned, and they are presently seen as living and reigning with Christ, and having "part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:4-6), whereas nothing of the sort is spoken about this white-robed multitude. And surely if they had joined the elders and the angels in heaven something would be said to show their presence. But the company in heaven is just the same in this chapter as before; nothing indicates that a fresh multitude has entered.

This countless number of Gentiles, then, represents those who have, during the great tribulation, believed on the coming Messiah, and at length, after severe sufferings, escaped with their lives. Their reward is then told. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among [or rather, "tabernacle over"] them" (Rev. 7:15). This does not mean that they are in heaven. The aged Anna "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). The longing of the godly remnant to dwell in God's temple is constantly expressed in the Psalms. "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of Jehovah: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Psa. 84:1-2). This blessing therefore is strictly in accordance with the longings of the saints during the millennial age.

Believers in heaven dwell in the Father's house, or with Christ, but it could hardly be said that God tabernacled over them. This He did, however, in the pillar of cloud in the wilderness; and this He will do when He shall "create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: and over all the glory shall be a covering. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" (Isa. 4:5,6). Thus the blessings which these multitudes enjoy are those promised to the millennial earth.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:16, 17). These are blessed promises, but promises fitted for an earthly rather than a heavenly people. In the eternal state "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Rev. 21:4). Then tears and sorrow, pain and death, are all done away, while the blessings of the Gentile multitude are rather exemption from trouble and protection from evil. They shall neither hunger nor thirst. To an earthly people just rescued from suffering, but still in the scene of their privations, this promise is most gracious, but how little appropriate to those dwelling in the Father's house.

These blessings too are those promised to the earthly people during Christ's reign. For He will come and "say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that bath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them" (Isa. 49:9, 10). This is not a prophecy about heaven, but about restored Israel; for it goes on to declare, "I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh," and concludes by saying that "all flesh shall know that I, Jehovah, am thy Savior, and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (Isa. 49:26). And though these blessings are promised to Israel, the same prophecy shows us also a Gentile remnant, who share, at least in part, the same portion. "It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

Again, speaking of the time "when Jehovah of hosts shall reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously," it is said that "He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth" (Isa. 24:23; 25:7-8). The time then at which this prophecy in the Revelation receives its fulfillment is neither during the Church period, nor in the eternal state; and the place is not in heaven. It is a prophecy about people on the earth during that blessed age when Christ, having judged His enemies, will reign in righteousness and peace over the nations of the world.

Looking back then on this and the previous chapter, we see the connection and meaning. The first six seals record the earlier judgments following the rapture of the Church. After these "the great tribulation" is about to begin. At this moment God remembers His elect of Israel, and the judgment is stayed, figuratively, till these are sealed for deliverance. But His grace includes also multitudes of Gentiles. These indeed, not being then His peculiar object, are not sealed like the Israelites; but the vision, passing forward to the close of the tribulation, displays them robed in white, and with palms of victory, enjoying the nearest access to God, and in the fullest enjoyment of His care and favor during the period of the Messiah's reign. This interval therefore is not, as some have supposed, an interruption in the orderly development of events. It marks the conclusion of the lighter judgments recorded under the first six seals, and shows God's gracious care of His elect during the heavier judgments that are yet to follow. Or if we compare this book with our Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24, it marks the division between the "beginning of sorrows," named in the first verses, and the "great tribulation," foretold later in the discourse.

"And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half-an-hour." The prophecy then goes on, "And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets" (Rev. 8:2). Some have thought that the seventh seal inaugurates the reign of Christ, and that the seven trumpets refer back to another set of previous judgments. The text however, both by its silence and its words, points to an opposite conclusion. It makes no mention, expressly or by implication, of the reign of Christ having come. On the other hand, the apparition of the trumpet-angels seems to be just as much the development of the seventh seal as the apparition of the warrior on the white horse was the development of the first seal. The solemn preparations in the interval after the sixth seal appear to show that the opening of the seventh seal must be followed by very great results, and it is clear that the half-hour's silence in heaven is no adequate fulfillment of such expectations. Yet no other result is stated, unless the appearance of the seven angels is so regarded.

This then seems to be the natural sequence, and indeed the only sequence which the text admits. From the opening of the first seal to the sounding of the last trumpet is one consecutive series of events. The first six seals disclose a number of judgments preceding the great tribulation. The drama then pauses while God declares His purpose of saving a multitude, both from Israel and from the Gentiles, amidst the sorrows of this dreadful time. After this announcement the tragedy proceeds. The last seal is opened, and the response is the appearance of the seven angels to whom the trumpets are given. As these trumpets are successively sounded the various judgments of the great tribulation

are unfolded. The opening of the seventh seal is therefore a most momentous event, and its deep solemnity is marked by the brief, but impressive, silence in heaven. At the sounding of the last trumpet, which really does introduce the reign of Christ, there are "great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of, this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." The "silence in heaven" is as appropriate to the opening of the seventh seal as the "great voices in heaven" are appropriate to the sounding of the seventh trumpet. For while the last seal inaugurates the age of the world's supreme suffering, the last trumpet inaugurates the age of its supreme blessing.

We now come therefore to the second and heavier series of judgments heralded by the angels with trumpets.

clickbible.org