

Revelation - Commentaries by Algernon James Pollock

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass, Revelation 11:18 (11:18)

The import of this verse should be clearly grasped if Revelation is to be understood. It rapidly surveys the wind-up of all things. Seeing that this is the great judgment book, the winding-up of judgment comes first in the verse.

The reward of His servants the prophets, the saints, and them that fear His name, small and great, comes next, not in order of time, but in moral order. The destroying of them which destroy the earth is the clearing of the earth of evil, so that those who are to be rewarded may have their place in the coming kingdom, just as the flood destroyed those who destroyed the earth, and thus prepared the way for Noah's place in the new earth of that day.

To make it clear, the first half of the verse carries us on to the great white throne, which is the final act of judgment, and takes place on the threshold of the eternal state, whilst the second half is chronologically earlier, and leads up to the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19), the siege of Jerusalem (Zech. 14), the sessional judgment of the sheep and the goats (Math 25), and the setting up of the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4).

The clear grasping of the meaning and place of this verse is a great help.

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass, Things Which Thou Hast Seen, The (1:12-16)

Revelation 1:12-16

The first thing John saw was the seven golden candlesticks, each candlestick representing one of the seven assemblies addressed. The figure of a candlestick is symbolic of the light or testimony borne by each assembly.

Next the apostle tells us he saw one "like unto the Son of Man" walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, truly the Lord Himself, for He could say to John: "I am the First and the Last." His appearance was terrifying, judged by the effect upon John, who tells us that he fell at His feet as dead.

He was girt about the paps with a golden girdle, speaking of affection being restrained as to its expression. Divine affection remains unchanged towards those on whom it is placed, but its expression may differ. The girdle usually encircles the waist, not the breast.

His head and hair white like wool, and as white as snow, symbolize His judicial character.

His eyes, as a flame of fire, speak of discernment that nothing can escape.

His voice as the sound of many waters speaks of majesty and dignity.

The seven stars in His right hand represent the angels of the seven churches (vs. 20). The angel of a church does not represent a single individual in our judgment, but those in an assembly who are directly and mainly responsible to the Lord in connection with it on account of their intelligence and weight as guiding and ruling. But being in the right hand of the Lord betokens that supreme power and authority belong to Him. Once those who have the place of guiding get away from the direct control of the Lord there is trouble and sorrow.

It is significant that the addresses given are not addressed to the assembly directly, but to the "angel" of the assembly, though once the angel is addressed the message is clearly through that chosen channel for the assembly, and the appeal thus made to every individual in it.

The sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of the Lord's mouth denotes summary judgment. He has but to speak, and judgment is carried out. For long in grace He has been silent, but speak He will in the end, and men must hear.

His countenance shone as the sun shineth in its strength. What a symbol of glory—divine and universal glory as the Son of Man. The Lord Jesus Christ is thus depicted in a striking, arresting way.

Once men rejected Him, but the day of judgment will come when men will have to take account of Him.

The Book addresses itself to the assemblies first, before branching out to Israel and the world. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

No wonder that the Apostle fell at His feet as dead; but the Lord tells him to fear not, and presents Himself as the First and the Last, as the living One that was dead, and who is alive for evermore, and the Possessor of the keys of hades and death.

Then the Lord instructs John to write down:

(1) "The things which thou hast seen,"

(2) "The things which are,"

(3) "The things which shall be hereafter."

But in bringing us to this point John has already—in response to the command in verse 2—described the things which he had seen. May we pay heed to these things, and have deepened in our souls a true sense of God's holiness, and of the jealous observation by the Lord of all that is contrary to Him in that which professes His name, and of the sure fact that judgment must fall upon all that is not according to Him.

We now come to the second section of the Book—

" The Things Which Are."

There are two ways of looking at this section, both of which have their place. There were seven local assemblies existing at the time, to whom the addresses were applicable. It may be that the evils were not then full-blown, but the germs of them all were apparent to Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire.

But it would scarcely be considered that this view, true and right as it is, would exhaust the meaning of God's Spirit in inditing these remarkable addresses, and embodying them in the great prophetic book of the New Testament, and one of the very last books of the canon of Scripture.

It has long been acknowledged that these seven addresses present to us a prophetic course of the Church's history from the day in which John wrote until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He shall present that Church unto Himself, a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The addresses are seven —the number seven speaking, as it does, of Divine perfection. So the seven addresses to the seven churches bring before us the Lord's perfect and complete dealing with His Church in discernment and discipline all through her checkered history.

In this aspect there are two or three general remarks to be made. At the close of each of the seven addresses we get the exhortation: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). "An ear" means a receptive moral condition, without which Divine communications would meet with no response.

But note, it is what the Spirit saith, not to the particular church addressed, but to all the churches. This is particularly significant. There is not one evil or corruption in any phase, or at any time, of the Church's history that we are not capable of. Whatever the time in which our lot is cast, we do well to pay heed to what is said to every one of the churches.

It is also worthy of note and careful study to observe that the Lord presents Himself to each of the Churches in a character that is calculated to help the overcomer to overcome just those peculiar difficulties and temptations that mark each church.

Further, it is well to state at once that the first four phases of the Church are successional, that is, one gives place to the other; whereas the last four, counting the fourth of the successional churches as the first of the next series, are contemporaneous, that is, as they come into existence, one after another, they run side by side to the end.

A diagram like the letter L will illustrate our meaning, and fix this thought upon the mind of each reader.

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass, Church in the Millennium, The (22:1-5)

Revelation 21:9-27 and 22:1-5 bring us back to one of the angels with the seven vials full of the seven last plagues. In other words, we are brought back from the eternal state to the time when judgments are being poured upon this earth just prior to the Millennium.

Hitherto we have not had indicated the part the Church will play in the Millennium. In general terms we read in the previous chapter of those who take part in the first resurrection being priests of God and of Christ and reigning with Him a thousand years. But here we have the distinctive position of the Church in relation to the Millennial earth outlined for us.

First note carefully the similarity of the wording of the invitation to behold the judgment of the false bride and the display of the true Bride. The false bride attempted display; the true waits for it in relation to, and as given by, the Bridegroom.

That is, exit the false bride, enter the true Bride. The fact that one of the seven angels connected with the seven last plagues draws attention to the judgment of the one, and the place of blessing of the other, proves that the latter has to do with the Church in the Millennium, for it is then she shall be displayed.

Note another point very carefully: "I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). "I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:9-10).

Doubtless the Church is here presented under the symbol of a Woman, a Wife, a Bride, a City, just as in Paul's epistles she is spoken of as a Bride, a Body, a Temple, the Assembly of God.

In the first passage, keeping up the symbols for the sake of clearness, John tells us he saw a city. What should we expect him to describe? Surely a city But no, he tells of the city as a BRIDE, adorned for her husband. Evidently then it is the Bride aspect of the Church that is presented in the former Scripture.

In the second passage John is invited to see the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. What should we expect him to describe? Surely the Bride But no, he is shown that Great CITY, the Holy Jerusalem. Evidently then it is the city aspect of the Church that is presented in the latter Scripture.

The Bride aspect is the eternal aspect of the Church—the Church as the joy and delight of the heart of Christ, presented to us under that symbol, as describing the highest joy and delight possible. The closest tie in nature is that of husband and wife —“they two shall be one flesh” (Eph. 5:31). The closest tie in new creation is that of the Bridegroom and the Bride.

The City aspect is the Millennial aspect of the Church, and speaks of rule, government, organization. The details will bear out this distinction.

In the eternal state all distinction between Jew and Gentile, and nation and nation, is gone. There will be no Emperors or Kings then—God is supreme.

In the Millennium such distinctions are owned.

In the eternal state God speaks of “His people” (vs. 3).

In the Millennium God speaks of “the nations of them which are saved,” and “the Kings of the earth” (vs. 24), and “of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel” (vs. 12).

But for a true understanding of this passage it must be clear that we are contemplating the glorified Church as the Bride of Christ in her relation to an earthly people in the Millennium. For instance, Revelation 22:3 says, “There shall be no more curse.” This is indeed gloriously true of the Church, once and for all beyond the reach of sin and failure, but it is not true of the Millennial earth, where a sinner that is an hundred years old shall die, and when at its end there will be seen as great a rebellion against God as ever known in the history of the world.

Let us now look at the details of the City.

First, John is carried away in spirit to a great and high mountain, there to behold this ravishing vision. When invited to look upon the doom of the false bride, Babylon, he is carried in spirit into the wilderness. The wilderness speaks of how God looks at that which is the product of man, even religiously, as led by Satan. Nothing His eye can rest upon with approval or delight. Everything about it is offensive to Him.

But to understand the heavenly city it is necessary to be lifted up in the power of God's Spirit to see with God's eyes what He sees. Balaam was taken to “the top of the rocks” (Num. 23:9) to behold the vision of the Almighty. In the same way Ezekiel was set “upon a very high mountain” (Ezek. 40:2) when he had a vision of an earthly city that should be according to God.

The Holy City is not heaven, for it descends OUT OF HEAVEN from God. It is a description of God's people in this dispensation as the Church in relation to an earthly system of blessing in the Millennium. Her origin is heavenly—“out of heaven”—and divine—“from God.”

She has the glory of God, and her light is as a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal, the jasper stone symbolizing the glory of God. With what relief we turn from the contemplation of the Church as a professing body under the discriminating searching gaze of the Son of God to this scene. Thyatira, with its depths of corruption and wickedness; Sardis with its lifelessness and formality; Philadelphia, the brightest spot, but yet characterized by little strength; Laodicea, with her nauseous lukewarmness, her assumption, her ignorance of her true state, present us with a picture sad beyond words, yet having in it its bright spots. But here all that is past. Only the fruit of God's work—the product of Christ's death, the outcome of His high priestly grace and intercession, the result of the Holy Spirit's gracious and patient dealings—is seen, and the result is incomparable in splendor and glory. It bespeaks the triumph of God. Could anything finer be said than that it has the glory of God?

It has a wall great and high, speaking of security from danger, and separation from evil. It is only as we are kept in the power of the Spirit that the saints are secure from outside danger, and kept in godly separation from evil. Then it will be so absolutely and forever. What a prospect!

It has also twelve gates, and, as the City is foursquare, on every side from which the City is approached there is uniformity of appearance and abundant entrance. If the wall were without gates it were a sorry thing. There is not only the exclusion of all that is evil, but also the inclusion of all that is of God, a happy, perfect balance.

The height of the wall is 144 cubits, that is, 12 x 12. The number of gates is twelve. These numbers speak of full and perfect administration.

Alas! some Christians are all walls, all exclusive, all for shutting out, no bowels of compassion, no yearning of heart characterizing them. Others are all gates, all inclusive, and in their largeheartedness and zeal forget the holiness of that which bears Christ's name. But in the Holy City everything will be perfect.

In these gates are the names written of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and at the gates are twelve angels or messengers. A gate in Scripture usage is the scene of judgment, the place where those who had a grievance came and stated their case. It answers to the thought of our High Court of Justice.

The above, then, teaches that the Church will judge Israel, and Israel will rejoice in it, for the Church will be the agent of her Lord, and will deal wisely and righteously, and Israel will recognize this.

The City has twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

It may be asked, where does the Apostle Paul come in? The answer can be given in a two fold way. First, twelve is a number symbolic of administration. There were actually thirteen tribes in Israel, but the people are always addressed as twelve tribes. James addresses himself “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1).

Second, the writer has often in his mind likened the Apostle Paul's position among and in relation to the twelve apostles to Levi's position among and in relation to the twelve tribes. Just as the tribe of Levi stood by itself, having territory throughout the tribes, so Paul stood by himself, and his teaching formed, doubtless, all the apostles.

The foundations speak of stability, twelve emphasizing again the administrative character of the City. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb remind us that saints are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

And this, by the way, shows conclusively that it is not the earthly bride, Israel, that is symbolized by the Heavenly city, as some think, but the Heavenly Bride, the Church, which is so set forth.

The vision given to Ezekiel (Ezek. 40 et seq.) of the earthly city, symbolical of the earthly bride, though a real city, differs from John's vision in such a way as to show that the two are distinct, though in relation to each other.

Ezekiel speaks of a reed to measure therewith; John writes of a golden reed—the reed symbolizing human measurement; the golden reed symbolizing that what is measured, while limited, is yet complete in divine righteousness.

Ezekiel speaks of the earthly city being four thousand five hundred cubits square. Four hundred cubits make one furlong. But the Holy City is 12,000 furlongs cube, for we read the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

In the one case the measure is comprehensible, as being within the compass of an earthly city; in the other it is incomprehensible, save as symbolic. It seems to indicate that the Church is the greatest thing of all God's handiwork, and yet, vast as it is, it has limits and can be measured.

No doubt the intense form of the administrative number 12, that is 12,000, speaks of the greatest heights of administration the world has ever seen, and this is held by the Church during the Millennium under Christ.

The building of the wall is of jasper, the thought connecting itself with the glory of God, as brought out in verse 11; whilst the City is of pure gold, like unto clear glass, the whole symbolizing a scene of fixed righteousness.

The foundations of the wall are garnished with all manner of precious stones. Again the number twelve comes in with its usual significance. Indeed, the number twelve and its multiples are stamped again and again most significantly upon the Holy City.

The names of the twelve apostles are found in the foundations. Just as one gem has one color and another flashes another color, so one apostle is distinguished by one line of ministry, and another apostle by another line. God does not repeat Himself, and He gives to each as He wills.

The twelve gates are twelve pearls. The Church is the pearl of great price, and in each gate being of one pearl we see how God would present to Israel and the nations the thought of the preciousness of the Church to Christ, even though the Church be viewed in administration, as the number twelve again indicates. The street of the city is of pure gold, as it were transparent glass. It is a scene where divine righteousness is seen to the infinite glory of God. The city has only one street—there will be no systems, sects, divisions, and subdivisions there. The prayer of our Lord, “That they all may be one” (John 17:21), will yet be gloriously answered. The joyful contemplation of this would go far to produce a yearning of heart now by God's Spirit for the unity of God's people, and that nothing in our spirit and ways should help on the confusion and weakness of the present. Thank God, He will triumph over all the sectarian spirit so natural to the human heart, and give us all to enter practically, and forever, into His thoughts for His Church.

There is no temple seen therein. The earthly Bride will have her earthly city, Jerusalem, and her earthly temple. But in the heavenly city the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof.

The vail of the temple was rent in twain at the cross. No vail is on the hearts of God's people, nor on the face of Christ.

In the Holy City, all God's glory is free to shine in unhindered splendor; there is no intermediate condition of things, no medium for its shining. It shines direct upon the hearts of the saints. It speaks of all God's nature being glorified, and everything in that Holy City being in accord with God. The love of God is at last complacent in that wondrous scene.

Thus the glowing narrative goes on to amplify this thought by telling us that there is in that city no need of created lights—sun or moon—the glory of God lightens that scene, and the Lamb is the light thereof. God's glory shines in Christ.

The saved nations walk in the light of it, and kings bring their honor and glory unto it. What a day that will be when heavenly light shall really govern the affairs of this world.

But it cannot be over-emphasized that it is not the light of the Church, but light through the Church. Then without limitation of any sort the Church will receive the light of God and the Lamb, and be the medium for its shining to the world. It is not the Church shining in her own light, for she has none in herself, but the Church shining forth the light of Christ.

Every bit of pretension as to the Church shining, the Church teaching, that the Church is the source of blessing to the world, is utterly false. But can anything be more blessed than that the Church, the pearl of great price, inexpressibly dear to Christ, should receive fully the light of the glory of God so as to make her the blessed medium for the illuminating of the nations?

The gates of the city are never shut—there is no night there. Nothing that defiles that scene can ever enter. What a blissful picture of the triumph of God's thoughts for His Church.

