

# The Synopsis

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## 1 THE REVELATION

### 1.1 Introduction

As regards Peter and Paul, we have scriptural authority for regarding them as the apostles respectively of the circumcision and of the uncircumcision. Peter and the twelve remained at Jerusalem when the disciples were scattered, and, continuing (though God was careful to maintain unity) the work of Christ in the remnant of Israel, gathered into an assembly on earth, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Paul, having received the ministry of the assembly, as of the gospel to every creature under heaven (Col. I), as a wise master-builder, lays the foundation. Peter sets us off as pilgrims on our journey to follow Christ risen towards the inheritance above. Paul, in the full development of his doctrine (though owning this, as in Philippians 3), shews us the saints sitting in heavenly places in Christ, heirs of all which He is heir of. All this was dispensational, and it is full of instruction. But John holds a different place. He does not enter on dispensation; nor, though once or twice stating the fact (as John 13: I; 14: I; 17: 24; 20: 17), does he take the saint, nor even the Lord Himself, up to heaven. Jesus, for him, is a divine Person, the Word made flesh manifesting God and His Father, eternal life come down to earth. The epistle of John treats the question of our partaking of this life, and its character.

But at the close of the Gospel, after stating the sending of the Comforter on His going away, Christ opens to the disciples (though in a mysterious way) the continuation of God's dealings with the earth, of which John ministerially is the representative, linking the manifestation of Christ on earth at His first coming with His manifestation at His second; Christ's Person, and eternal life in Him, being the abiding security and living seed of God, when dispensationally all was corrupted, and in confusion and decay. If all were in disorder outwardly, eternal life was still the same.

The destruction of Jerusalem formed a momentous epoch as to these things, because the Jewish assembly, formed as such at Pentecost, had ceased (nay, it had even before); only the judicial act was then accomplished. Christians had been warned to leave the camp. The breach of Christianity with Judaism was consummated. Christ could no longer take up the assembly, established in the

remnant of the Jews, as His own seat of earthly authority.<sup>1</sup> But alas! the assembly, as Paul had established it too, had already fallen from its first estate—could in no sense take up the fallen inheritance of Israel. All seek their own, says Paul, not the things of Jesus Christ. All they of Asia-Ephesus, the beloved scene where all Asia had heard the word of God—had forsaken him. They who had been specially brought with full intelligence into the assembly’s place could not hold it in the power of faith. Indeed, the mystery of iniquity was at work before this, and was to go on and grow until the hindrance to the final apostasy was removed.

Here, in this state of universal declension and ruin, John’s ministry comes in. Stability was in the Person of Christ, for eternal life first, but for the ways of God upon earth too. If the assembly was spued out of His mouth, He was the faithful witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Let us trace the links of this in his Gospel. In John 20, as elsewhere noticed in detail, we have a picture of God’s ways from the resurrection of Christ till we come to the remnant of Israel in the latter days, represented by Thomas’s look on the pierced One and believing by seeing. In chapter 21 we have, besides the remnant, the full millennial gathering. Then at the close of the chapter, the special ministry of Peter and John is pointed out, though mysteriously. The sheep of Jesus of the circumcision are confided to Peter; but this ministry was to close like Christ’s. The assembly would not be established on this ground, any more than Israel. There was no tarrying here till Christ came.<sup>2</sup> Peter’s ministry in fact was closed, and the circumcision assembly left shepherdless, before the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to all such connection for ever. Peter then asks as to John. The Lord answers, confessedly mysteriously, but putting off, as that which did not concern Peter who was to follow Him, the closing of John’s ministry, prolonging it in possibility till Christ came. Now, in fact, the Bridegroom tarried; but the service and ministry of John by the word (which was all that was to remain, and no apostle in personal care) did go on to the return of Christ.

John was no master-builder like Paul—had no dispensation committed to him. He was connected with the assembly in its earthly structure like Peter, not in the Ephesus or heavenly one; he was not the minister of the circumcision, but carried on the earthly system among the Gentiles, only holding fast the Person of Christ. His special place was testimony to the Person of Christ come to earth with divine title over it—power over all flesh. This did not break the links with Israel, as Paul’s ministry did, but raised the power which held all together in the Person of Christ to a height which carried it through any hidden time, or hidden power, on to its establishment over the world at the end; it did not exclude Israel as such, but enlarged the scene of the exercise of Christ’s power so as to set it over the world, and did not establish it in Israel as its source,

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<sup>1</sup>This was morally true from Acts 3, where the Jewish leaders refuse the testimony to a glorified Christ who would return, as they had rejected a humbled One. Acts 7, by the mouth of Stephen, closes God’s dealings with them in testimony, and the heavenly gathering begins, his spirit being received on high. The destruction of Jerusalem closed Jewish history judicially.

<sup>2</sup>Paul, of course, is in no way noticed. For him the assembly belonged to heaven—was the body of Christ, the house of God. He was a builder.

though it might establish Israel itself in its own place from a heavenly source of power.

What place does the assembly then hold in this ministry of John, found as it is in the book of Revelation? None in its Pauline character, save in one phrase, coming in after the Revelation is closed, where its true place in Christ's absence is indicated (chap. 22: 17). We have the saints at the time, in their own conscious relationship to Christ, in reference, too, to the royal and priestly place to His God and Father, in which they are associated with Himself. But John's ministerial testimony, as to the assembly, views it as the outward assembly on earth<sup>3</sup> in its state of decay—Christ judging this—and the true assembly, the capital city and seat of God's government over the world, at the end, but in glory and grace. It is an abode, and where God dwells and the Lamb. All this facilitates our intelligence of the objects and bearing of the book. The assembly has failed; the Gentiles, grafted in by faith, have not continued in God's goodness. The Ephesian assembly, the intelligent vessel, and expression of what the assembly of God was, had left its first estate, and unless it repented, the candlestick was to be removed. The Ephesus of Paul becomes the witness on earth of decay and of removal out of God's sight, even as Israel had been removed. God's patience would be shewn towards the assembly as it had been towards Israel; but the assembly would not maintain God's testimony in the world any more than Israel had. John does maintain this testimony, ministerially judging the assemblies by Christ's word,<sup>4</sup> and then the world from the throne, till Christ comes and takes to Himself His great power and reigns. During this transition—dealing of the throne the heavenly saints are seen on high. When Christ comes, they come with Him.

The first part, then, of the epistles of John is the continuation, so to speak, of the Gospel before the last two dispensational chapters; the Revelation, that of these last two chapters (20, 21), where, Christ being risen and no ascension given, the dispensational dealings of God are largely intimated in the circumstances which occur; while it is shewn at the same time that He could not personally set up the kingdom then. He must ascend first. The two short epistles shew us that truth (truth as to His Person) was the test of true love, and to be held fast when what was anti-Christian came in; and the free liberty of the ministration of the truth to be held fast against assumed ecclesiastical or clerical authority, as contrasted with the assembly. The apostle had written to

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<sup>3</sup>And hence in particular assemblies, which of course could be judged and removed. There is another point of divine wisdom here. Though we have, I doubt not, the whole history of the assembly to its end in this world, it is given in facts then present, so that there should be no putting off the coming of the Lord. So, in the parables, the virgins who go to sleep are the same that wake up; the servants that receive the talents are the same found on the Lord's return, though we know ages have passed and death come in.

<sup>4</sup>Note this immensely important principle: the church judged by the word, not the church a judge; and the individual Christian called to give heed to this judgment. The church (I use the word designedly here as used to claim this authority) cannot be an authority when the Lord calls me, if I have ears to hear, to hear and receive the judgment pronounced by Him on it. I judge its state by the words of the Spirit, am bound to do so: it cannot be an authority therefore on the Lord's behalf over me in that state. Discipline is not in question here, but the church as wielding authority.

the assembly. Diotrephes rejected free ministry.

I now turn to the book itself.

## 1.2 Chapter 1

The Revelation is one belonging to Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, and He signifies it to John. Though God over all blessed for ever, He is here seen as Son of man, the rejected Messiah or Lamb, and so Head over all things. This fact, that the revelation is one confided to Him, is important, because it at once makes it the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, being communicated by Jesus, and given to Him by God. This testimony of Jesus and word of God comes as a vision to John, who bare record of all he saw. All of it is prophetic in character, not the Spirit of God the messenger of the Father and of the Son's grace to the assembly in its own place-a direct inspired communication to the assembly itself for itself as in its own right place-but a prophetic revelation to John about it as in the world, and about the world itself.

The assembly being already in decay and to be removed, whatever the delay of grace, the time was at hand, and the rejection of the assembly on earth to be taken as a starting-point. Another system was to be set up. The apostle had not his face turned towards the assemblies at all, but his back. The mind of the Spirit is towards Christ's taking the kingdom. Still Christ was yet amongst them, but as Son of man, the character in which He judges and inherits the world. The apostle turns and sees Him. Still it behoved, if he was recounting the coming dealing with the world in judgment, to notice by the bye " the things that are." By giving them in seven contemporary churches, no time was necessary; it left the final results as at the door, for they were in the last days, yet it gave, if there was delay, opportunity for a full moral picture of the whole of the assembly's history. I see in this only the wisdom of the Spirit, and exactly the character of John's ministry. "If I will that he tarry till I come."

I cannot doubt then for a moment that (while professedly of universal application for everyone that had an ear, not an address to the general conscience of the assembly) the seven assemblies represent the history of Christendom, the assembly as under man's responsibility, the fact of the judgment of the world coming afterwards on its close (the assemblies being " the things that are ") and the character of events, beginning with the assembly leaving its first love, and ending with holding fast till He comes, and with being spued out of Christ's mouth. The adoption of the number seven, which cannot mean completeness at the same time because the states are different; the reference to Christ's coming; the reference to the great tribulation to come on all the earth in the letter to Philadelphia; the clear object of warning the assembly till Christ came, the world being then in scene for judgment: all leave no cloud upon the conclusion that the seven churches are successive phases of the professing assembly's history, though not exactly consecutive (the fourth going on to the end; new phases then commencing, and going on to the end collaterally also). <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>There are moral reasons from the contents. We shall see, farther on. that the structure

But though the assembly be thus spoken of, God Himself appears here as the administrator of the world, even when addressing the assembly; and Christ as man coming under Him to this purpose, the Holy Ghost being noticed as the direct agent of power in the sevenfold perfection in which it is exercised. It is not the Father and the Son, but God who is, yet who embraces past and future in His being, and is never inconsistent with Himself, making good in time all in which He has announced Himself in the past. The form of this however is peculiar here. It is not merely the abstract idea of Jehovah, who was, and is, and is to come. He is first announced by His present absolute existence, "from him who is," the "I am," God Himself; and then to connect Himself with previous dealings (not present relationships) declares that He is the One who was (had revealed Himself in previous ages to the earth or to men, to the Abrahams and Moses's of old time), and at the same time was the coming One who would make good everything revealed of and by Himself. Jesus Christ (who comes last as the Man in immediate connection with God's witness to, and government of, the earth) is presented as the faithful witness-as He was personally on earth-of God; as risen from the dead (but no ascension or headship of the assembly), taking all in this character, not after the flesh; and lastly, in government not yet made good, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

The saints then express their own consciousness of what He has done for them, yet still in reference to the kingdom, not as the body or bride, or their own heavenly joys, but the highest possible as regards the given glory and place. This is the necessary consequence of the consciousness of a near and blessed relationship. Whatever the glory of the One we are in relationship with, it is what He is for oneself, one's own nearness to Him, that comes to the mind when the glory is declared. Were a general to march in triumph into a town. the feeling of a child or wife would be, , That is my father,'- 'That is my husband.' Here the feeling, though of this character, is more unselfish. "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." It is His love to us which is celebrated, still with the personal feeling "us." The saints know what He has done for them, and further what He has made them. His love is perfect. King and Priest are His highest characters here: nearest to God in power downwards, and in approaching Him upwards. He has made us kings and priests to God and His Father: to Him be glory! Such is the saints' thought when He is spoken of. He loved us, has cleansed us, and given us a place with Himself. This flows out the instant He is named. It is the answer of heart when He is announced, before any communication takes place. His having done this is not announced; it is the saints' own consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

As to others, all must be told. The next point, the first announced, is His appearing to the world. No direct communication to the assembly for its own sake-the book is not that. Here the assembly has that in its own consciousness only, as we have seen. Behold! He cometh with clouds; every eye shall see Him, the Jews too who pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because

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of the book fully confirms this.

<sup>6</sup>We shall find the same thing at the close when the prophecy is ended. Here what He has been to the saints and has done: there what He is for the future. See chapter 22 : 17.

of Him. His appearing is in judgment.

We then find, what is so remarkable in John, the mixing up in expression of God and Christ. Verse 8 cannot be said to be one or the other. It is Christ; but it is Christ Jehovah, Almighty, the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come; the first and the last (compare chap. 22: 12, 13).

Thus, we have the saints of these days; Christ's appearing to judgment; He is God, the first and the last, Alpha and Omega; the complete circle of position from John's day to the end. The practical position which John takes with all the saints, is "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." He belongs to the kingdom, but must wait while Christ waits, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. The generic name given to testimony applies to all his ministry as well as to the prophecy-the word of God and the testimony of Jesus: only one might have thought that prophecy was not this last, as it was not to the assembly about itself from its Head; but the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

Such is the introduction to this book. We now enter on its contents. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. It is his place and privilege however then, as a Christian, which is spoken of, not the prophetic period into which he entered. In the day of resurrection-his own place-the day on which Christians meet, the apostle, removed from the society of Christians, still enjoyed the special elevating power of the Holy Ghost, though alone; and is thus used of God, allowed to be banished for the purpose, for what He could not, in an ordinary way, have communicated to the assembly for its edification. The persecuting emperor little thought what he was giving to us when he banished the apostle; no more than Augustus, in his political plans as to the census of the empire, knew he was sending a poor carpenter to Bethlehem, with his espoused wife, that Christ might be born there; or the Jews and Pilate's soldiers, that they were sending the thief to heaven, when they broke his legs in heartless respect for their own superstitions or ordinances. God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man's busy movements: they will accomplish God's. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will.

The same voice that afterwards called John up to heaven, he now hears behind him on earth-the voice of the Son of man. It summons his attention with power; and turning to see the voice, as Moses towards the bush, he sees, not the image of God's presence in Israel, but the vessels of God's light in the earth, and a complete summary of it all, and, in the midst of them, Christ as Son of man. We find, thus, in the Revelation, God's whole history of the world, or of what is of Him in it, from the first decay of the assembly to the new heavens and new earth. But it was impossible for God to set aside the present expectation of Christ, or to justify the assembly in its careless but sinful thought, "My Lord delayeth His coming." Hence, as always, this history, and especially that of the assembly, is given in a way which leaves time out altogether. The moral progress of the assembly is given in pictures of the state of the existing assemblies selected for that purpose, beginning with its first decline, and ending

with its entire rejection. Being taken up as assemblies, the general principle of responsibility is in view, and the assembly viewed, not as the infallibly blessed body of Christ, but such as that it may be rejected and set aside on earth; for a local assembly and the external visible assembly clearly can.

These assemblies are seen as distinct light-bearers; that is, in their place of service, or rather position of witness in the world. They are viewed in their own proper character as of God; as set by Him in the world, they are of gold. He may take them away because they give a dim, or no true light or witness for God; but the thing taken away was founded in divine righteousness, and founded originally by a divine hand.

But the Spirit first occupies itself with the character of Him who stood amongst them. First, we get His actual position, before stating what He was. He stood as Son of man. We have not Him here as Head of the one body, nor even as heavenly Intercessor; nor have we the Christ, of course (that is, the Jewish character of the Lord). It will be found that these are just the characters of Christ omitted also in the first chapter of John's Gospel. John sees Him in the wide character in which He is set over all the works of God's hand, and Heir of all promises and purposes of God to man according to divine righteousness. He is not the Son of man in service. His garment is down to His feet, and He has the girdle of divine righteousness about His breasts. This is His character.

We have then His qualities or attributes. First, He is the Ancient of days. In Daniel the same truth comes out. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days; but, farther on in the chapter, it is the Ancient of days who comes. The Son of man is Jehovah. This characterises all the testimony. The King of kings and Lord of lords shews Him : <sup>7</sup> but, when He comes, we find that He is King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>t</sup> But in this glory He has the attributes of judgment-eyes of fire-that which pierces into everything, and fire is ever the sign of judgment. This was its piercing, searching character: His feet, the firmness with which sin was met; for brass is righteousness, viewed, not as intrinsically in God to be approached, but as dealing with man, in his responsibility as man. The mercy-seat was gold, the altar and laver brass; but there it was as an altar, that is, dealing with sin for man, a sacrifice, though fire was there, but here the burning furnace of judgment. The voice was the sign of power and majesty.

Next, we have official supremacy. He held all that was subordinate authority in light and order, here spoken of as regards the assembly, in His right hand, in His power. He had the power of judgment by the word, and supreme authority the sun-in the fulness of its highest character. We have His personal glory as Jehovah; His qualities as divine Judge; and His supreme official position.

But, He was not less the Redeemer, the gracious securer in blessing of them that were His. John (as ever in prophetic vision of Jehovah, for it is not the Spirit of adoption here) falls at His feet as one dead. So Daniel; so in spirit Isaiah (chap. 6); but His power sustains the saint, does not destroy him. He lays His right hand on John himself, declares Himself the first and the last, Jehovah Himself, but withal the same that died in love and has complete power

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<sup>7</sup>I Timothy 6 : IS. <sup>t</sup> Revelation 19 : 16.

over death and hades; the deliverer from it, not the subjecter to it. He has risen out of death and hades, and has the keys-full power over them -divine power or support; and He who died and rose again, and lives for ever even as man, does so, not simply in the power of divine life in man, but of victory over all that man was subject to by sin and infirmity.

This is the position He here takes with John His servant, and with the assemblies respectively. We shall see that the state of the latter assemblies brings out other characters known only to the opened eye of faith. These were what John had seen, and which he was to write. Then as regards prophetic facts, he was to write the things that were, the state of these various assemblies as the setting forth historically of the assembly's various state-a history; and the things which should be after them (that is, when the assembly's history has close don earth). The whole assembly therefore, is thus, to the Spirit, the present time-the "things that are." The future was what came after it, God's dealings with the world. This, while it left the coming of the Lord, or preparatory prophetic events in immediate expectation, left, if there was delay (and there was to be), the period undefined, and the expectation, though prolonged, still a present one. We may remark that we have the personal glory of Christ here, the position as to the assemblies accompanying it. He is not personally revealed as Son of man, that is, as taking the Son of man's place: only He who is Ancient of days is so seen as to make us understand that it was one who had that place-was Son of man. Subsequently, in the Apocalypse, it is not His intrinsic personal character, but some relative character or place He takes. Only we have something analogous to this, when the account of future things comes in. As regards the world, He is seen as the Lamb, one whom the world has rejected, but who has redemption right over it. There He is seen with the seven horns and seven eyes-His power over the world, as with the seven stars here as Son of man. These are the things John had seen.

We now pass to "the things that are." The stars are in Christ's hand; He speaks of them first; He walks in the midst of the assemblies. The latter are light-bearers, the assemblies or assembly as set in a given position, and viewed as such before God; not what the people became, but what the assembly is in His sight; just as Israel was His people whatever the Israelites became. The stars are that which is held by Christ to give light and have authority, what He holds responsible to this end before Him. It is, in a certain sense, all composing the assembly therefore, and so it is often said in the addresses to the assemblies; but more especially those who stand in responsibility through their connection with Himself, the stars in His hand. They should shine, and influence, and represent Him, each in its place during the night. That the clergy gradually took this place, and in this sense are responsible in it, is quite true; but that is their affair to answer for themselves before the Lord. The Spirit does not so take it here. They assume it as honour; they have it as responsibility. If ever they were called "angels," it was evidently just this assumption, and taken from this place. Again, it cannot be doubted that leaders, elders, or others, were in a special place of responsibility, supposing them to be rightly such. In Acts 20 they are so treated; but the Spirit does not so own them here. Christ does not



address Himself to elders, nor to the modern notion of a bishop, which did not indeed exist then. Nor is a diocese <sup>8</sup> thought of in these addresses. You have not the authorities (elders) spoken of in scripture, of which there were always several; and this passage of scripture cannot be applied to human arrangements as now existing.

What then is the angel? It is not a symbol, properly speaking. The star is the symbol, and it is here seen in Christ's hand. It is (as angel is always used where it is not actually a heavenly or earthly messenger) the mystical representative of one not actually seen. It is so used of Jehovah, so used of a child, so spoken of Peter. Elders may have practically been specially responsible from their position; but the angel represents the assembly, and especially those to whom, from nearness to Christ and communion with Him, or responsibility for it through the operation of His Spirit in them for His service, He looks for the state of His assembly in His sight. No doubt the whole assembly is responsible, and therefore the candlestick is removed when unfaithfulness is brought home to it; but Christ is in immediate communication with these in respect of it—a solemn thought for all who have the good of the assembly at heart.

The way in which the angels and the assemblies are identified, and any distinction in the degree or manner of it, requires a little more detailed attention. That the assemblies are addressed in their general responsibility, in the addresses to the angels, is evident. For it is said, "What the Spirit saith to the churches." It is not a private communication to an authority for his direction, as to a Titus or a Timothy, but said to the assemblies; that is, the angel represents their responsibility. So we find distinct parts of them noticed. "The devil shall cast some of you into prison"; "fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer": "but I have a few things against thee, that thou hast there": "My faithful martyr who was slain among you": "But unto you I say, the rest in Thyatira" (so it is to be read). Yet the angel and assembly or candlestick are distinguished: "I will remove thy candlestick out of its place." "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel."

But this separation between the angel and the assembly does not take place in the last three assemblies. The angel is addressed throughout. As to them too it is only said, Christ has the seven stars, not that He holds them in His right hand. In Smyrna and Philadelphia there is no judgment; they were tried, as faithful, and encouraged. As to judgments, or rather warning threats :—in the case of Ephesus, which presents the general fact of the assembly's first decline, the warning is given that the candlestick would be taken away unless they repented: that the assembly did not, we know from scripture and fact, and these assemblies looked at as a successive history. In Pergamos and Thyatira the offenders are those specifically judged; in the case of Thyatira fearful judgments on Jezebel and those connected with her: she had had time to repent and did not; but here the change of everything is looked for at the Lord's coming. All this shews the angels to be the representatives of the assemblies, but morally such; Christ's warning to be addressed to them (as we can easily understand

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<sup>8</sup>Except in some parts of the world, those called bishops are always bishops of a city, shewing historically that dioceses are a subsequent arrangement. Angels were not chief officers of the synagogue.

to be the case in any who had the interest of the assembly at heart), whom Christ trusted with this; but to be so far identified with the assemblies that it concerned all who composed them, while particular judgments were denounced on guilty parties.

### 1.3 Chapter 2

We may now enter on the series of particular assemblies; but briefly, in connection with the whole structure of the book, rather than entering into the instructive details, which I have done elsewhere in a series of lectures. The first great fact is, that the assembly in this world is subject to judgment, and to have its whole existence and place before God as light-bearer in the world set aside; secondly, that God will do this if it departs from its first spiritual energy. This is an immense principle. He has set the assembly to be a true witness of what He has manifested in Jesus; of what He is when Jesus is gone on high. If it be not this, it is a false witness, and it will be set aside. God may have patience, and has blessedly so. He may propose to her to return to her first love, and does; but, if this do not take place, the candlestick is removed, the assembly ceases to be God's light-bearer in the world. The first estate must be maintained, or God's glory and the truth are falsified; and the creature must be set aside. But no mere unsustained creature does this, none as such. Hence all fails and is judged, save as in, or upheld by, the Son of God, the second Man. Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency, but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone. As heretofore remarked, there were works of labour and patience; but the faith, hope, and love had in their true energy disappeared. They had rejected the pretension of false teachers, and laboured and not fainted. All that can be said of them is said to shew Christ's love, and that He is not forgetful of them, or of the good manifested in them. Still they had left their first love; and this unless repented of and the first works done, involved the taking away of the candlestick.

Another important principle is found here, that when the assembly had departed from faithfulness, when collectively it had ceased to be the expression of the love in which God has visited the world, God throws back individuals on the word of God for themselves: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The assembly is judged, and thus cannot be the security for faith; the individual is called to hear what the Spirit says. The warning of taking away the candlestick here is specially worthy of notice, because there was a great deal the Lord highly approved of-encouraged them by shewing He did; but, for all that, if first love was departed from, the candlestick would be removed.

The character of Christ and promises are general, as the assembly is characteristic of the whole principle on which the assembly stands. Christ has the stars in His right hand and walks amidst the candlesticks. It is not a special character applicable to a special state, but the whole bearing of His position in the midst of the assemblies. The assembly, viewed as having left its first love,

is never promised anything. It cannot direct a believer when it comes under reproof and judgment itself. The promise is then to the individual overcomer: a very important principle. The promise given to him that overcomes is the general one-is the contrast to Adam's ruin, but in a higher and better way than that in which he enjoyed the good which he lost. He that overcomes shall eat of the tree of life. But this is not the tree of life in man's paradise in this world, but the paradise of God Himself. We must remark, too, that it is not as the first Adam now, individually keeping one's first estate, but overcoming. And what is before us to overcome in is, not only the world and its hostilities (though that may be), but within the sphere of the assembly itself. It is the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies which gives occasion to the speaking of overcoming. This, in respect of the claim of the assembly to be heard, is an immensely important truth. The message is addressed to the assembly, not by it to individuals, and she is warned of her delinquency, and the individual saint is called to overcome.

The word to Smyrna is short. Whatever the malice and power of Satan, at the utmost, if permitted, he has but the power of death. Christ is First and Last, beyond as before death, God Himself; but more than that, has met and gone through its power. The saints were not to fear. Satan would work, be allowed to sift, to imprison. Let the saints only be faithful to the extreme point of his power; all beyond was beyond him, was Christ's; and the faithful one would receive from Him the crown of life. Tribulation, poverty, the contempt of those who pretended to have the legitimate hereditary claim to be God's people-always the persecutors, be they Jews or Christians was the portion of the assembly here; and God suffered it. It was really mercy to the declining assembly. Their hope was beyond it all when Christ gave the crown of life. This made the assembly, sliding into the world, or about to do it insensibly through decline of its first love, sensible that the world was in Satan's hands-was not the rest of saints. But, if the Lord permitted, He limited, the tribulation. All was in His hands. Not only was there the crown for the sufferers, but whoever overcame, his portion was secure: the death of judgment, the second death, would not hurt him.

We now need a closer judgment. Christ appears as the One having the two-edged sword of the word proceeding out of His mouth. It will be remarked here, that, in Smyrna and Pergamos, a special character of Christ applies to a special state. There is no general result for the assembly. In Ephesus we have Christ's position as Judge in the midst of the candlesticks, and the assembly threatened with removal from its place of witness upon earth. In Thyatira He takes His place as Son of God, Son over His own house, and, as things are (as to the assembly) got to the worst, is revealed in all-piercing and immutable judgment, and the whole blessing of the new state is promised to the overcomer. In Pergamos we have faithfulness found in its previous path, Christ's name and faith held fast in spite of persecution. It differs from Philadelphia, that His word is not said to be held fast as that of Christ's patience (that the assembly, in its Pergamos state, did not do), but it did hold fast the confession of Christ in the midst of persecution. But another kind of evil came in-seduction to fall

in with the world's ways by evil teaching within. The doctrine of Balaam was there. Idolatry flowed in. There were also sects within, which taught pretended sanctity but evil practice. These the Lord would judge.

The general truth of removing the candlestick had no place here, neither as a general truth, when the assembly could be called on to keep its first love, nor as fiery judgment, because it was gone wholly astray; but there were corrupters, and Christ's servants were led into idolatry and evil. Individual approbation by Christ, communion with Himself in future blessing (in spirit then), as the once humbled and rejected One (which the assembly was ceasing to be), a name given by Christ, and so of tenderness on His part, a link known only to him who had it. In a word, individual association and individual blessing of secret delight-this was the promise to the overcomer when corruption was advancing, not yet dominant and unhindered in the assembly.

In Thyatira the assembly reaches to the close. There was found, in what Christ owned in this state of things, increasing devotedness. But Jezebel was allowed; and both connection with the world, idolatry, and children begotten to it in the assembly itself. All would be judged, great tribulation fall on Jezebel, and her children be killed. Christ searched the heart and reins, and applied judgment in unchangeable righteousness. The faithful ones of this epoch, the "you" that Christ specially addresses, are but a "rest," a remnant, but specially and growingly devoted. It is, we may remark here, what the assemblies are towards Christ, which is especially in view. What Jezebel did towards the faithful ones is not noted. The Lord's coming is the time looked to; and the whole millennial blessing is promised to him that overcomes; both to reign with Christ, and Christ the Morning Star Himself. "He that hath an ear" is now put after the overcoming; not said in connection with the assembly, but with those who overcome in it. The state is the state characterised by this. Thyatira may go on to the end, but does not characterise the witness of God to the end; other states must be brought in to do that. It is, I have no doubt, the Popery of the middle ages, say to the Reformation; Romanism itself goes on to the end. The judgment on Jezebel is final. The Lord had given her space to repent, and she had not repented. It would be a forced association with those whom she had once seduced to the ruin of them all. The whole character here is piercing judgment according to God's own nature and requirements; special trial and judgment, yet the blessing not special, but the portion of the saints at large in that which they have with Christ; as the departure and judgment were complete-adultery, not merely failure in first love.

### 1.4 Chapter 3

We have seen the close at the Lord's coming contemplated in Thyatira. Sardis begins a new collateral phase of the assembly's history. Save the having the seven stars, none of the ecclesiastical characters of Christ, none of those noticed in Him as walking in the midst of the assemblies, are noticed. Still the assembly is noticed as such. It is still the history of the assembly. But, the Lord's coming having been noticed, all characteristics of Christ refer to what He will have in the

kingdom. Still He has yet the seven stars-supreme authority over the assembly. It is nothing peculiar to this assembly He has it over, and as to, all. It is in this character He has to do with Sardis. He has the seven spirits, the fulness of the perfection in which He will govern the earth. Thus He is competent to bless in the assembly, though there is no regular ecclesiastical connection. He has power over all, and the fulness of the Spirit; both in perfection. Whatever the assembly is, He is all this. This is a great comfort. The assembly cannot fail in the place of witness through want of fulness of grace in Him. Nor can He fail him who has ears to hear.

But the state of the assembly shewed that it was far from availing itself of it. It had indeed a name to live; it was superior in its pretensions to the evil of Thyatira; nor were there Jezebels and corruption. But there was practically death. There was no completeness in her works before God. It was not evil here, but lack of spiritual energy. But this did leave individuals to defile their garments in the world. She was called to remember, not her first works, but what she had received and heard, the truth committed to her, the gospel and word of God; if not, she would be treated as the world. The Lord would come as a thief; for the Lord's coming is now always in view.

There is no threat of removing the candlestick: that was settled. Judgment, setting aside the assembly, was fixed. But this body would be treated as the world, not ecclesiastically as a corrupt assembly (compare I Thess. 5). However, some had preserved their integrity, and would be owned; and they would walk with Christ as those that had done righteousness. This was the promise too. They had confessed His name practically before men, before the world, and theirs would be confessed before God when the nominal assembly was treated as the world. They were real Christians in the midst of a worldly profession, and their names would not be struck out of the register, then ill-kept on earth, but infallibly rectified by heavenly judgment. It has been remarked that, simultaneously with bringing in the Lord's coming, the ear to hear comes after the distinguishing of the overcomers. Such a remnant only is looked for. I cannot doubt that we have Protestantism here.

The assembly of Philadelphia has a peculiarly interesting character. Nothing is said of its works, but that Christ knows them. But what is interesting in it is that it is peculiarly associated with Christ Himself. Christ, as in all these last assemblies, is not seen in the characters in which He walked in the midst of the assemblies, but in such as faith peculiarly recognises when ecclesiastical organisation has become the hot-bed of corruption. Here it is His personal character, what He is intrinsically, holy and true, what the word displays and requires, and what the word of God is in itself-moral character and faithfulness. Indeed this last word includes all : faithfulness to God within and without, according to what is revealed, and faithful to make good all He has declared.

Christ is known as the Holy One. Then outward ecclesiastical associations or pretensions will not do. There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that word which He will certainly make good. With this He has the administration; and opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. See what His path was on earth: only then graciously dependent, as we

are. He was holy and true, to man's view had a little strength, kept the word, lived by every word that proceeded out of God's lips, waited patiently for the Lord, and to Him the porter opened. He lived in the last days of a dispensation, the holy and true One, rejected, and, to human eye, failing in success with those who said they were Jews, but were the synagogue of Satan. So the saints here: they walk in a place like His; they keep His word, have a little strength, are not marked by a Pauline energy of the Spirit, but do not deny His name. This is the character and motive of all their conduct. It is openly confessed, the word kept, the name not denied. It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything.

And this element is noticed. Christ, the holy and true One, is waiting. Here on earth He waited patiently for Jehovah. It is the character of perfect faith. Faith has a double character -energy which overcomes, and patience which waits for God and trusts Him (see the first in Heb. II : 23-34; the latter in v. 8-22). It is the latter which is found here; the word of patience kept.

But as regards the former substantive qualities, keeping the word, and not denying Christ's name (though with a little strength) in presence of ecclesiastical pretension to a successional God-established religion, promises were given. Christ would force these pretentious claimants to divine succession to come and own that He had loved those who kept His word. An open door was given at present, and no man could shut it ; just as the porter had opened to Him, so that scribes and Pharisees and priests could not hinder it. In the future they would have to own themselves humbled, and that those who followed the word of the holy and true One were those He had loved. Meanwhile His approbation was sufficient. This was the test of faith-to be satisfied with His approbation, content with the authority of His word.

But there was a promise also as to the Lord's judgments in the earth. Christ is waiting till His enemies be made His footstool. We must wait for it to see the world set right. We have to go on where the god of this world has his way, though under divine limitation. The thought that good is to have its rights in this world is to forget the cross and Christ. We cannot have our rights till He has, for we have none but His. Judgment (since Pilate had it, and Christ was the righteous One before him) has not yet returned to righteousness. Till then Christ waits, though at the right hand of God; and we wait. It is not persecution and martyrdom, as in Smyrna. It is as hard a task perhaps, or, at any rate, our task now patience and contentedness with Christ's approbation, keeping His word, not denying His name.

But then there were other and blessed encouragements. There was an hour of temptation coming upon all the world to try those who belonged to earth, who dwelt there as belonging to it. Some might be spared, victorious in the trial; but those who kept the word of Christ's patience would be kept from it. On the whole world it would come; and where were they ?-Out of the world. They had not belonged to it when in it. They had been waiting for Christ to take His power-waiting His time to have the world. They belonged to heaven, to Him who was there; and they would be taken to be with Him when the world

was to be in the time of terrible trial. There was a special time before He took His power; and not only would they reign with Him in result, but they would be kept from that hour, and had the assurance of it in the time of their trial. And hence the Lord points them to His coming as their hope; not as warning that the unrepentant would be treated as the world when He appeared. He came quickly, and they were to look for the crown then, holding fast what they had, feeble but spiritually associated with Him as they were, lest any should take it.

We have now the general promise in heavenly places marked by special association with Christ; and they are publicly owned in that in which they seemed on earth to have nothing. Others had the pretension to be the people of God, the city of God-to have divine religious title; these were only consistent with His word, and they waited for Christ. Now, when Christ takes His power, when things are real, according to Him in power, they have this place according to God. It was the cross and contempt below; it is the display of God's name and heavenly city above.

Let us examine the promise to the overcomers here. He who had but a little strength is a pillar in the temple of the God in whom and with whom he is blessed. He was held perhaps as outside the ecclesiastical unity and order; he is a pillar in it in heaven, and will go no more out. On him who was hardly owned to have a part in grace has the name of his rejected Saviour's God been stamped publicly in glory. He who was hardly accounted to belong to the holy city has its heavenly name written on him too, and Christ's new name-the name not known to prophets and Jews according to the flesh, but which He has taken as dead to this world (where the false assembly settles down) and risen into heavenly glory. The careful association with Christ is striking here, and gives its character to the promise. "The temple of my God," says Christ; "the name of my God"; "of the city of my God," "my new name." Associated in Christ's own patience, Christ confers upon him what fully associates him in His own blessing with God. This is of peculiar blessing, and full of encouragement for us.

Laodicea follows. Lukewarmness characterises the last state of profession in the assembly. It is nauseous to Christ; He will spue it out of His mouth. It was not mere want of power, it was want of heart-the worst of all ills. This threat is peremptory, not conditional. It brought irremediable rejection. With this want of heart for Christ and His service, there was much pretension to the possession of resources and competency in themselves; "I am rich," whereas they had nothing of Christ. It is the professing assembly accounting itself rich without having Christ as the riches of the soul by faith. Therefore He counsels them to buy of Him true and approved righteousness, clothing for their moral nakedness, and what gave spiritual sight; for they were, as respects what Christ is and gives before God, poor, naked, and miserable, and specially so. This is Christ's judgment of their pretended acquisitions according to man. However, as long as the assembly subsists, Christ continues to deal in grace, stands at the door and knocks, presses reception of Himself in the closest way on the conscience. If anyone, still in what He was going to spue out, heard His voice and opened, He would give him admission to be with Him, and a part in the

kingdom.

There is no coming here; nor was there for the judgment of Jezebel. That was practically Babylon; and she is judged before Christ comes. This is spued out of Christ's mouth, cast off as worthless to Him; but the general body is judged as the world. The Lord's coming is in Thyatira for the saints, and in Philadelphia too. That is its aspect as to the assembly, and that only. Sardis is reduced, if unrepentant, to the condition of the world, and judged as such. When the state of Laodicea arrives, the assembly is disowned and rejected of Christ in that character: but for that His coming is not to be spoken of. Although Thyatira goes down to the end and closes ecclesiastically the assembly's history, yet only in the first three is the assembly at large treated as the subject of repentance. In Thyatira space had been given Jezebel to repent, and she did not: and the scene is to close and be replaced by the kingdom. In this respect the last four assemblies go together. There is no prospect of repentance of the whole assembly, or restoration. Sardis is called to hold fast and repent, and remember what she had received; but, if she does not watch, is to be treated as the world. Hence, as we have seen, the call to hear is addressed to overcomers after the promise.

The character of Christ in connection with this assembly must not be passed over. It brings out the passage from the various conditions of the assembly to His authority above and beyond it over the world. Christ personally takes up what the assembly has ceased to be. He is the Amen, the fulfilment and verifier of all the promises, the real witness and revealer of God and of truth, when the assembly is not; and the beginning of the creation of God-Head over all things, and the glory and witness of what it is as from God-as the new creation. The assembly ought to have displayed the power of the new creation by the Holy Ghost; as if any man is in Christ, it is a new creation, where all things are of God. We, as its firstfruits, are created again in Him. The assembly has thus the things which remain (2 Cor. 3 : II). But she has been an unfaithful witness of it. Does she possess a part in it? It is because Christ does, and He is the true beginning of it as really displayed. The responsible witness of it by the Holy Ghost having failed, Christ now takes it up, coming in for its effectual display.

But the series of preparatory events in the world must first be gone into. And it is to be remarked, that there is no mention here of the fact of the Lord's coming in reference to the assembly. It is promised that He will come quickly; and the assembly is threatened with being spued out of His mouth. But the fact of His coming for His own, or the assembly's rapture at any time, is not stated. This falls in fully with what we have seen of John's ministry<sup>9</sup> - his being occupied with the manifestation of the Lord on earth, and scarce touching (and only when needed on leaving the disciples) on heavenly promises. In John 14 and 17 he does it exceptionally. Here it is left out. Even in Revelation 12, which remarkably confirms what I say, the rapture is only seen as identified with the catching up of the man-child, Christ Himself. Hence we have no specific relative

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<sup>9</sup>His character too was for judgment among the assemblies and the assembly on earth; not His own bride, but the outward body here on earth.



epoch noted for the taking away the saints here, save that they are taken before the war in heaven which leads to the last three years and a half. But on the other hand the saints belonging to the assembly, or before, are always seen above when the epistles to the assemblies are ended. They are waiting for judgment to be given to them for the avenging of their blood; but they are never seen on earth.

## 1.5 Chapter 4

But we have to consider where the fourth chapter commences God's ways. It does not follow necessarily that the assembly has been spued out of Christ's mouth. It had been threatened; but the judgment on Sardis, or even on Thyatira, was not yet come. But it is after Christ has ceased to deal with the professing assembly as such, looking to it as His light-bearer before the world. What it may call itself still is not stated; He is not dealing with it. An open apostasy will come. Its date is not revealed; nor is it revealed as to the rapture. But I gather from 2 Thessalonians 2, that the rapture will be before the apostasy. What we have stated then is, that it is after all dealing with the assemblies by Christ is closed, that the subsequent dealings with the world in the Revelation begin. The assemblies are "the things that are"; what follows, "the things after these." Christ is not now seen walking in their midst; He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. John is not occupied with seeing Him there, or sending messages to the assemblies, but is called up to heaven where all the ways of God are now carried on, and that towards the world, not the assembly. We have the throne too, not the long-robed priest. The kings and priests we read of in chapter I are now on high. Others may follow them; but they are in heavenly places, seated on thrones, or worshipping, or presenting their censers full of incense. On the other hand the Lord is not come to judge the world, but about to receive the inheritance. The saints then, who will be caught up to meet Christ, are seen only on high here; they belong to heaven, and are no longer dealt with on earth, but have their own place in heaven.

The connection between the two parts of the Apocalypse is this :-Christ, who was judging in the midst of the professing church, is now seen on high, opening the book of this world's judgment, of which He is about to take the inheritance publicly. From this scene of judgment the saints are far. The apostle's occupation with the assembly now ceases-an important point, for the Holy Spirit must be occupied with it as long as the saints are in it on earth ;--and he is taken up to heaven, and there he sees God in covenant with creation, on a throne of government, with a rainbow round about it. The living creatures celebrate Him as the Creator, the One for whom all things were created. The throne was not a throne of grace, but the signs of power and judgment broke forth from it; but around it those who represent the saints received at Christ's coming, the kings and priests, are sitting on thrones in a circle round the throne. No altar of sacrifice is in view, as if it were a time of approach ; the brazen laver has glass instead of water. It is a fixed accomplished holiness, not cleansing of feet. The elders are crowned, the number twenty-four recalling the courses of the priests.

The seven Spirits of God are there in the temple, not Christ's to wield for the assembly, or sent out into the world, but the perfections in attributes which characterise the actions of God in the world. This it bears light now into the world.

Besides these, four living creatures are there in the circle of the throne itself and around the throne. They may be viewed as forming the throne, or apart from it, though connected with it as a centre. They have some of the characters of the cherubim, some of the seraphim, but somewhat different from both. They were full of eyes, before and behind, to see all things according to God, and within; having also six wings; perfect in inward perception, but given perception, and in the celerity of their motions. They embraced also the four species of creation in the ordered earth: man, cattle, beast of the field, fowl of the air: these symbolising the powers or attributes of God, themselves worshipped by the heathen, here only the instruments of the throne. Him who sat on it the heathen knew not. The intelligence, firmness, power, rapidity of execution which belong to God were typified as elsewhere by them. They are symbols. Divers agents may be the instruments of their activity. But though there was the general analogy of the cherubim, judicial and governmental power, these had a peculiar character.

The cherubim in the temple had two wings, which formed the throne; they looked on the covenant, and at the same time, as of pure gold, were characterised by the divine righteousness of the throne to be approached. In Ezekiel they were the support of the firmament above which the God of Israel was: it was a throne of executive judgment. They were like burnished brass, and like fire—a symbol we have considered already. They had four wings: two to fly with, two to cover themselves. From Ezekiel 10 it appears they were full of eyes ("it is not said within") it was to govern what was outside according to God, not divine intelligence within. In Isaiah 6 the seraphim (or burners) have six wings as here; they are above the throne, and cry as here, Holy, holy, holy! They, with a burning coal, cleansed the prophet's lips; they were above the throne.

The symbols used here become clearer through these cases. The living creatures are in and around the throne; for it is a throne of executory judgment, with the attributes of cherubim united to it. But it is not, as in Israel, mere earthly providential judgment, a whirlwind out of the north. There is before us the government of all the earth, and executory judgment according to the holiness of God's nature.<sup>10</sup> There is not only full perception of all, but intrinsic perception morally. It is no seat of gold to be approached, as in the tabernacle. The intrinsic holiness of God is applied to judgment. He is making good His nature and character in all creation. Providence would be no longer a riddle. It was not complex attributes unsolved, so to speak, though applied in special circumstances; each act would have its character.

Here too remark, it is not, as in the first chapter, the God who is, though embracing past and future, God in Himself; but the God of ages, "who was,

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<sup>10</sup>For the judgment at the end, though governmental, closing earth's history, was not merely so (cherubic), but according to God's holiness and nature (seraphic), particularly as in Isaiah 6, a known God in Israel.

and is, and is to come.” Still He has all Old Testament names: Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai. His attributes now celebrate His full name, as the Holy One who lives for ever and ever-has no passing power or being, like man at his best estate, vanity. And the saints here fall down before the throne, bow themselves before His place in glory, and worship Him in His endless being, and lay down their given glory before His supreme and proper glory, ascribing all glory to Him alone, as alone worthy of it; but here, according to the nature of the celebration of it, the Creator for whom all things are. In all changes these remained true.

It will be remarked here, that the living creatures only celebrate and declare; the elders worship with understanding. All through the Revelation the elders give their reason for worshipping. There is spiritual intelligence in them.

Further, remark, that when thunderings and lightnings and voices, the signs of terror in judgment, go forth from the throne, the throned elders remain unmoved; they are on thrones around when the throne of judgment is introduced. This is their place before God in respect of judgment. Whenever He takes judgment in hand this is their position. They are part of the glory-assessors of the throne from which its terror goes forth. When He that sits on it is celebrated, they are all activity, own all glory to be His, are prostrate on their faces, and cast their crowns before Him, more blessed in owning His glory, than in possessing their own.

We do not find the Father here; it is Jehovah. And indeed should we ask in whom He is personally displayed, it would be, as always, in the Son; but it is in itself simply the Jehovah of the Old Testament here.

## 1.6 Chapter 5

In the next chapter we find the Lamb. A book was in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. It was counsels, wielded by His power. Who could open them and bring them forth to execution? Who had the title to do so? None in heaven or earth but One. The elders explained to the prophet who mourned that the ways of God should be shut up, that the mighty One of Judah, the true source of all promises to David, had prevailed to open it and loose the seals. This was the Lamb, the rejected Messiah. He was more than this, as the chapter goes on to shew; but He is this. The rejected Messiah was in the midst of the divine throne; and within all the displays of providence and grace-the living creatures and elders-stood a Lamb as it had been slain. He had the fulness of power over the earth-seven horns-as of God, and the seven Spirits of God for government, according to God’s perfection, of all the earth. When He has taken the book, the living creatures and elders fall down before Him with golden censers full of the prayers of the saints. They are priests here.

Now a new song is sung to celebrate the Lamb. What seemed His dishonour and rejection on earth was the ground of His worthiness to take the book. He who at all suffering and cost to Himself had glorified all that God was, was able and worthy to unfold what made it good in the way of government. It was not the government of Israel, but of all the earth; not merely earthly chastisements according to God’s revelation of Himself in Israel, but the display in power of

all God was in the whole earth. He who had glorified all He was, and redeemed, by the gospel of what He was through His death, out of all the earth, was the fit One to bring it forth in power. He does not yet come forth; but His work is the worthy instrument, the divine motive, for the display of it all. He can unlock the seals of God's ways and mysteries. I read the passage thus :-" Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, etc., and hast made them unto our God kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth." Thus it is not any particular class, but the value of the act which is the motive of praise, and all being confided to Him.

Here the angels come in to praise, not in the fourth chapter. I can hardly doubt that a change in administrative order takes place here. Until the Lamb took the book, they were the administrative power; they were the instruments through which what the four living creatures symbolised was exercised in the earth. "But unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." Hence, as soon as the Lamb appears and takes the book, as soon as the idea of redemption is brought in, the living creatures and elders are brought together, and the angels take their own place apart. Like the living creatures before, they give no reason for their praise. As the heads of creation as to their nature, they celebrate with all creatures the title to glory of the Lamb and His own worthiness, ascribing praise to Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever. The four living creatures, that is, all the exercise of God's power in creation and providence, join their Amen, and the elders worship God in the excellency of His being. But the living creatures and elders are joined (verse 8) in falling down before the Lamb. I do not think they are meant to be distinguished in the latter part of the verse,<sup>11</sup> but merge in the elders, symbolising different service but not now two classes. Verse 9 is the general fact; not" they sung," but "they sing." This takes place in heaven; but those named are in the mind in a general way. Thus the source of what follows, the throne, and the persons engaged in heaven before God in all that passes, are displayed: whence the judgment flows, who surround the throne of God above, and who is in it, have been brought before us; the heavenly scene, and choir, and assistants.

## 1.7 Chapter 6

What is to follow on earth now begins, when the seals are opened. It will be remarked here, that John, standing in the ruin of the assembly, gives prophetically all that passes from that failure till Christ comes in chapter 19. There is no ascension, no rapture, save so far as chapter 12: 5 gives both together.

The first seals are simple; nor have I anything to offer very new upon them: first, imperial conquests, then wars, then famine, then pestilence, carrying with it what Ezekiel calls God's four sore plagues (sword, famine, pestilence, and the beasts of the earth). They speak of the providential course of God's dealings, and hence the four beasts call attention to it ; but they have God's voice in

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<sup>11</sup>That is, " having" does not apply to elders only.

them, the voice of the Almighty : that, the ear of him who has the Spirit hears. These complete providential plagues, as spoken of in scripture. Then direct judgments follow; but these are what we may call preparatory measures.

I have to notice that in the full plagues of verse 8 the whole Roman earth is not included. It is a fourth, not a third. The plagues too, note, are limited in extent of sphere, not universal.

The saints are those whom God is really thinking of, and they come in remembrance before other scenes are brought out. Those who had been martyred for the word of God and their testimony demand how long before they were avenged; for we have ever to do here with a God of judgment. Their being under the altar means simply that they had offered their bodies, as sacrifices for the truth, to God. The white robes are the witness of their righteousness-God's declared approval of them; but the time for their being avenged was not yet. I do not think giving white robes is resurrection. The first resurrection is sovereign grace, giving us the same place with Christ ("for ever with the Lord"), consequent on His work and His being our righteousness, which is alike to all of us. White robes thus conferred are the recognition of the righteousness (righteousnesses)<sup>12</sup> of the saints-hence are seen in chapter 19 : 8 at His appearing. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." I am not denying that we are made clean, and our robes white in the blood of the Lamb. But, even where this is said in chapter 7, I think it refers especially to the way they have been associated by faith with the suffering position of Christ. Here white robes are given them-their service owned; but, for avenging, they must wait till a new scene of persecution had brought them companions who had to be honoured and avenged like them. Still this marks progress, and finds its cause in the dealings of God to bring about this new state of things, which issues in final judgment and setting aside of evil. Here the judgments are providential.

The next thing to the claim for avenging is the breaking up of the whole system of earthly government, and the terror of all on earth. How clearly we see here that we are in a scene of judgment, and that God is a God of judgment! The desires of the saints are like the desires of the Psalms. We are not with children before the Father, with grace, with the gospel, and the assembly; but with Jehovah, where God is a God of judgment, and by Him actions are weighed. We are on Old Testament ground, that is, prophecy, not grace to the wicked, though judgment brings in blessing.

The opening of the sixth seal brings an earthquake, that is, a violent convulsion of the whole structure of society. All the governing powers are therein visited; and, seeing all subverted, small and great think (with bad consciences as they have) that the day of the Lamb's wrath is come. But it is not, though preparatory judgments with a view to His kingdom are there.

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<sup>12</sup>It is very possible that the plural "righteousnesses" is a Hebraism for righteousness. It is a common case in moral things. At any rate it is of the saints.

## 1.8 Chapter 7

But God thinks too of His saints on earth (where, we must remember, the assembly is never now seen) before the scenes which follow, whether judgments on the Roman earth or the special workings of evil, to secure and seal them for that day.

First, the perfect number of the remnant of Israel is sealed, before the providential instruments of God's judgments are allowed to act;  $144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 1000$ . They are secured for blessing according to God's purposes and set apart by Him; not yet seen in their blessings, but secured for them. Afterwards the vast multitude from among the Gentiles is seen. We must remark here, there is no previous prophetic announcement of the blessing of the spared ones in the great tribulation (not the three years and a half of Matthew 24-this refers to Jews-but that mentioned in the epistle to the church at Philadelphia). Hence this is fully given to us here, and we are distinctly told who they are. A multitude of Gentiles is seen standing not as around the throne, but before it and before the Lamb, their righteousness owned and themselves victorious. They ascribe salvation to God thus revealed, that is, to God on the throne, and to the Lamb. They belong to these earthly scenes, not to the assembly. This is answered by the angels who are around the throne, the elders, and the living creatures-all together composing the heavenly part of the scene already connected with the throne; the angels surrounding the others, which form the centre and immediate circle of the throne, the white robed multitude before it. The angels give their Amen, and pronounce the praise of their God too.

All this belonged to the white-robed multitude and the angels; only the former speak of the Lamb, who was also their salvation. The angels add their Amen to this; but praise their God. They had ascribed glory and blessing to the Lamb before; but, naturally, salvation to the Lamb was not their own part of the song. But the four living creatures and the elders do not worship here, because their own relationships were different, and these are not what are spoken of here. They are found, as far as the book goes, in chapters 4 and 5, where they are on thrones around, and cast their crowns before the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever. They give the motives of worship according to the relationships they are in: that of the angels is with their God; of the white-robed multitude, with the God of the throne and the Lamb as having the title to the government and deliverance of the earth as a present thing. That the Lamb was the Son, yea, the God who created the angels, is not the question here, but of each speaking in his own relationship, so as to bring these relationships out.

We have thus the heavenly hosts, the glorified saints, and the white-robed multitude, each in a different relationship, but the first and the last thrown in the main together-the glorified saints forming a class apart. They do not worship here. But one of the elders, who have always the intelligence of God, explains to the prophet who the white-robed multitude are. It formed no part of the prophetic revelation as yet, and it was not the assembly's own place. "Sir, thou knowest," says the prophet. They had come out of the great tribulation, faithful in it, their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They were not millennial

saints, that is, born in that time, and subject by birth to the responsibility of that condition (which grace had to meet). They were cleansed and owned to be so, having the consciousness of it and victory when the others began; so that they, as already cleansed and owned, are always before the throne a special class, and serve Him day and night in His temple.

This at once distinguishes them from the heavenly worshippers; there is no temple there; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. He that sits on the throne tabernacles over these, as once over the tabernacle. They are not only as Israel in the courts, or the nations in the world: they have a priest's place in the world's temple. The millennial multitudes are worshippers; these priests. As Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, ever in the temple itself, they have always access to the throne. But they had blessings under the Lamb also, to whom they alike ascribe their salvation-the good Shepherd cast out, and who had passed through tribulation Himself, also so great, would feed them; they would not hunger any more or thirst any more, as they had often done; nor should persecution or tribulation reach them. The Lamb, as known in this transitional time, but exalted in the throne, would feed them and lead them to living fountains of water. It is not, as to us, the promise of a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, and flowing out as a river; but they would be fed, refreshed, and perfectly cared for by the Lamb's grace whom they had followed; and God Himself would wipe all tears from their eyes. They would have the consolations of God, worth all the sorrows they had passed through. But their blessings are consolations, not proper heavenly joy. They are thus a class apart, distinct from the elders or heavenly saints, and distinct from millennial saints who will never see tribulation, having a known position fixed in grace before God. It is a new revelation as to those passing through the great tribulation. The 144,000 of chapter 14 are a similar class from among the Jews, coming out of their special tribulation.

## 1.9 Chapter 8

Again, divine interest in the saints, brought out into action by the effectual intercession of the great High Priest, brings down judgments on the world. For those under the altar there was no intercession; they were perfected, having been rejected and slain like Christ. There are saints upon the earth who yet need this intercession, so that their cry in their infirmity should be heard and answered. The smoke of the incense came up with the prayers of the saints. The great Mediator took of the fire off the altar, put it into the censer, and cast it on the earth. The intercession turned into judgments in the answer, and the signs of God's power were manifested, and subversion of order on earth followed-voices, thunderings, lightnings (as when the throne was set), and an earthquake.

Then follow specific judgments, on the signal being given from above. They fell on the Roman earth, the third part of the earth (see chap. 12: 4). First, judgment from heaven, hail and fire; and violence or destruction of men; on earth blood: the effect was the destruction of the great ones in the Roman earth, and of all general prosperity. Next, a great power, as the judgment of God, was cast

into the mass of peoples-still, I apprehend, in the Roman earth; for destruction of men, and all that belonged to their subsistence and commerce followed in those limits. Next, one that should have been a special source of light and order in government fell from his place, and corrupted the moral sources of popular motives and feelings-what governs and sways the people so as to characterise them. They became bitter, and men died of it. The last of these four plagues falls on the governing powers, and puts them out in their order, as from God: all in the limits of the Roman earth. This closed the general judgments, subverting and producing disaster and confusion in the Roman earth, where the power of evil, as against the saints, was.

Woe (specially on those who had their settled place on earth, in contrast with the heavenly calling, and who were unawakened and unmoved by the judgments on the earth, but clung to it in spite of all as their home), is then announced. Threefold woe! The term "dwellers on," or "inhabiters of," the earth, has not yet been used, save in the promise to Philadelphia, and the claims of the souls under the altar: for both of these were in contrast with such. After all these dealings of God they are a distinct and manifested class, and spoken of, in what passes on the earth, as such. Against this perversely unbelieving class the earthly judgments of God are now directed: the first, against the Jews; the second, against the inhabitants of the Roman earth; the last, universal.

## 1.10 Chapter 9

The fifth angel sounds (chap. 9); and one who should have been by position the instrument of light and governmental order over the earth was seen as having lost his place; and the power to let loose the full darkening influence of Satan was given him. He opened the bottomless pit-the place where evil is shut up and chained; not where it is punished, that is, the lake of fire. Supreme authority, and all heavenly light over the earth, and healthful influence of order, were darkened and made to cease by the evil satanic influence which was let loose. Nor was this all: direct instruments of satanic power came out of this evil influence in numbers; crowds of moral locusts with the sting of false doctrine in their tail. But it was not to destroy temporal prosperity on the earth, but to torment the ungodly Jews; not to kill, but to harass and vex them. This was to continue five months; for it is not the final judgment. The torment was worse than death-pain and anguish of heart. But they had the semblance of military imperial power, crowned, and with masculine energy, to those that met them; but they were, if seen behind and the secret disclosed, subject and weak: their faces were as the faces of men, their hair as the hair of women. But they were armed in a steeled conscience. They were the direct instruments of the power of Satan, and under his orders. The angel of the bottomless pit-he who rules the depths of Satan's wiles, as the ruler of the power of darkness led them. We are too unbelieving as to the direct influence of Satan in darkening men's minds when permitted, when men are given up to his darkening influence. Cruel harassing torments, worse than death, with darkening of their minds, become the portion of the once beloved people. One woe was past.



The sixth angel sounds. The woe which follows is much more human and providential. It is directed against the inhabitants of the Latin Empire. The instruments of it are let loose from beyond Euphrates-a countless crowd of horsemen. But they were not simply such. Their consciences and their words, both were in the power of Satan, but in judgment from God. But it now killed men. Their mouths belched forth the power of Satan, and their influence in doctrine was satanic: with both they did hurt. I do not believe this death here is mere temporal death (there may be such), but, I suspect, making apostates. The rest, who did not thus fall, did not repent of their idolatry and misdeeds.

## 1.11 Chapter 10

These were preliminary woes on the body of Jews and christianised Gentiles, not the direct antagonism of the power of evil with God. This is now unfolded, but first, in the little open book, put in its place in the general history (chap. 10). The book is open as part of well-known prophecy, and now brought to a direct issue on known ground; not the unrevealed and more unmanifest ways of God introducing the final issue. Christ comes down and affirms His right to all below; puts His right foot on the sea, the left on the earth, and utters the voice of His might, to which the voice of the Almighty in power answers. But its revelations were sealed up; but Christ swears by Him who lives for ever and ever that there should be no more delay. All things are drawing to a final issue. In the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God would be closed-His direct power come. The prophet is to recommence his prophecy as to nations and tongues, and languages.

## 1.12 Chapter 11

We are here at once in the centre of prophetic subjects- Jerusalem, the temple, the altar, and worshippers (chap. II). The worshippers and the altar are recognised and accepted of God-those worshipping in the secret of God within. The general profession of Judaism is rejected and disowned. It is given up to be trodden down under the Gentiles, and that for the half-week of sorrow. Those who held the place of priests were owned. Real worshippers, according to God's mind, were there and owned; and God gave also an adequate testimony- two witnesses-what was required under the law; and they continue day by day constantly to give witness the whole period, or half-week. The witnesses were in sorrow and reproach, but with power; as Elias and Moses were when the people were in apostasy and captivity. It was not the reestablishment of Israel with royalty and priesthood, as it would be afterwards-the candle stick of Zechariah with the two olive trees- but the sufficient witness to it. Nor could they be touched while the half-week of their prophecy lasted; their word brought death on their adversaries. We have priesthood and prophecy in the remnant, not of course royalty, but a testimony to it practically: suffering marked its absence, yet none could touch them till their time were come. In this they were like Christ in His humiliation in the midst of Israel; only He did not slay His

enemies. In the Psalms He marks it out as the remnant's portion. Complete humiliation and the full answer of God to their prophetic word marked their state. But when they had finished their testimony, the case is different. They had to do with the beast out of the bottomless pit. They stood before the God of the earth-not preachers of heavenly gospel, but witnesses of God's title to the earth-of His love to His people in connection with it. They bore witness to God's claim when hostile Gentiles were in possession. The beast, now their hour is come, slays them, and their bodies are cast into the highways of the city. Those of the nations rejoice over them and make merry. The dwellers upon earth, who would have the earth theirs and ease upon it, were delighted: for the witnesses of the God of the earth tormented them; but in three days and a half, quickened by the power of the Spirit of God, they ascended to heaven in a cloud, not as Christ did, apart, but in the sight of their enemies. A tenth of the great city of the world fell at the same time in the convulsion that took place on the earth; and the remnant are affrighted, and give glory to the God of heaven. But God was dealing already as the God of the earth. The second woe was now past.

Thus we get the close of the half-week indicated; the seventh trumpet was quickly to sound, which was to finish the mystery of God. It sounds; and there were great voices in heaven declaring that the worldly kingdom of their Lord (Jehovah) and of His anointed (Christ) was come-the greatest woe and terror of all to the inhabitants of the earth. Satan's woe had been specially on Jews; man's woe, specially on the men of the Latin Empire; this is God's woe when the nations are angry, and God's wrath is come, and full reckoning and final deliverance come. We have again the elders here announcing the reason of praise and thanksgiving. Voices in heaven announce the fact of the reign of Jehovah and of His Christ according to Psalm 2, and that He (for, as ever, John unites both in one thought) should reign for ever and ever; and so it will be. But both the earthly and eternal kingdom are celebrated. Only in the eternal kingdom the distinction of the worldly kingdom and of Christ's subordination is omitted. In the thanksgiving of the elders, Jehovah Elohim Shaddai is also celebrated; as the great King who takes to Him His power and reigns; for it is God's kingdom. We have two parts in their statement: the nations angry-this brings in the time of God's wrath; and the time of the dead to be judged. This is the first half: man's wrath, and God's judgment. Then He gives reward to prophets, saints, and all that fear His name, and sets aside from the earth those who corrupted it. This is blessing. The first part is general, the time of wrath and judgment; the second is reward and deliverance of the saints on earth. This closes entirely the main symbolic history. The last trumpet has sounded, and the mystery of God is closed.

In what follows we have details: the beast, and the connection of the assembly and Jews with it; Babylon; and then the marriage of the Lamb; judgments of beast and false prophet; binding of Satan; two resurrections, and final judgment; and the description of the heavenly city. But this new prophecy begins (chap. II: 19), as to earthly prophetic dealing, with special reference to the Jews. The temple of God is opened in heaven, the ark of His covenant, which

refers to Israel is seen there. But judgment characterises it now; judgments of all kinds, those coming down from above, and subversion and disaster below. <sup>13</sup>

### 1.13 Chapter 12

Chapter 12 gives us a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God. The first symbolical person, subject of the prophecy and result of all God's ways in it, is a woman clothed with the sun, having a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. It is Israel, or Jerusalem as its centre, as in the purpose of God (compare Isaiah. 9: 6, and Psalm. 87: 6). She is clothed with supreme authority, invested with the glory of perfect administration in man, and all the original reflected glory of this under the old covenant, under her feet. She was travailing in childbirth, distressed, and in pain to be delivered: on the other hand Satan's power in the form of the Roman Empire, complete in forms of power, seven heads, but incomplete in administrative supremacy-ten, not twelve horns. But Satan, as the open infidel enemy of God and God's power in Christ, sought to devour the child as soon as born, who was to have the rule of the earth from God. But the child, Christ, and the assembly with Christ, is caught away to God and His throne-does not receive the power yet, but is placed in the very source of it from which it flows. It is not the rapture as regards joy; for it goes back to Christ Himself but the placing Him and the assembly in and with Him, in the seat from which power flows for the establishment of the kingdom. There is no time for this: Christ and the assembly are all one. But the woman the Jews, after this fly into the wilderness, where God has prepared a place for them, for the half-week.

The assembly, or heavenly saints (as Christ, note), go up to heaven to be out of the way. The Jews, or earthly ones, are protected by providential care upon earth. This gives the whole state of things, and those in view in this scene, and their respective places. She that is to have glory and hold power in the earth is cast out. The child that is to have power, in and from heaven, is previously taken up there. This makes the position very clear.

The historical course of events is now pursued, the child being supposed to be already caught up. There is war in heaven; and the devil and his angels are cast out, and have no more place there. This brings out yet more clearly the distinction of the heavenly saints and the Jewish remnant. The heavenly ones had overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; the woman's seed have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, the Spirit of prophecy. What they have of God in the word is according to the Old Testament.

But, to follow up the latter part of the chapter, a loud voice proclaims in heaven that the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ is come-the

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<sup>13</sup>Where the throne is set for judgment, it is characterised only by what proceeds directly from God. There are no earthquakes and hail; here there are.

testimony still of the second Psalm; only as yet it was only proclaimed from heaven, where the power of the kingdom was already made good by the casting down of Satan. Satan's anti-priestly power was over for ever; king and prophet he might yet put on; but his heavenly place was past. The saints of the heavenlies had overcome him by that which made their conscience and their title to heaven good-the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their mouth, God's sword by the Spirit-and gave up their lives to the death. The heavens and the dwellers there could now rejoice; but it was woe to the inhabitants of earth and sea; for the devil had come down, knowing he had but a little time left. I think verse II implies that there are saints killed after the rapture, who yet belong to heaven. If there were such killed because of their faithfulness, were they not taken up, they would lose earth and heaven, though more devoted than those who had earth. We see them moreover in chapter 20 in the first resurrection. The souls under the altar also had to wait for others-their brethren who had to be killed, as they were; and we are to note here that those celebrated as happy are the slain ones, none others. Yet it is before the last three years and a half.

So that we have these three parties in view: the voice of those in heaven; (our) their brethren who had overcome; and those who would be in the three years and a half of Satan's rage, which had not yet begun. Now, if the man-child in heaven be, as we have considered it, Christ and the raptured saints, the voice would be that of those already there,<sup>14</sup> and all self-evident: the raptured saints associated with Him celebrate the casting down of the accuser and the deliverance of those who belonged to heaven, calling them "our brethren"-the brethren whose conflict with the accuser was over, as he was now cast down, but who had had to resist him as a heavenly potentate, an anti-priest, all which part is mystery for John and those who now would be in trial, when he would act with rage on earth, as king and prophet. For the dragon, cast to the earth and unable to accuse in heaven or oppose saints having a heavenly calling (and the priesthood refers to such, not to union), persecutes the Jews, and seeks to destroy their testimony; but God gave, not power of resistance-the Lord must come to deliver-but power to flee and escape and find refuge where she was nourished the whole half-week out of the serpent's reach. He seeks to pursue; wings he has none: but he uses a river, the movements of people under the influence of special motive and guidance, to overwhelm the woman. But the earth, this organised system in which men live, swallowed the waters up. This influence was in vain-was not met by an army, a counter-power, but was nullified. There was such a disposition or course of the earth as neutralised the effort wholly. So God ordered in His providence; and the dragon turned to persecute individually the faithful remnant of the seed-the Jews who held fast by the word.

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<sup>14</sup>I do not continue to put the voice as Christ's. The application to Him is too questionable.

## 1.14 Chapter 13

In chapter 13 we have the clear and full development of Satan's instruments of evil. They are two-the ten-horned and the two-horned beasts. To the first the dragon, who swept with his tail a third part of the stars to earth, Satan under the form of the Roman Empire, gave his throne and much authority.<sup>15</sup> The second not only wielded the first power administratively before him, but was the active power of evil to lead men to recognise the first, and therein the dragon. The beast is the original Roman Empire, but largely modified and in a new character. It has perfect completeness in its forms of government or heads, but is composed of ten kingdoms, indicating also, I doubt not, imperfect administrative completeness. It has not twelve horns; it is incomplete. Seven would be completeness of a higher kind. The Lamb had seven horns; the woman, twelve stars on her head. One is perfectness in itself; the other administratively in man. Seven is the highest prime number (you cannot make it); twelve, the most perfectly divisible, composed of the same elements, but multiplied, not added as a simple number. So four is finite perfection, as is a square and still more a cube, perfectly the same all ways but finite. But the beast had names of blasphemy. It was the open enemy of God and His Christ. It absorbed the previous empires and represented them. The dragon, Satan's direct power in the form of the heathen Roman Empire, gave his throne and power to this new beast. It was not of God. God owned no power on the earth now the assembly was gone, till He took His own. The earth was at war with Him.

One of the beast's heads (I doubt not the Imperial) was seen as wounded to death, but healed. The imperial head was restored and the world was in admiration; and they worship the dragon as giving the beast his power. Nothing in their eyes equals the beast; but God is wholly thrown off in the earth. The beast is given to have the greatest pretensions in his language and outrage against God. He blasphemed God, His name and dwelling-place, and the heavenly saints-all Christianity, and the God of it. The dragon had been cast out from heaven; the raptured saints had been received there. He blasphemed, but could only blaspheme them.

As regards those who dwelt on earth (for the division was not merely a spiritual one now), all worshipped the beast, save the elect-those who had been written from the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life. Human resistance by force was not the path of obedience. Here the patience and faith of the saints were shewn. He who took the sword would perish by it; it is never Christ's way, but unresisting patience; but the beast who did would perish. This then was the imperial power, a blasphemous power set up by Satan, with the place of the old Roman Empire, which represented all four, modified in form, but the imperial head restored.

But there was a second beast; it rose not out of the mass of peoples (the sea) to be an empire, but out of the already formed organisation with which God had to say as such. It had the form of Messiah's kingdom on earth, two

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<sup>15</sup>We are not to be surprised, therefore, if the beast at the end had only local empire, though originally God had given universal empire to the beasts: how widely exercised we know.

horns like a lamb; but it was the direct power of Satan. He who with a divinely taught ear heard it speak heard the voice of Satan at once. All the power of the first beast it exercises before it; is, with its power, its minister, and makes the earth and the dwellers on it worship it (that is, the Roman Empire restored to its head). It is Antichrist, the false Christ of Satan, who subjects the earth to the satanic Roman Empire. He does great wonders, so as to give men as good proof of the beast's title before men, as Elijah did of Jehovah's. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2, where the man of sin gives the same proofs, if lying ones, that Jesus did of being the Christ. He deceives the dwellers on earth by his miracles, making them set up an image to him. This image he gives breath to; so that it speaks and causes those to be killed who do not worship it. All likewise were obliged to take the stamp and the mark of the beast's service in their work, or open profession, and no man was allowed to traffic who had not the name of the beast as a mark.

Such is the power which has the character of Messiah's kingdom in its form, is animated with the fullest energy of Satan, and, recognising the public power which Satan had set up in the world, will have everyone bow to it, none to traffic without acknowledging it; and all will, save the elect. The anti-priestly power of Satan in the heavens is over; royalty and prophecy as yet remain to him, in opposition to Christ who has not yet appeared. These he assumes; but he does not and cannot set aside the power of the Gentiles-that remains for Christ to do-but sets it up as his delegate; and, as the apostate Jews of old, so now that people, save the elect remnant, as his instruments bow to it and minister to it. Thus you have all Satan's power exercised. But, in setting up his Messiah, he is obliged to deceive; and advances by his miracles of deceit what he cannot set aside-the Gentile power; and subjects the Jews to idolatry and to the Gentiles; and all the Gentiles themselves dwelling on the earth to the depository of Satan's authority-the first beast.

This is a singular state of things, far from Jewish feelings and modern Gentile hopes; but the unclean spirit of idolatry is to return to his house. Signs, not truth, will govern the superstitious mind of man; they will be given up to believe a lie. Here, though he takes the character of Christ in his kingdom, it is chiefly his action on the Gentiles which is spoken of; the Jews are mixed up with them as we see in Isaiah 66, and Daniel. It is a liberal time, but one of most complete tyranny as regards all who do not bow to Satan's power and the ordinances established by him. What characterises it is the absence of truth.

As regards the number of the beast, I have no doubt that it will be very simple to the godly, when the beast is there, and the time of spiritually judging it comes, and that name will practically guide those who have to do with him. Till then, the speculations of men are not of much value; Irenaeus's old one of Latin man is as good as any.

## 1.15 Chapter 14

In chapter 14 we have the dealings of God with the evil, only first owning and setting apart the remnant. The remnant belongs entirely to the renewed earth:

they are seen on that which is the centre of dominion and glory in it—Mount Zion, where the Lamb shall reign. They had His and His Father's name on their foreheads; that is, by their open confession of God and the Lamb they had been witnesses of it, and suffered as Christ had suffered in His life in owning God His Father: only they had not suffered death. It was a new beginning, not the assembly, not heavenly, but the blessing of a delivered earth in its firstfruits in those who had suffered for the testimony to it. Heaven celebrates it with a voice of many waters, and as of thunder, but with joy. This voice was the voice of harps. A new song is sung before the throne and beasts and elders. Here the fact is the important thing. There had been song in and of heaven, in chapter 5, in connection with redemption; but those who were redeemed there were made kings and priests. Here it was redemption in connection with earthly blessings, not with the kingdom and priesthood on high; and it is sung before the heavenly company and throne. Heaven however is directly connected with the song. It was connected with triumph over the power of evil by patient endurance of suffering.

What specially characterised them was purity from the contamination that surrounded them. This passing through sorrow and overcoming connects them directly with the heavenly conquerors. It was not the new song of heavenly redemption; still it was victory when down at the gates of death, though not actually in it. It was "as it were a new song." This none could learn but those who had shared the earthly sufferings of the Lamb, and would now be His companions in His earthly royalty; they had followed Him, they would follow Him whithersoever He went. They are the firstfruits of the new scene. They had not corrupted themselves where all did. They were not of those who loved or made a lie, or gave in to it. Corruption and falsehood they had been kept free from, openly confessing the truth. They had not the heavenly place, but they are without fault, and they share the Lamb's earthly place and glory, accompanying Him whithersoever He goes, in the manifestation of that glory. All that led to these privileges had no place when once the kingdom was set up. It was then too late to shew faithfulness in this way. There is a connection with the heavenly saints which is not in chapter 7. The white-robed multitude stood before the throne and the Lamb. They are before the throne of God, they worship in His temple, and the Lamb comforts them. Here there is special association with the Lamb on earth, in their path and in their consequent place. It is the remnant of the Psalms (especially Ps. 1 to 41). But, though on earth with the King, they are redeemed from among men before Christ comes to earth; and the song they learn to sing is sung before the elders and living creatures. They are not with them, but they sing the song sung before them; that is, the Gentile multitude are admitted to special privileges before God and the Lamb; the Jewish remnant are associated with the Lamb on earth, and, in a certain sense, with heaven. The progress of God's ways follows—warning to the earth to leave idolatry; for the hour of God's judgment was come. The everlasting gospel is the testimony of Christ's power, from paradise onward, as in contrast with the special announcement of the assembly, and glad tidings connected with it. Babylon is announced to be fallen; threats and warnings to any that should

own the beast; but the time is now come when dying in the Lord was to cease; only their blessedness remained henceforth. Dying and tribulation were over. They are looked at as one whole body; and while any remained yet to die, they were diers in the Lord, not rested and blessed. Now their rest is come, and their reward.

Christ then reaps the earth-separating, gathering, and judgment; and treads the winepress, exercises unmingled vengeance on the wicked. Hence in this last judgment it is the angel who had the power over fire who calls for it; it was full divine judgment. This judgment was not within the limits of Babylon-was not in the sphere in which man had formed and ordered his organisation in opposition to God. This closes the whole scene of that which the history had begun by the catching up of the Man-child to heaven. He had returned in vengeance.

An interesting question here arises-What is the vine of the earth? It is that which is the fruit-bearing organisation, or what should be so (that is the idea of it), in professed connection with God, as His planting in the earth. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt. Christ on earth was the true vine. It is not connection with Him in heaven. There we are looked at as perfect, not to bear fruit and be pruned. But analogously it went on after He had ascended on high, and professing Christians are the branches. But here it is the vine of the earth, that which has its character and growth therein, but with the pretension to take the religious place by succession on the earth. The true saints are gone on high, or are a persecuted individual remnant. I have no doubt the Jews will be the centre of that system then, but they will be mixed up with Gentiles, have turned to idolatry, and have seven spirits worse than that; and the apostate Gentiles will be fully associated with it all (see Isaiah 34, 63, 65, 66).

## 1.16 Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is a new vision. It unrolls before the prophet another scene, the last plagues or judgments of God, and specially that of Babylon, before Christ comes. The main object of the vision was the seven angels, having the seven last plagues; but, as ever, the saints who have to do with this scene are seen in security before the judgments begin. They have been purified, but have come through the fire of tribulation too. They stand on a sea mingled with fire. They have belonged to the time when the beast and his image were in power, but they had got the victory over it. They seemed perhaps to have succumbed-it was real victory.

Their song is very peculiar. The song of Moses is triumph over the power of evil by God's judgments. The song of the Lamb is the exaltation of the rejected Messiah, of the suffering One, like whom they had suffered; for it is the slain remnant amidst unfaithful and apostate Israel whom we find here. The song celebrates God and the Lamb, but by victorious sufferers who belong to heaven. What they celebrate are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai (the God of the Old Testament), but who now has manifested Himself in judgment, known by His works that are public for the people. He shewed His ways unto Moses, His works unto the children of Israel. His works are celebrated now.



They are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai, the Judge of all the earth. But His ways are celebrated too. There was intelligence of them, as far at least as righteous judgment went. These ways in judgment were just and true. Israel would understand deliverance, and how it came; but Moses knew God's ways. But this is all. It is not merely celebration of qualities and attributes, as the angels do, nor the full knowledge of God's work in salvation by the blood of the Lamb. It is not the heart going up in the sense of its own relationship, but a celebration of the glory of the Lord, who would now be worshipped by the nations, for His judgments were manifested. It was intelligence when judgments were manifested, not when all was yet to be learned within the veil.

This celebration of what was just bursting forth being made, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, not merely the temple with the ark of the covenant seen. That secured the result for faith, when evil was raging in power on earth; the ark of God's covenant secured Israel. It was a testimony opened out, not a covenant which secured in the hour of evil, but a testimony which made good what the ark of the covenant secured; for the temple was opened, and the messengers of judgment came forth-God's judgment for the restoration and blessing of Israel, by the judgment of the Gentiles and all who corrupted the earth. Cleanness in God's sight, and divine righteousness, characterised and animated this judgment-clean linen pure and white, and golden girdles: I apprehend the former, in answer to corruption in what should have had this-Babylon (compare chap. 19: 8). That is, it was a judgment which required it, and was according to it, and also to divine righteousness. It is not brass burning in the fire-simply execution of judgment in dealing with men, though that took place-but God making good His own nature and character against corruption, the essential character of the eternal God, which the assembly ought to have displayed; whereas Babylon was entirely the contrary, and the beast too. The seven angels judge all according to these characters of God, because it was really the avenging of what God was, as fully revealed to the assembly; but the white linen refers, I doubt not, specially to Babylon, though the men with the mark of the beast would come under the judgment. One of the four living creatures gives the vials; for it is the judicial power of God in creation, not yet the Lamb. God's glory in judgment filled the temple; and no man could have to say to Him in worship, or approaching Him, while these plagues were executing. It was the full display of God in judgment.

The first four plagues have the same objects as the judgments of the first four trumpets-the whole circle of symbolic nature, but here directly as regards men-earth, sea, rivers, and sun; the ordered prophetic sphere of God's dealings, the masses of peoples as such viewed as unorganised, the moral principles which give an impulse to their movements, and sovereign authority. But it is not a third here (that is, the Roman earth) but in general.

## 1.17 Chapter 16

The first vial of wrath brought the utmost distress and shameful misery on all who had taken the mark of the beast.

The second brought the power of moral death on the mass of peoples; all who were among them within the limits of the prophetic earth, died-I apprehend, gave up mere outward profession. We have here an example of the use of symbols which it is well to note. All the vials are poured out on the earth, that is, are applied to the sphere of already formed relationship with God. But in this there might be a special relationship in which men had to do with God in this world were inhabitants of earth, or the mass of people within that sphere.

The third vial was poured out on all the sources of popular influence and action; and they became positively deathful. It seems to me, that the deadly influence in alienation from God, within the sphere of prophecy, is strongly marked here. Death is used generally as the expression of the power of Satan.

Then the supreme authority is made frightfully oppressive. This gave the first four of direct judgment according to the usual division.

The fifth vial strikes the throne of the beast, the seat and stability of his authority, which Satan had given him; and his kingdom became full of darkness. All was confusion and wretchedness, and no resource: they gnawed their tongues with anguish and blasphemed God.

The sixth angel pours out his vial on Euphrates-destroys, I apprehend, the securing boundary of the Western prophetic powers-not the seat of its power, but broke its frontier, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared. I look at this simply as the bringing in of the powers of Asia into the conflict for the universal conflagration of powers. The sixth vial sends forth three unclean spirits, the sum of all evil influences: that of Satan's direct power as antagonistic of Christ; that of the power of the last empire, the beast; and that of the second beast of chapter 13 henceforth known as the false prophet, Satan's influence as the Antichrist, an idolatrous wonder-working power; and the kings of the world were gathered together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. The allusion is to Judges 5 : 19,20.

At the seventh vial there is a general break-up and subversion, and Babylon comes into judgment. And the hail of God, the judgment of God, came on men from heaven (compare Isaiah 32 and 33). All separate independent interests and established powers disappeared. This was over the earth-God's judgment by providence and instruments-but the Lamb was not come yet. The details of Babylon's judgments are reserved for the following chapters.

## 1.18 Chapter 17

The characters of Babylon are first portrayed. Like the beast, she is only one thing in the judgment, but morally she is more important than all the rest. The general character is the great active idolatress that has gained influence over the mass of the nations; next, that the kings of the earth have lived in guilty intimacy with her, seeking her favours, while those that dwell on the earth have lost their senses through her pernicious and inebriating influence. This is the general idea first given, a character plain enough to mark the Roman or Papal system.

But more details follow. There was a woman, a religious system, sitting on an imperial beast full of names of blasphemy, having the form which marked it Roman. The woman was gorgeously and imperially arrayed, had every human glory and ornament on her, and a rich cup of prostituting yet gross idolatries in her hand. "Abominations" are simply idols; "filthiness of her fornication," all the horrible corruption that accompanies it. Her cup was full of them. She was in the desert; no springs of God were there. It was not, so to speak, God's land, no heavenly country. To spiritual understanding she bore on her forehead her character (yet one known only when spiritually known), of the great city of corruption, source of all seduction to men and of all idolatry in the earth: such was Popery. But this was not all. All the blood of the saints was found in her: she was the persecuting murderess of those God delighted in, and who bore witness to Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The prophet was astonished-for it was what the church had come to.

The angel then describes the beast on which she rode. It had been, ceased to exist, and then it comes up again from direct diabolical sources-comes up out of the abyss. The renewed Roman Empire, which had disappeared, is blasphemous and diabolical in nature, and in this character goes to destruction: yet all but the elect on the earth will be in admiration of it when they see the beast that was, is not, and shall be present. Of itself this marks the Roman or Latin Empire, only that it will reappear more formally. But Rome is more distinctly marked. It is the city of the seven hills. Nor was this even all. It was the existing authority in the time of the prophecy: five of its governing powers had fallen; one was there; there was then one yet to come for a short space, and then the beast out of the abyss, the last diabolical state of the empire, would appear, and it would be destroyed. The last however is not a new form; it is one of the seven, though an eighth. My impression is, that the first Napoleon and his brief empire is the seventh, and we have now to wait for the development of the last. The beast, though imperial, has ten horns, ten distinct kingdoms. They have their power, and for the same period, with the beast. But they all give their power to the beast, and make war against Christ, the rejected One on earth; but He shall overcome them. For, despised as He may be, supreme authority is His, and there are others coming with Him, not merely angels but called ones, His saints.

Details are then added. The waters are explained as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues-masses of populations in their diverse divisions. Next the ten horns, the kingdoms which are associated with the beast, and the beast (for so it is to be read) hate the whore and eat her flesh and burn her with fire (first, take all her substance and fatness, and then destroy her); for they are to give their kingdom to the blasphemous beast until God's words are fulfilled. And

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<sup>16</sup>It is important to remark that formal religion, which rests on ancient claims as established, and which is left behind as to the truth by others who have received it, is the regular habitual instigator of persecution, though others may be the persecutors. So it was with the Jews, so in the universal history of the world. It always becomes false as regards truth, though it may retain some and important truths. The truths which test the heart and its obedience are not there.

then we are expressly told that the woman (not" the whore "-the last is her corrupt idolatrous character-but the "woman "), who as riding the beast was to be such, is Rome. All this chapter (17) is description.

## **1.19 Chapter 18**

Chapter 18 announces the judgment. The one difficulty here is verse 4, coming where it is; but, as every difficulty in scripture, it leads into further light. The destruction of Babylon is simple enough. She falls by God's judgment just before Christ comes to judge the earth; and, first perhaps losing her power and influence, is destroyed by the horns and beast. The comparison of chapter 14: 8, and the place it holds, chap. 16 : 19; 18: 8, and the beginning of 19, make this plain. Chapter 18 is a warning from heaven, not the angel of judgment of the earth. It is not consequent on events, but supposes spiritual apprehension of heaven's mind. This is the case when it is simply a voice from heaven. This call then was a spiritual call, not a manifest judgment. It may be more urgent and direct just before judgment, and I doubt not will be : as the call is in Hebrews to come out of the camp because Jerusalem's day was at hand. Hence I believe this applies whenever we see the system to be Babylon, and the sense of her iniquities is pressed upon the conscience.

The chapter then goes on to the actual execution of judgment according to chapter 17: 16. The horns, or kingdoms connected with the beast, have destroyed her. The kings mourn over her; so do those that have sought profit and ease and commerce in the earth. The royal and commercial system is shattered to pieces by the upset of the system. What characterises her, that for which she is judged, is idolatry, corruption, worldliness, and persecution. She is judged and destroyed, and the prosperity of the worldly is smitten by her fall, and the hopes of the kings who had commerce with her. The blood of all saints was found in her, as in Jerusalem in her day. Persecution comes from religion connected with worldly advantage. But what a picture we have here of the world, the relations of the kings and of the saints to Babylon!

## **1.20 Chapter 19**

Chapter 19: 2 clearly shews the aspect in which she is judged-the great whore who corrupted; and God avenges the blood of His servants. This judgment of Rome is the great joy of heaven. Hallelujah and salvation are sung. The elders and four living creatures fall down and worship, and the voice of the multitude proclaims the bringing in of the marriage of the Lamb, when the false woman is set aside. Till then, though espoused, the assembly was not thus actually united in the heavenly marriage of the Lamb. Still there was no greater event could be than a judgment of Rome. No doubt the beast had to be destroyed. Power, when God gave it scope, would soon do that. But here the old corruptress and persecutor was set aside for ever. Heaven is full of joy. There is no celebration of joy like this in the Revelation.

The rest of the book is simple and clear enough, for the mystery of God is closed. I do not myself attach any importance to the distinction, as a class, of those called to partake of the joy of that day. It means, I believe, just that, according to the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the guests are those who have share in the marriage joy. But several points have to be noticed: God in power has come in to set up His reign.

The true though not yet the open seat of the power of evil has been judged and destroyed. Two characters of evil, falsehood or deceitful corruption and violence, have existed since Satan himself began his career; false in himself, he was a murderer to others. The mystery of iniquity contained both, though hiding the latter and using others for it. Still she was characterised by corruption and what was false. Direct violence was in the hands of the beast. The destruction of that would, no doubt, relieve the earth of oppression; but for heaven and all that was heavenly-minded, the destruction of this Christ-dishonouring, soul-enslaving, and soul-debasing corruption, was joy and gladness, and the witness that divine power had come in. It had set aside the worst evil, the corrupting what was God's under pretence of being what Christ had purchased for Himself, the one precious object of His especial love. They sing, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

This was to make way for the introduction of what was His own-the manifest power of His Christ. But, before that, the assembly must have her place of association with Him in that must have Himself: the marriage of the Lamb is come. Till the evil woman had been set aside, this could not be. This is the character of heavenly joy and redemption by which we are brought into it. Man on earth is first good, then yielding to temptation. Redemption supposes first evil, and even slavery to it, but then deliverance from it and our being set beyond it, God having taken to Him His power. The assembly is presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, cleansed and white, suited to Christ. The apostle was disposed, in sight of all this blessedness, to fall down and worship him who had revealed it. His mind was thrown into devotion by these scenes. Its immediate object was the heavenly messenger, and he turns to bow to him, but is forbidden. He was a fellow-servant, and the same to all who had the testimony of Jesus; for the spirit of prophecy, we are told, is the testimony of Jesus. The testimony not to worship intermediate beings is the last warning left to a declining assembly, as, so to speak, one of the first (in Colossians).

We now arrive at the great announcement of the coming of Christ in power. Heaven, which had been opened on Jesus and to Stephen, now opens for Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. Holy and true He had been known by faith, and the faithful and true Witness. The last He is now; not as witness, but in judgment, save as judgment itself is the witness of His faithfulness and truth. The characters in which He appears are plain but all-important. It is first in general judgment but in the form of war, not what we may call sessional judgment, but overcoming power. Sessional judgment is in chapter 20 from verse 4. His eyes have the piercingness of divine judgment. He had many crowns, witness of His various and universal dominion. But, though thus

revealed as man, He had a glory none could penetrate into ; <sup>17</sup> of which He had the conscious power, but which was not revealed. He was the avenger-His garment was dipped in blood. All characterised Him, we may note here, according to that in which He is manifested by the judgment itself. It was the Revealer, the Word of God-His eternal character-what He was before creation; now making it good in judgment.

The armies in heaven had not garments dipped in blood. They were triumphant; they followed Him in His triumph, pure and perfect, His chosen, called, and faithful ones. The vengeance of Idumea was not their part, though they share His victory over the beast. The vengeance in Edom had a more earthly character, and is connected more with Judah. The Assyrian is there (see Psa. 83), not the beast. The beast and the false prophet are destroyed by Him as coming from heaven. He smites the nations with the rod of His mouth, He rules them with a rod of iron: this the saints will have with Him (chap. 2: 26, 27). He treads the wine-press too. <sup>18</sup> This is the part that is more earthly, as Isaiah 63 shews. So He that sits on the cloud thrusts in His sickle on the earth. It was an angel who cast the grapes into the wine-press, and the winepress was trodden <sup>19</sup> -it is not said, as by one sitting on the cloud. The character of the judgment of the beast and the false prophet is heavenly-it is the Word of God, the Lord from heaven; the wine-press is earthly. He is publicly, officially, and intrinsically King of kings, and Lord of lords. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire: this was a present final judgment-the rest were judicially slain. The final judgment of these deceived ones is not said to take place here. Satan is not yet cast into the lake of fire, but into the bottomless pit, where the legion of devils besought the Lord they might not be sent. He is bound there so as not to deceive the nations for a thousand years. There will be no seduction by Satan during the thousand years.

## 1.21 Chapter 20

We now come, evil power having been set aside, to the exercise of judicial authority in peace; and this is conferred on the saints. The prophet does not

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<sup>17</sup>\* \* So it was as to His Person and service. No one knew the Son but the Father. It was the secret of His rejection. He was that, and so necessarily such in the world. But the world under Satan's influence would not have that. In His humiliation His divine glory was maintained in the unsounded depths of His Person. Now He is revealed in glory; but there ever remained what none could search or penetrate into-His own Person and nature. His revealed name was the Word of God. As revealing God in grace or power so as to make Him known, we know Him. But His Person as Son always remains unsearchable. His name is written, so that we know it is unknowable-not unknown but unknowable. But He made good now the character and requirements of God in respect of men-what they ought to be with God, and what God was to them in their natural relationship, revealed in respect of their responsibility. Judgment refers to these, and to ourselves.

<sup>18</sup>This too He does alone; not that the saints may not be with Him as His cortege, so to speak, but the execution of judgment is His. In Isaiah it is only said that of the people none were with Him. In sessional judgment, judgment is given to them.

<sup>19</sup>I have already stated that the harvest is discriminative judgment: there is wheat for the garner. The wine-press is vengeance, righteous vengeance.

merely see the thrones as set in Daniel 7, but sitters on them too. Besides all to whom judgment is given in general, two special classes are mentioned, because they might seem to be too late, or to have lost their part : those beheaded (after the assembly was gone, for it is the Revelation-period we have to do with) for the witness of Jesus; and those who had not worshipped the beast (compare chap. 6: 9-II; 13: 15). These, as well as previously departed saints, had their part in living and reigning with Christ a thousand years. But those who were not Christ's, the rest of the dead, did not live again till the thousand years were over.<sup>20</sup> These were finally delivered from the second death. The first death they had undergone, the natural wages of sin, but in faithfulness; in the second death, the final judgment against sin, they would have no part. It could have no power over them. On the contrary, they had special relationship with God and Christ, they were priests of God and of Christ, and would reign with Him a thousand years. They also are priests and kings. Note how God and Christ are here united in one thought, as continually in the writings of John. Thus the beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire, their armies slain, and Satan bound in the abyss, and the risen saints are priests of God and Christ, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The details and effects, mark, are not given here. The object is to give the place of the saints, and especially of the sufferers, during the time of this book. The rest come in as a general fact, there were sitters on thrones of judgment; but the faithful of the prophecy are specially mentioned.

When the thousand years are finished, Satan is let loose again. He comes up on the earth, but he never gets up to heaven again. But the nations are tested by his temptation. Not even having seen Christ and enjoyed the fruits of His glory-no mere means can secure the heart of man, if it is to be depended upon; and men fall, in number as the sand of the sea, into Satan's hands as soon as tempted; enjoying blessing, where unfaithfulness would have been present loss (perhaps cutting off) and there was nothing to tempt them, but unfaithful as soon as they are tempted, as soon as the heart is tried. It was the last and needed trial of man; needed because they could not have finally enjoyed God with natural hearts, and the natural heart had not been tested where present blessing was on the side of owning a present, visible, glorious Christ. The deceived multitude, not limited now to a third of the earth or a special prophetic district but taking in the breadth of the earth, went up against the camp of the saints, and surrounded it and the beloved city, Jerusalem. It is remarkable here, there is no special presence of Christ amongst them. They are left apparently to be surrounded by their enemies. The Lord has allowed all this testing separation of personal faithfulness. Had He appeared, of course these hostile crowds could not have come up, nor would the thorough trial of the heart have proved the faithfulness of the saints, who would not follow the seductions of Satan. They are pressed upon and surrounded by the enemy, but faithful. Once this separation and full testing had been accomplished, God's

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<sup>20</sup>It may be noted here that, according to the true reading, the living and reigning is certainly resurrection. "The rest of the dead lived not until," etc.; so that it is clearly used here for resurrection, as the following words confirm: "This is the first resurrection."

judgment fell on them from heaven, and destroyed them. The devil was then cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet were already, where they are tormented for ever and ever.

This closed the exercise of wrath, of the destruction of hostile power-a wondrous scene-that God should have enemies in this world! Now judicial power, as such, seated in its own right, comes in. It may be remarked, that the exercise of this on the quick, forms no part of the contents of this book. The hostile power of the beast was destroyed by Him who judges and makes war, the heavenly saints having been taken to glory. The crowds of apostates at the end of the thousand years are destroyed by fire from heaven. But the judgment of Matthew 25 is not found here, unless there be a possible connection with the judgment of chapter 20 : 4.

There now comes the judgment of the dead. There is no coming here. A great white throne is set; judgment is carried on according to the purity of God's nature. It was no dealing with the earth, or the power of evil, but with souls. Heaven and earth-all mere scenes of judgment-disappear. The secrets of men's hearts are judged by Him who knows them all. Heaven and earth flee away before the face of Him that sat on the throne, and the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. Judgment was according to works, as it was written in the books of record. Still another element was brought into view. Sovereign grace alone had saved according to the purpose of God.<sup>21</sup> There was a book of life. Whosoever was not written there was cast into the lake of fire. But it was the finally closing and separating scene for the whole race of men and this world. And though they were judged everyman according to his works, yet sovereign grace only had delivered any; and whoever was not found in grace's book was cast into the lake of fire. The sea gave up the dead in it; death and hades, the dead in them. And death and hades were put an end to for ever by the divine judgment. The heaven and earth passed away, but they were to be revived; but death and hades never. There was for them only divine destruction and judgment. They are looked at as the power of Satan. He has the power of death and the gates of hades; and hence these are for ever destroyed judicially. They will never have power again. They are personified; but of course there is no question of tormenting them or of punishment: when the devil himself is cast in, there is. But death was not then destroyed; for the wicked dead had not been raised for judgment. Now they had; and the last enemy is destroyed. The force of the image, I doubt not, is that all the dead now judged (the whole contents of hades, in whom the power of death had been) were cast into the lake of fire, so that death and hades, which had no existence but in their state, were entirely and judicially ended by their being cast in. The saints had long before passed out of them; but they subsisted in the wicked. Now these were,

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<sup>21</sup>Thus purpose and man's responsibility are never confounded, but, from the two trees of the garden on, are in juxtaposition; life brought into connection with responsibility in the law, responsibility being put first, and thus proof given that man cannot stand before God; but the question is solved only in Christ, who bore our sins, died for us to sin, and is life. Counsels and promise of life in Christ come first, then responsibility in the creature on earth, then grace making good counsels, in -righteousness, through the cross.



consequent on the judgment of the white throne, cast into the lake of fire the second death. The limit and measure of escape was the book of life.

## 1.22 Chapter 21

But there was a new heaven and a new earth; but no more sea-no separation, nor part of the world not brought into an ordered earth before God. Here we do not find any mediatorial kingdom. The Lamb is not in the scene. God is all in all. No sorrow or crying more, no earthly people of God distinct from the inhabitants of the earth. These are God's people, and God is with them Himself, but withal His tabernacle is with them. This is the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The assembly has her own character, is the habitation of God in a special way, when the unchanging state comes, and all is made new. God is the end, as the beginning. Him that is athirst now God will refresh with the fountain of the water of life-the overcomer shall inherit all things. The world for the Christian is now a great Rephidim. This is the twofold portion of the final blessedness: he shall have God for his God, and be His son. Those who feared this path-did not overcome the world and Satan but had walked in iniquity would have their part in the lake of fire. This closes the history of God's ways.

What follows is the description of the heavenly city, as before we had that of Babylon. Its heavenly character and millennial connection with the earth is revealed. One of the seven angels, as in the case of Babylon, comes to shew the prophet the bride, the Lamb's wife. The result of judgment on the earth is the introduction of better and higher blessings. The prophet is taken, like Moses, to see the scene of promise, and sees New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. This was its double character from God, divine in its origin, and also heavenly (compare 2 Cor. 5: 1). It might be of God and earthly. It might be heavenly and angelic. It was neither; it was divine in origin and heavenly in nature and character. It was clothed with divine glory; it must be as founded on Christ's work. It was transparent jasper; jasper being used as a symbol of divine glory (chap. 4: 3). It is secure, having a wall great and high. It has twelve gates. Angels are become the willing doorkeepers of the great city, the fruit of Christ's redemption-work in glory. This marked the possession, too, by man thus brought in the assembly to glory, of the highest place in the creation, and providential order of God, of which angels had previously been the administrators. The twelve gates are full of human perfectness of governmental administrative power. The gate was the place of judgment. Twelve, we have often seen, denotes perfection and governmental power. The character of it is noted by the names of the twelve tribes. God had so governed these. They were not the foundation; but this character of power was found there. There were twelve foundations, but these were the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They were, in their work, the foundation of the heavenly city. Thus the creative and providential display of power, the governmental (Jehovah), and the assembly once founded at Jerusalem, are all brought together in the heavenly city, the organised seat of heavenly power. It is not presented as the bride, though it be the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is not in the Pauline character of nearness of

blessing to Christ. It is the assembly as founded at Jerusalem under the twelve—the organised seat of heavenly power, the new and now heavenly capital of God’s government. They had suffered and served the Lamb in the earthly, and under Him founded the heavenly. It is alike vast and perfect, and all measured and owned of God. It is not now a remnant measured; it is the city. It has not divine perfectness (that could not be), but it has divinely given perfectness. It is a cube, equal on every side, finite perfection. So the wall (they are merely symbols) was perfect, 12 X 12. The wall which secured it was the divine glory. As it is written of the earthly Jerusalem, "Salvation hath God appointed for walls and bulwarks."

The city was formed, in its nature, in divine righteousness and holiness—gold transparent as glass. That which was now by the word wrought in and applied to men below, was the very nature of the whole place (compare Eph. 4: 24). The precious stones, or varied display of God’s nature, who is light, in connection with the creature (seen in creation, Ezekiel 28; in grace in the high priest’s breast-plate), now shone in permanent glory, and adorned the foundations of the city. The gates had the moral beauty, which attracted Christ in the assembly and in a glorious way. That on which men walked, instead of bringing danger of defilement, was itself righteous and holy; the streets, all that men came in contact with, were righteousness and holiness—gold transparent as glass.

There was no concealment of God’s glory in that which awed by its display—no temple where men approached but where they could not draw nigh, where God was hidden. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were its temple. They were approached in their own nature and glory, surrounded only by that fully displayed.

Nor was there need of created light here; the glory of the divine nature lighted all, and the Lamb was the light-bearer in it.

Note here, we have not the Father as the temple. It is the revealed dispensational Ruler, the true God, and the Lamb who has made good His glory. This was the character of the city.

The vision goes on to shew its relationship to those on the earth, and its inhabitants: a seeming inconsistency, but no real one; for the city is viewed as the estate of the bride. Where the inhabitants are spoken of, it is the individual blessing. The nations, spared in the judgments on earth, walk in the light of it; the world does, in a measure, in that of the assembly now. Then the glory will be perfect. The city enjoys the direct light within; the world transmitted light of glory. To it the kings of the earth bring their honour and glory. They own the heavens and the heavenly kingdom to be the source of all, and bring there the homage of their power. Night, there is not there, and its gates are ever open; no defence against evil is needed, though divine security leaves no approach to evil. The kings themselves bring their willing homage to it. But the glory and honour of the Gentiles is brought to it too. Heaven is seen as the source of all the glory and honour of this world. Hence these are now true. Nothing defiling enters there, nor what introduces idols and falsehood. Neither man’s evil nor Satan’s deceit can exist or produce any corruption there. How often, when anything good is set up now, the considerate heart knows that evil

will enter, and Satan deceive and corrupt! There we have the certainty that this can never be. It was not merely the absence of evil, but the impossibility of its entrance, which characterised the holy city. There was that which, having its source in perfect grace, involves all blessed affections in connection with the Lamb in those within the city. Those only whose names were in the Lamb's book of life found place in the city.

## 1.23 Chapter 22

The connection of the holy city with the earth, though not on it, is everywhere seen. The river of God refreshed the city, and the tree of life, whose fruits ever ripe were food for the celestial inhabitants of it, bore in its leaves healing for the nations. Only the glorified ever ate the fruit of constant growth; but what was manifested and displayed without, as the leaves of a tree, was blessing to those on earth. We see grace characterising the assembly in glory. The nation and kingdom that will not serve the earthly Jerusalem shall utterly perish-it preserves its earthly royal character; the assembly its own: the leaves of the tree it feeds on are for healing. There is no more curse. The throne of God and the Lamb is in it. This is the source of blessing, not of curse; and His servants serve Him; often they cannot as they would here. Note too again here, how God and the Lamb are spoken of as one, as constantly in John's writings. His servants shall have the fullest privilege of His constant presence, shall see His face, and their belonging to Him as His own be evident to all. There is no night there, nor need of light, for the Lord God gives it ; and, as to their state, they reign, not for the thousand years, as they do over the earth, but for ever and ever.

This closes the description of the heavenly city and the whole prophetic volume. What follows consists of warning, or the final expression of the thoughts of, and relationship with, Christ of the assembly.

The angel declares the truth of these things, and that the Lord God of the prophets-not as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor as directly teaching the assembly as dwelling in it by the Spirit-the Lord God of the prophets has sent His angel to inform His servants of these events. "Behold," says Christ, speaking as of old, in the prophetic spirit, rising up to His now personal testimony, " Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." The assembly is viewed, not as the subject of prophecy, but as "the things that are," time not being counted, specially time to come. Those that keep it are those concerned in the book, who are warned that Christ will soon be there. No doubt we all can profit by it, but we are not in the scenes it speaks of. John, impressed with the dignity of the messenger, fell down and would have worshipped him. But the saints of the assembly, even if made prophets of, were not to return into the uncertainty of ancient days. The angel was a simple angel, John's fellow-servant, and fellow servant of his brethren the prophets: he was to worship God. Nor were the sayings to be sealed, as with Daniel: the time was at hand. When it closed its testimony, men would remain in the same state for judgment or blessing. And Christ would quickly come, and every man receive as his work was. Verse 7 was a warning, in form of blessing, to

those in the circumstances referred to, to keep the sayings of the book, but this verse 12 is the record of Christ's coming to the general judgment of the quick.

Finally, Christ announces Himself, having taken up the word in Person in verse 12, as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end-God before and after all; and filling duration. I suppose we are to take as the true reading: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." The redeemed, cleansed ones, can enter there and feed on the tree of life; for I suppose it is the fruit here. Without are the unclean and violent, and those who love satanic falsehood and idolatry, sin against purity, against their neighbour, against God, and follow Satan.

This closes the summing up. The Lord Jesus now reveals Himself in His own Person, speaking to John and the saints, and declares who He is, in what character He appears to say it to them. "I am the root and offspring of David"-the origin and heir of the temporal promises of Israel; but much more than that-He is the bright and morning Star. It is what He is before He appears, in both respects; only the former regards Israel born of the seed of David according to the flesh. But the Lord has taken another character. He has not yet arisen as the Sun of righteousness on this benighted globe; but, to faith, the dawn is there, and the assembly sees Him in the now far-spent night as the morning Star, knows Him, while watching according to His own word, in His bright heavenly character-a character which does not wake a sleeping world, but is the delight and joy of those who watch. When the sun arises, He will not be thus known: the earth will never so know Him, bright as the day may be. When Christ is in this place, the Spirit dwells in the assembly below, and the assembly has its own relationship. It is the bride of Christ, and her desire is toward Him.

Thus" the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is not a warning from one coming as a judge and a rewarder, but the revelation of Himself which awakens the desire of the bride according to the relationship in which grace has set her. Nor is it a mere sentiment or wish: the Spirit who dwells in the assembly leads and suggests her thought. But the Spirit turns also, and the heart of him who enjoys the relationship, to others. "Let him that heareth"-let him who hears the voice of the Spirit in the assembly-join in the cry, and say, Come. It is one common hope, it should be our common desire; and the sense of what is coming on the earth, and the sense of failure in things that are, ought only, though it be in truth an inferior motive, to urge the cry in all. But while still here, the saint has another place also. Not only do his desires go after God upwards and the heavenly Bridegroom, but he reflects God's known character, by having His nature and Spirit as manifested also in Christ's love, and in possession of the living water, though not of the Bridegroom. He turns round and invites others, "Let him that is athirst come," and proclaims it forth then to the world, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Thus the whole place of the heavenly saint, conscious of the assembly's place, is brought out in this verse, from his desire of Christ's coming, to his call to whosoever will to come.

The integrity of the book is preserved by a solemn warning of the danger

of losing a part in the tree of life <sup>22</sup> and the holy city. Christ then cheers the saint's heart, by assuring that He would quickly come; and the heart of the true saint responds with unfeigned and earnest desire, " Even so, come, Lord Jesus." And then, with the salutation of grace, the book closes, leaving the promise and the desire as the last words of Jesus on the heart.

Let the reader note here that, in the beginning and end of the book, before and after the prophetic statements, we have in a beautiful way the conscious position of the saints.

The first, at the opening of the whole book, gives the individual conscious blessing through what Christ has done; the latter, the whole position of the assembly, thus distinguishing clearly the saints under the gospel from those whose circumstances are prophetically made known to them in this book. " Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests to God and his Father." As soon as Christ is named (and it is so in both cases), it awakens in the saints the consciousness of Christ's love and their own place in relationship with Him. They are already washed from their sins in His own blood, and made kings and priests to God and His Father- have their place and state fixed, before any of the prophetic part is developed, and in the coming kingdom will enjoy that place, not of being blessed under Christ, but of being associated with Him. Here they have their place simply in the kingdom and priesthood; it is individual title resulting from His first coming. They are loved, washed in His own blood, and associated with Him in the kingdom.

At the end of the book, Christ is revealed as the morning Star, a place forming no part of the prophecy, but that in which the assembly, who has waited for Him, is associated with Him for herself, and the kingdom (compare the promise to the overcomers in Thyatira). <sup>23</sup> This draws out active love (not as before, simply being loved and what we are made)- love first directed towards Christ in the assembly's known relation to Himself, then to the saints who hear, then to the thirsty, then to all the world. The desire of the assembly, as the bride with whom the Spirit is, is directed to Christ's second coming for herself- to the possessing the morning Star; then the Spirit turns to the saints, calling on them to say to Jesus, Come- to join in this desire. But we have the Spirit though not the Bridegroom; hence whoever is athirst is called on to come and drink, and thus the gospel proclaimed abroad, " Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." It is love acting in the saint all round from Christ to sinners in the world.

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<sup>22</sup>The true reading here is " tree," not " book"; but the book of life is not life, nor is our being written there final, though a *prima facie* register, unless indeed written there before the foundation of the world: but, even so, it is not the same thing as the possession of life.

<sup>23</sup>Compare the place of the bright cloud in Luke 9. There it is the Father's voice.