

*THE REVELATION
OF JESUS CHRIST
VOLUME 2:
Things Which Must Take Place*

*Notes of Sermons on
The Book of Revelation chapters 4 - 22*

First given at
Mount Zion Baptist Church, Ashford
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2016

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Volume 2:
Things Which Must Take Place

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10. GOD IS ON THE THRONE

Revelation 4

In Volume 1 we considered the seven messages to the local churches given to the Apostle John by Jesus Christ our Head. He is assuredly our great Saviour, Lord and High Priest and is on the throne of God in Heaven. These messages are timeless in their application to the different conditions of the local churches. We have seen revealed in the messages to the Churches strengths and weaknesses, encouragements and warnings, instruction and promises. The messages are most assuredly applicable to the here-and-now situation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Now we come to the second part of the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to His servant John. We are dealing here with the symbolic, prophetic part of the Revelation. It is vitally important to remember the principle that abides throughout this Book, the certain truth that God's Kingdom is greater than Satan's kingdom. The gates of hell will not prevail over the Church of Jesus Christ. God is in control and is working out His purposes.

The second part pictures the displacement of the kingdom of Satan by the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. As we come to these chapters always remember: God is on His throne – God is in control. God is God, and He is simply working out His sovereign purposes. Jesus Christ is coming again and the old, sinful order will be replaced by a new and perfect one. Satan's kingdom will be finally overthrown as the certain consequence of Christ's death and resurrection. The glorious Kingdom of Christ will abide in eternal perfection in the new heavens and the new earth.

To emphasise the vital teaching that must prevail throughout this Book, Christ reveals this to John in a vision. John is taken in the Spirit

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to the throne of God, the divine, supreme control centre, the ultimate Headquarters of all creation! John writes down what he saw, and this account is left on record for our encouragement, to strengthen our faith.

Welcomed to the throne

‘After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne’ Revelation 4.1-2.

The throne of God is the highest sovereignty of Heaven and earth. He who sits on the throne is God; there is nothing beyond God! Jesus invites John up to the most amazing place of all. In his vision he is called to the throne of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

‘Come’. This is the ultimate invitation – John experiences Heaven in his soul while still a mortal being here on earth. He is given a wonderful and unique spiritual experience. With spiritual insight in his vision he beholds the throne of God. John is privileged to behold some wonderful aspects regarding the throne of God, different aspects which speak of the character of God.

John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as instructed writes down the vision.

‘I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet...“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this”’ Revelation 1.10, 19.

John could not describe the form of God. God is a Spirit, so John described Him on His throne in creative terms.

A jasper stone (verse 3)

‘And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald’ Revelation 4.3.

The word ‘jasper’ comes from a Hebrew word meaning ‘to be bright’. This was the first thing John realised; God’s glory and God’s purity.

‘Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal’ Revelation 21.11.

A sardius stone (verse 3)

This was vivid red in appearance, reminding John of the fire of God’s holiness and wrath.

A rainbow (verse 3)

This was a symbol of God’s love, grace and mercy. The rainbow on earth is the evidence before our eyes of the covenant promise made by God to Noah that God would no longer allow the earth to be completely flooded. We see on earth a segment of the rainbow in its various colours. John saw at the throne of God a complete, circular rainbow, emerald green in colour, a symbol of completeness and hope, as an emblem of the covenant of promise.

When we see a rainbow it reminds us of God’s faithfulness to the promise that He has made with Christ as the Head of the Church, and all His people in Him. This covenant is as the waters of Noah unto God, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

“For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you’ Isaiah 54.9-10.

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'Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure'
2 Samuel 23.5.

This rainbow looked like an emerald; the most prevailing colour was a pleasant green. This showed the reviving and refreshing nature of the new covenant.

Twenty-four elders (verse 4)

'Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads' Revelation 4.4.

These twenty-four elders represented the Church, the people of God throughout all ages, including both converted Jew and converted Gentile. In the Old Testament there were the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the New Testament twelve Apostles. These elders represent the Old and the New united together around the throne of God.

'Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb' Revelation 21.12-14.

Their sitting denotes their honour, rest, and satisfaction. Their sitting about the throne signifies their relation to God, their nearness to Him, the sight and enjoyment they have of Him.

They were clothed in white raiment, in the pure and spotless robe of Christ's righteousness which is comparable to fine linen, clean and white; and is the righteousness of the saints, every member of God's Church, of Christ's body.

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They had on their heads crowns of gold, signifying the honour and authority given to them of God, and of the glory they have with Him.

They continually worshipped, but notice how they are compelled in adoration and worship to fall down on their knees!

‘...the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created”’ Revelation 4.10-11.

Lightning, thunder and voices (verse 5)

‘And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God’ Revelation 4.5.

These are all symbols of the majesty of God, His law, and His sovereign power. In the Old Testament we read of the experience of the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai.

‘Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin”’ Exodus 20.18-20.

Seven lamps, seven spirits of God

These symbolise the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in the Church through Christ Jesus.

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The sea of glass (verses 6-8)

‘Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”’ Revelation 4.6-8.

A sea of glass like crystal, a scene of marvellous splendour reflecting the glory of God.

Four living creatures

These creatures symbolise that all of God’s creation is made to worship God. These creatures represented the power, strength and wisdom of God. They had a wonderful responsibility to lead the praise of God at the throne of God.

It seems to me that the Church of God as a body were represented by the elders, while the creation of God as a whole is represented by the living creatures.

The Psalmist said, *‘All Your works shall praise You, O Lord’ (Psalm 145.10)*. The works of creation praise God in time now, and will do so forever in the new heavens and the new earth; but God’s supreme work of creation, those made in the image of God, will praise Him in their souls. The redeemed race, purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, express the deepest adoration for they, above all God’s creation, have been endowed with the communicable attributes of God.

Praise (verses 9-11)

‘Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and

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thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" Revelation 4.9-11.

Two songs of praise are recorded in this chapter, and it reminds us that God's creation will praise Him eternally. This is their role, living to bring praise and honour to God. It seems they are continually singing a chorus of which they do not weary! Its content is eternally real and precious because it continually praises God. There is no weariness in Heaven; praise is glorious.

These four living creatures lead the worship around the throne and in the midst of the throne. The elders fall down before Him. There is room for humility in Heaven; there is room for praise, but there is no room for pride.

What were the characteristics of their praise? God's holiness, might, eternity, worthiness, creation and sovereignty.

Conclusion

We started by reminding ourselves of the principle that needs to be borne in mind continually: God is on His throne and is in control. We have seen a little glimpse of how John saw God's throne.

This vision helps us to understand a little of the character of the God we worship. God on His throne – He is to be worshipped.

11. WORTHY IS THE LAMB OF GOD

Revelation 5

In the previous chapter the writer John has been given a remarkable vision of God's throne. John then, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uses the language of creation to describe his vision. John's vision reveals the wonderful character of God, revealing His purity, holiness, grace, love, power, glory and praise.

In *Revelation 5* John's vision centres on the role of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the throne of God, and brings glory to Him. It leaves us in no doubt as to the awesome significance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Saviour and Lord. It warns us of the foolishness of a Christless faith.

This chapter reveals the place God the Son takes in the divine purposes of God for mankind and creation. It is impossible to separate the harmony of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity have distinct roles, yet are perfectly united as One in essence and purpose. So to speak about believing in God, and worshipping God, without believing in the Son of God is utter folly. Christ has an awesome role as the anointed King; to deny Him is to deny the very God we claim to believe in. The vision tells of the worthiness, role and place of Jesus Christ the Son of God to fulfil God's purposes.

The scroll

*'And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals'
Revelation 5.1.*

John is shown a scroll in the hand of God. It is written on both

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sides and sealed with seven seals, symbolising the perfect will of God, complete and full. The scroll represents the divine plan of God and the foreknowledge of God of all events upon this earth, both for time and in judgment, and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. It represents the sovereign purposes of God, the pre-appointed decree of God. Nothing can be added to it; it is complete as the divine plan of the Triune God. Neither can anything be taken away because these are the purposes of God. Written both sides – complete!

The scroll is sealed up, symbolising that God's plan is not only fixed and full but secret. It is hidden from our eyes unless and until He reveals it to us. The *Book of Revelation* means 'the unveiling', the unveiling of wonderful truths concerning the sovereign wisdom and power of God. This is one of the fundamental points James made at the Jerusalem Council Meeting.

'Known to God from eternity are all His works' Acts 15.18.

This is what God revealed about Himself to the prophet Isaiah:

'Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure"' Isaiah 46.9-10.

It is this doctrine the Apostles focused upon in their letters. For example, Paul writing to Timothy states:

'Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began' 2 Timothy 1.8-9.

The great question

‘Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it’ Revelation 5.2-4.

To open the scroll by breaking the seals means not merely to reveal, but to carry out God’s plan. The question is therefore, who is going to open the scroll? No one can be found worthy in Heaven, or on earth, or under the earth. No one was worthy enough! No one could be found anywhere! Not Moses, the meekest man; Elijah, prophet of power; Enoch, who walked with God; David, the king beloved of God; Isaiah, the royal prophet; John the Baptist, the pioneer for Christ; Paul, the mighty man of God; Peter, James and John, the closest of the disciples to Jesus. No. These were all sinners like you and me, yet saved by the glorious grace of God.

Someone perfect had to be found, Someone acceptable to God the Father on the throne. Someone had to be found Who has authority to take the scroll out of the hand of God the Father; Someone God the Father can trust perfectly to fulfil His divine, sovereign purposes of love and justice – His love to those who believe in Him and His judgment upon those who reject Him.

Here is creation in its utter helplessness. Throughout the universe no one could be found worthy for such a duty. No one could be found who is pure enough to perfectly fulfil God’s purposes; no one who is powerful enough to ensure the enactment and fulfilment of God’s purposes for mankind; no one who is wise enough to understand God’s will; no one who can be the ‘Managing Director’ to ensure the Chairman’s directives.

John wept, because John understood the significance of this scroll.

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It had to do with the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God and no one is worthy. John understood in his vision that if no one opened this scroll there would be no ultimate victory for believers, no new heavens and new earth; Christ's death would have been in vain, no fulfilment of the glorious Kingdom of God.

The great angel shouted. The challenge went out: 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?' The devil is helpless to rise up to this challenge, though he would break into Heaven itself from where he was thrown out. He is unable to snatch the scroll and ruin God's plan for the fulfilment of the new heavens and the new earth. He is helpless to take the scroll out of the hand of God and shred its contents.

Even the angels are unable to accept the challenge. Of all the billions of human beings, no one can be found worthy. No one in all creation is able to fulfil this challenge. The gauntlet has been thrown down, but no one is able to govern God's world, or bring to pass the fulfilment of God's everlasting Kingdom.

This verse puts creation firmly in its place. It shows the impotency of the devil compared with God; and it shows the limited authority of the angels.

The Lion and the Lamb

'But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne'
Revelation 5.5-7.

Worthy is the Lamb of God

But look! The vision revealed the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ coming onto the scene. Do not weep, but look to Jesus.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

Here His strength is symbolised.

'Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?' Genesis 49.9.

The lion is the king of the beasts of the field, a symbol of all-conquering power. Power belongs to Christ Who has conquered Satan, triumphing over sin and death.

The Root of David

Christ was of the royal seed of David, being in the line of David, the offspring of David.

'I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star' Revelation 22.16.

The fact that He was of the Root of David meant He was to be the offspring of David of the tribe of Judah. The name 'Root of David' is a name given to describe Him as the source, the root cause, the means of blessing. From the root the tree sprouts forth and develops; so from Christ the Church grows and develops.

The Lamb

Here we have the strength of the lion seen not in aggression but in a living Lamb, a Lamb that had been slain but now lives! It is at this point we come to see the awesome significance of the cross of Christ. The history of the world hinges on the cross; the history of the world is formed around the cross. The purpose of creation, of life and of eternity, finds its meaning at the cross of Christ. A Lamb slain, but now arisen! He had been announced to John as a Lion, but a Lamb

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appeared on the scene, a Person Who proved His strength as a Lion by being slain as a Lamb; standing resolute as a Lion but as the perfect Lamb.

‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’

John 1.29.

The Lamb had seven horns, symbolising His power, and seven eyes. This symbolised the Spirit of the Holy God which dwells in Him and has been sent forth into His Kingdom. So Jesus Christ is the life of the Kingdom.

Worthy is the Lamb!

‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!”’ Revelation 5.9, 12.

He alone is worthy to open the scroll; He alone can declare God to man; He alone is with the Father and the Spirit in the unity of the Trinity, and party and privy to all the scroll contains.

When the Lamb Who is worthy takes the scroll a new song is sung. We are presented here with a picture of worship which rightly belongs to the Lamb. He is worthy, the delight of the Father, the delight of Heaven, the delight of believers on earth, One to Whom all honour, glory and praise is due.

What aspects of Christ’s character are worshipped here! Redemption, exaltation, power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing – for ever.

Here in the passage Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is revealed in His offices as Mediator, Redeemer and Giver of authority as God the Son.

Worthy is the Lamb of God

The Mediator

‘And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation”’ Revelation 5.9.

As Mediator between God and man Christ can take the scroll and unseal it, and unfold the mystery of God.

‘All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him’ Matthew 11.27.

‘For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time’ 1 Timothy 2.5-6.

‘Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it’ Genesis 28.12.

The Redeemer

See verse 9 again. He has purchased men for God. Redemption is the buying back of something lost or gone astray. It is a glorious redemption from all over the world.

‘...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’ 1 Peter 1.18-19.

The Giver of authority

‘And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth’ Revelation 5.10.

He has given authority to God’s people. God’s people are greatly

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privileged to serve God. Believers are given authority and power today through prayer. Prayer changes things, and who prays? Believers.

It was said that that Mary, Queen of Scots, considered John Knox at prayer a far greater force than a great army!

Jesus Christ the eternal Lord God to be worshipped

‘Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever’ Revelation 5.11-14.

John witnessed all in Heaven and all on earth praising Jesus as God on the throne!

*In Thee, most perfectly expressed,
The Father’s glories shine:
Of the full Deity possessed,
Eternally divine:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow!*

Josiah Conder (1789-1855)

Proclaim far and wide the deity of Christ. Have no fellowship with those who deny the deity of Christ!

Conclusion

Amen! The elders fell down and worshipped. How about us?

12. THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE

Revelation 6

As we consider the meaning of the seals that are opened by the Lamb of God, we need to remember the principle of interpretation. God is on the throne. He is simply ensuring the outworking of His glorious purpose, being the fulfilment of His Kingdom, when His people will reign with Him in the new heavens and new earth. He is working out His purposes to ensure all is working together for the fulfilment of His perfect will.

In this chapter we have a description given of the content contained within six seals. These were opened by the only One Who alone is worthy to do so, the Lamb of God. These six seals speak to us about the various experiences that this world goes through, and what will be the final experience at its end.

These experiences are under the ultimate, divine control of God. The growth of His kingdom will continue amidst these experiences and despite the opposition of Satan. The amount of evil and suffering in this world cannot go further than the divine purposes of God permit. The Day of Judgment is approaching; its time is known only to God; it cannot be stopped or avoided.

The point for us to remember in all events in the world is that everything will ultimately turn out for the glory of God, including His dealings with the righteous and the wicked, the believer and the unbeliever. In what way will all turn out for God's honour and glory? God's love will be magnified with the righteous, and God's justice will be magnified in His dealings with the wicked.

'The Lord has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom' Proverbs 16.4.

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The first seal: the rider on the white horse

‘Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.” And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer’ Revelation 6.1-2.

This first horse reminds us, first and foremost, of the conquering work of Jesus Christ – the spread of the Word of God, and the building up of His Kingdom in the control of Jesus Christ as Lord. This interpretation is supported by referring to the original meaning of the words. ‘To conquer’ in this verse means ultimate victory. Therefore it appears to speak of the spread of the Gospel and the growth of His Kingdom. The golden thread running throughout the Book is of the conquering Christ.

We can also see that white in *Revelation* constantly speaks of something positive and pure. So the white horse could depict purity, the crown given can speak of victory, and the bow could depict the Word of God proclaimed.

Another argument for this interpretation is because of the picture given in the latter part of the Book referring clearly to Christ on a white horse.

‘Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war...And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses’ Revelation 19.11, 14.

We could also look to passages like *Psalms* 45.4:

‘And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.’

The World in Which We Live

We are laying down a principle that the Gospel and the Kingdom of God will ultimately conquer.

Having said all that, we also do need to be aware of the great danger of Satan, the antichrist, who appears as an angel of light, and yet desires destruction. Jesus tells us that in the last days the great problem will not only be persecution but deception, the appearance of something which seems right and pure, but really having an evil desire to conquer through deception. So we need to be on our guard for the white horse of deception. We need to be aware of the all-conquering desire of false religions. Beware of the look-alike who seeks to conquer your heart and mine! Look always to the all-conquering Lord.

We need to be aware of the way Satan works through ungodly leaders and false religions which have this desire to conquer and impose their rule or religion. We need to take comfort from the words of the Apostle Paul:

‘Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us’ Romans 8.37.

The second seal: the rider on the red horse of strife

‘When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.” Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword’ Revelation 6.3-4.

This red horse speaks to us of bloodshed, wrath, anger and violence. The rider on this horse is in the business of taking away peace. The symbol here is speaking about the reality of war, conflict, division and hatred. This stems from a rejection of God and the Gospel of peace in Jesus Christ the Lord. The rider on the red horse will continually make his presence felt in bloodshed until the return of Christ.

Jesus tells us in *Mark 13.7-8* we live in world of war:

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‘But when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.’

The Lord says that this period in the world’s history will be characterised by wars and rumours of wars. For example, billions of pounds a year are spent on weapons of mass destruction. Some world states have special days in which they parade their awesome firepower. We live in a world in which men are constantly killing one another. How relevant, true and up-to-date this is!

The third seal: the rider on the black horse of poverty

‘When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine”’ Revelation 6.5-6.

This is a symbol of the distress caused by poverty, with the description given of how the equivalent of a day’s wages will only buy enough wheat or barley to survive. Life for the poor is just taken up with survival.

But at the same time the command goes out, *‘Do not harm the oil and wine.’* These were symbols of luxury; the rich had enough and more, but would not allow their luxuries to be touched. Here again, like the previous symbol of war, we are reminded of a pattern in the world in which we live. While people starve for want of bread and rice, Europe has its so called ‘butter mountains’ and ‘wine lakes’. The oil and wine must not be harmed!

There is a great imbalance in the world between rich and poor. For millions of people life is about survival, just enough to live on, while

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for millions of other people the stress is not what to eat but how to protect and be sure their luxuries are maintained and not harmed, and even increased.

The fourth seal: the rider on the pale horse of death

‘When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth’ Revelation 6.7-8.

Here the pale horse and its rider symbolises the reality of death. We live in a world in which we are constantly reminded of death; death by sword, famine, disease and beasts. The mention of death and Hades being given power over a quarter of the earth is a reminder that these judgments are warnings before the great Day of God’s judgment.

It seems that what is being symbolised here are those times when death cuts down many at the same time, like in an earthquake, famine or war. The boundaries of death are fixed by God. These particular times either soften man’s heart and turn him to God, or harden man’s heart against God.

The fifth seal: the cry of the martyrs

‘When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed’ Revelation 6.9-11.

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In the general course of events in this sin-cursed world, believers suffer like unbelievers. But for believers the suffering is actually working for their good. God is working through the good times and the bad. Believers have a totally different perspective on life. They live in the world, but what they experience while walking with the Lord is working for their good.

But here is taught the reality that they are particular targets for attack and slaughter. The people of God in many parts of the world are persecuted simply because of their faith. The persecution of Christians even to their death will continue until Christ returns.

'And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' Matthew 10.28.

'If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me' John 15.18-21.

These martyrs John saw in his vision had sacrificed their lives for the Word of God. Their bodies were slain but not their souls. They were precious in God's sight.

'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints' Psalm 116.15.

Their life blood had been poured out as an offering to God. They longed for the day when the Church of God would be delivered and triumphant in the face of their enemies and their testimony vindicated.

Their cry was heard and they received a white robe to comfort them, symbolising their perfection in Christ. They must wait patiently until all the chosen people of God have been called by God's grace, and all those appointed to martyrdom have fulfilled their calling. The Day of Judgment comes when God's sovereign purposes of grace have been fully accomplished.

The sixth seal: the day of God's judgment

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" Revelation 6.12-17.

The sixth seal symbolises the great and awful Day of God's Judgment. Throughout history as warnings given to mankind, God has allowed times of terrible devastation, hurricanes and earthquakes. God allows these times to lead men to repentance, and to impress upon mankind the instability of the world. These are like mini judgment days.

But the sixth seal tells us what the great Day of God's Judgment will be like: a day of terror which will affect the whole earth; a day when mankind will desperately try to hide from the all-seeing face of God, from the wrath of the Lamb. All society, from the king to the slave, will be affected. They will be united in their fear of facing God. Like

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Adam and Eve hid from God, so mankind in the last day will try to flee from God. This is the question! Who is able to stand? Only those who trust and believe in the Lamb of God!

Conclusion

We come back to the abiding principle to remember – God is in control in the midst of the world.

Be informed: Read the newspaper and listen to the news, doing so in the light of God's Word.

Be encouraged: What we do know is that the Kingdom of God continues to grow in the midst of a sin-cursed world which is under the judgment of God; amidst persecution, suffering, hardship and death, the spiritual and numerical growth of God's Kingdom continues.

*Have confidence...*in the all-prevailing power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Be encouraged in the continuing, perfect fulfilment of God's purposes for good and over evil.

*The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

William Cowper (1731-1800)

*Look forward...*to the promise of the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.

'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' Habukkuk 2.14.

'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord' 1 Corinthians 15.58.

13. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 7

One grand theme of *Revelation* to remember is that God is on His throne and is working out His purposes. He is working for the good of His everlasting Kingdom and for the ultimate glory of His almighty name. *Revelation 7* is speaking to us about God's special, gracious and particular purposes to His people, the children of His Kingdom saved and redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It reveals to us the manner of the response of praise in Heaven of the angels and the Church of the living God.

John is given a glimpse of the blessed eternal state and security of those who have put their trust in Jesus. He is given a vision of the perfect care and precious purposes of God for His Church. Remember, John had already been briefed of the reality of the world in which we live in the here-and-now, a world in which the Kingdom of God continues to grow amidst war, famine, destruction and death. This chapter simply confirms this grand principle that, in the midst of trial, the Church of Jesus Christ is secure and can look forward to a glorious future with God. God will eternally wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In this chapter, for our assurance, we are given seven characteristics of the Church of Jesus Christ.

1. The sealed Church: the Church on earth

'After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to

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whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed’ Revelation 7.1-8.

The Word of God uses the name ‘Israel’ in two ways. First, to describe a nation upon whom God bestowed unique, providential privileges. He gave the nation of Israel a specific land to live in; this was called the land of promise, as given to Abraham. It was also known as the Land of Canaan. Despite the special favour shown to the nation by God, this nation often rejected God, and was ultimately taken captive. Yet God delivered them again in His mercy and restored them back to their home city Jerusalem. But, despite God’s wonderful blessings towards them, this favoured nation rejected the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In doing so they suffered the judgment of God, and in AD70 the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

The second way the name Israel is used, is to describe the Church of the living God. The Church is made up of converted people from all over the world, Jew and Gentile alike.

‘But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel’ Romans 9.6.

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'For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him' Romans 10.12.

'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them"' Galatians 3.8-10.

'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God' Galatians 6.16.

It is evident this passage refers to Israel in a spiritual sense, for from a family tree perspective there are tribes of Israel missing – Ephraim and Dan. Joseph is included who, as such, did not form a tribe in Israel, but rather his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Neither are they given in order of age, as when the Old Testament describes them as a nation. Notice Judah is first, which is the family tribe of Jesus. There is an equal number sealed from each tribe, when we know that the tribes varied greatly in size. They are referred to as servants of God.

This passage is symbolic of the Church, the spiritual Israel, while here on earth, made up of every tribe and nation.

The number one hundred and forty-four thousand is not to be taken literally, but rather what it symbolises. It is a symbol of completeness, being the total of those sealed here on earth. To understand this numerical symbol of completeness we can compare it with *Revelation 21*. Here we are given a picture of Jerusalem symbolising the Church of the living God.

The numbers twelve, one hundred and forty-four and twelve thousand are used. The city had twelve gates and twelve foundations: it was a perfect cube – *Revelation 21.10-23*. The description symbolised perfect completeness in Heaven.

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This passage in *Revelation 7* refers to the one Church here on earth, perfectly secure spiritually from all the judgments that come upon the earth because of wickedness. They are sealed. The sealing represents the perfect work of the Holy Spirit which comes upon all believers. It marks them out as different. It is a mark of God's ownership and God's protection.

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" 2 Timothy 2.19.

They are spiritually sealed and shall not be harmed spiritually whatever might happen to them bodily, and whatever might happen here in earth in terms of God's judgment.

2. The saved Church: the completed Church in Heaven with the angels

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honour and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen" Revelation 7.9-12.

Now John is given a vision of the redeemed Church in Heaven. It was so vast he could not number the multitude made up of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, clothed with white robes and palm branches in their hands.

...and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you

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have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” Genesis 22.16-18.

Our view of God’s Church is so small! Their praise was centred upon the wonderful salvation that had come to them from God. They are a saved people singing a song of salvation. Their song confirms that salvation is of God! They were there by the grace of God. The fundamental heart of Heaven is worship (v11); the fundamental focus of worship in Heaven is unto our God (v12).

There are seven particular aspects of praise given unto God, symbolising the complete perfection in Him:

- Blessing: God is the only source of spiritual blessing, joy and satisfaction;
- Glory: God alone deserves the glory and the praise forever and ever;
- Wisdom: God is infinite in wisdom and will be eternally;
- Thanksgiving: God is the Giver of every perfect thing and to be thanked forever and ever;
- Honour: God is on His throne and reigns as King of kings and Lord of Lords, the Highest;
- Power: God is infinite in power and directs His power according to His will;
- Might: God is mighty to save, to secure, to keep and to protect forever.

3. The sanctified Church

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the

Things Which Must Take Place

ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' Revelation 7.13-14.

The question is asked, 'Who are these arrayed in white robes?' There was a time when these people were dead in trespasses and sin. They have been converted, having been cleansed of their sin through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. They are no longer unclean, but pure through the blood of the Lamb the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

'And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God' 1 Corinthians 6.11.

Only those who place their confidence in Christ and His atoning work are before the throne in Heaven! These are those who come to Christ in repentance and faith, trusting only in Him as their Saviour.

4. The serving Church

'Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them' Revelation 7.15.

Part of our service here on earth is to worship the almighty God. True worship comes from a heart devoted to God in service. In Heaven it will be a life of unwearied service. We will not be idle in Heaven; we will be active in serving God. There will be plenty to do, we will never get bored. We will be before the throne of God, which means the focal point. This speaks to us of intimate fellowship with God, whereas here on earth sometimes God seems very distant from us. We do not always feel His presence, but in Heaven we will always feel and know the Lord's presence. We will constantly experience communion with God, as Adam and Eve did before the Fall.

The whole of God's new creation will be His Temple where He dwells. All the redeemed will eventually dwell in the new heavens and

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the new earth created by God. This is where God will be with His people and in His Temple. In the Old Testament only the Jewish High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies in the Temple; only the priests served Him day and night. But in Heaven people from all races will enjoy sweet fellowship. There will be no racism, no 'them and us', no divide in Heaven, but all will serve Him day and night in His Temple.

5. The satisfied Church

In Heaven we will enjoy God's provision and never again experience the feeling that something is missing. We will be living perfectly in His presence; there can be no higher plane than this. The satisfaction will be preeminently in the Lamb of God.

*O Christ, in Thee my soul has found,
And found in Thee alone,
The peace, the joy I sought so long,
The bliss till now unknown.
Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me!
There's love, and life and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.*

Anonymous

Augustine said: 'God has made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Him.' The Old Testament promise finds its perfect fulfilment in Christ:

'They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them' Isaiah 49.10.

'As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness. Psalm 17.15.

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6. The secure Church

‘They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat’ Revelation 7.16.

When we go on holiday we often go seeking the sun, but we all know how powerful the sun can be. If you have ever been to a really hot country, the power of the sun and effect of the heat can be quite frightening. But here we are told God’s people will be divinely protected by God.

In the original the word used for God dwelling among them has to do with being covered like a tent. Verse 16 portrays the caring, eternal protection of God: covered by the tent of God’s glory and divinely overshadowed by God. This reveals the heart of God.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Matthew 23.37.

7. The shepherded Church

When Jesus looked upon the world while here upon earth He was moved with compassion for the people before Him, who were like sheep without a shepherd (*Mark 6.34*). Now we see Jesus in the role in which He loves, shepherding His people, caring for them, guiding them to place of eternal satisfaction, the place where there is no more sorrow, the place where only joy dwells. The great Shepherd Who has given His life for the sheep is guiding them to their eternal home wherein is the source of all spiritual life and blessing.

Jesus will have a shepherding role in Heaven. He will not only be the Glory and the Light, but He will be the glorious Guide. He will teach His sheep how make the best use of the blessings available to them in Heaven, and ensure they are enjoyed.

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'He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters' Psalm 23.2.

Conclusion

We commenced by saying this chapter teaches about the wonderful and special purposes that God has for His Church. We have seen seven characteristics of the Church of the living God: sealed, saved, sanctified, serving, satisfied, secure and shepherded. This is the principal teaching behind this part of *Revelation*. Amidst the awesome reality of the Revelation, that has confirmed the turmoil on this fallen earth, John is given this oasis of hope, of assurance, that God has a glorious inheritance for His people. The tears of sin and sorrow experienced here on earth will be replaced with joy. God will personally wipe away all tears from our eyes, and will be the source and substance of the joy. He will most certainly replace sorrow and suffering with a most glorious and fulfilling joy.

Salvation is of God and glory be to His name!

14. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

Revelation 8-9

‘When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour’ Revelation 8.1.

Having had a little respite in the oasis of hope in *Revelation 7*, we come back to the revelation of the dealings of God. While there were seven seals, only six were dealt with in *Revelation 6*. In *Revelation 8* we come to the seventh seal.

The revelation of the seventh seal is the God of judgment, God Who is continually dealing with a state of wickedness here on earth. We come face to face with the fact that the world is not reforming itself but destroying itself. This is by a continual rejection of the holy and almighty God. The more it rebels, the more it will come under the judgment of the holy God.

Yet in the midst of a worsening situation, God’s Church is growing. God’s glory is magnified in the way that His Church will grow and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (*Matthew 16.18 AV*). The amazing love of God in still calling out sinners from darkness into light in their great rebellion shines forth as a glorious rainbow against the darkness of sin and the terror of His judgments. The rainbow of God’s love and mercy remains around the throne of God.

Silence before God

Worship to God can be both audible or silent; it can be with a joyful noise or silence of contemplation. Here in Heaven, when the seventh seal is opened, a silence descends, a perfect, undisturbed silence. The almighty God is still worshipped just as when the amazing choir of millions of angels are singing, ‘Worthy is the Lamb’.

This silence of worship came as they watched the Lamb of God,

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the worthy One, open the final seal. Silence reigned for about half an hour. Silence reigned as the prayers of the saints ascended up to the throne.

- **A silence of awe.** So great was the solemnity of the occasion, and the awesome reality of the seal's contents, the only appropriate and perfect response was a silence of awe. Let us learn from the angels! Worship includes silence.

'Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him' Psalm 33.8.

'But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him' Habakkuk 2.20.

- **A silence of contemplation.** We read in the Word of God of a similar effect upon the angelic hosts when they consider the wonders of God's salvation. They are amazed at the greatness and wisdom of God's love in Christ. Peter, when speaking about the sufferings and glory of Christ, says, *'things which angels desire to look into'* (1 Peter 1.12). Two great characteristics of the almighty God move the angelic host to a silence of awe and contemplation: the love of God and the justice of God. These two characteristics of God have a profound effect.
- **A silence of reverence and respect.** We learn from the angels that worship involves reverence. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent!

'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him' Psalm 89.7.

'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' Hebrews 12.28.

Prayer unto God from the saints

‘Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne’ Revelation 8.3.

Some people make the mistake of only making saints of certain, specially selected dead people. People pray to their saints in Heaven, depending upon them to intercede for them. There is absolutely no biblical warrant for this practice. There is only one Mediator in Heaven, and that is Christ Jesus the Lord (*1 Timothy 2.5*).

‘Saints’ is a New Testament description given for Christians.

‘To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world’ Romans 1.7-8

‘Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons’ Philippians 1.1.

Departed believers are saints in Heaven; believers in time are saints on earth. That is their status in Christ Jesus.

- **Assisted.** The saints under persecution and tribulation are praying and crying out to God. With these prayers comes the glorious incense of the intercession of the Holy Spirit and Christ.

‘Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God’ Romans 8.26-27.

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'Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us' Romans 8.34.

- **Accepted.** *'And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand' Revelation 8.4.* These prayers have come to the very throne of God. God Himself has accepted them, they are something sweet to Him. They are pure in Christ, they perfectly accord with His will, they are accepted. The purpose of these verses is to assure us our prayers are not lost in space!
- **Answered.** *'Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake' Revelation 8.5.* Immediately the prayer had ascended to the throne, the same angel took the same golden censor and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. The effect was noise, thunder, lightning and an earthquake. This was demonstrating the judgment of God.

There are times when, for the honour and glory of God, the saints cry out for God's vengeance upon the wicked. The Psalmist David pleaded with God to deal with the wicked. Here the prayer of saints crying out for help brings forth the judgment of God.

Judgment is part of God's pure character. When the saints are pleading by faith with God to vindicate His name and cause, to avenge Himself of His enemies, glorify His saints and bring in His Kingdom, then such answers of judgment must be expected.

'Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!...Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are appointed to die' Psalm 79.9.11.

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If we are just praying for ourselves, caught up with our earthly needs and time issues, then we lose the big picture. We need to pray, *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6.10). We then realise events in the world, including the judgments of God, are working for the fulfilment of His Kingdom. The Children of Israel were taught that the plagues coming upon Egypt were all part of their deliverance!

Judgments of God

'And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets' Revelation 8.2.

The judgments of God upon this earth will get stronger and stronger. They are foretastes of the great Day of Judgment, when the end of the world will come. They have two purposes, and two reactions. They serve to punish and to warn. They either serve to bring repentance, or increase the hardness of our heart.

Consider some of the great disasters that constantly come upon this earth. We are greatly responsible before God in this day and age of instant satellite communication. We are without excuse! We are not passive onlookers in this situation. How do we respond to disasters? Are people dying in vain? Does not their suffering warn us of the brevity of life, the awesomeness of nature and its Creator God?

'But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk' Revelation 9.20.

The seven trumpets of the seventh seal relate to God's constant and continuous operations in the world. These will intensify in their severity as we get nearer the coming of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We know from the record given for us in *Exodus 7-12* that God does judgment through His creative power. These judgments are

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similar to those which descended upon the Egyptians who were persecuting God's people.

- **The first trumpet.** *'The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up'* Revelation 8.7. This presents us with a picture of calamities which hit the earth and its vegetation. We are reminded constantly of the awesome, devastating power of so-called natural disasters. Under the power of God even those areas we consider safe are affected.

'Thrown to the earth' demonstrates these judgments are controlled in Heaven. The fraction of a third indicates the growing nature of God's judgments. In the previous seals a quarter was affected; now it is a third.

- **The second trumpet.** *'Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed'* Revelation 8.8-9. Now it is the sea rather than the land which is on the receiving end of various calamities. Here something seeming like a great mountain on fire is hurled into the sea. The consequences are devastating. Fish and ships are destroyed. The power of the sea is awesome and yet is under the divine control of God. All creation is under the power of God and is at His service to bring forth His glory. God uses the sea and land as part of His judgment!
- **The third trumpet.** *'Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter'* Revelation 8.10-11. Now it is the turn of the inland waterways and reservoirs. A star falls from Heaven and its effect is devastating upon the earth. It is a picture

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of bitterness because it is called Wormwood. It speaks of disaster affecting the water we use and drink. Polluted and poisoned, the waters having a deadly effect upon mankind.

- **The fourth trumpet.** *“Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!””* Revelation 8.12-13. Now the sun, moon and stars are touched. Strange things happen. A third of these powerful givers of light are affected. A third of the day is dark! So the whole universe here is used by our Lord as a warning.
- **The fifth trumpet.** *“Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their*

Things Which Must Take Place

wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things' Revelation 9.1-12. The Word of God tells us that Satan fell from Heaven.

'And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"' Luke 10.18.

Now this prince of darkness opens the abyss. Satan's home is bottomless, ever falling.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Edward Mote (1797-1874)

Satan fills the world with demons and their wicked influences and operations. From this shaft comes the smoke of deception and degradation, darkening the sky. There follows a terrible army of locusts, symbolising the evil influence of Satan troubling and tormenting the world. He fills the world with darkness and despair. Satan the destroyer is at work. The world sows the seed and reaps the whirlwind. God can use even the effect of evil to warn the wicked.

'The way of the unfaithful is hard' Proverbs 13.15.

For example, the effect of alcohol and drugs so often leads to despair!

- **The sixth trumpet.** *'Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen*

The Judgment of God

was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm’ Revelation 9.13-19. Here is a picture of war, the building up of weaponry. The terrible tools of war machinery are glamourised in this day and age. Weapons of mass destruction are unleashed in fury. War will increase in its ferocity and devastation. But God can use even the voice of war as a warning to the wicked.

‘To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace’ Ecclesiastes 3.1-8.

Conclusion

‘But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts’ Revelation 9.20-21.

Things Which Must Take Place

The chapter ends confirming the purpose of the judgment, not only to punish but warn, but the people did not repent. One word describes the world at large under sin – stubbornness. The Bible describes this attitude as ‘stiff-necked’.

‘You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you’ Acts 7.51.

The world at large accuses God, rather than bows to God. But God is so patient, He waits to be gracious. Every day, as the world continues in its increasing rebellion against God, is the day of God’s mercy and grace. But there will come a day when finally God will seal up and lock the door of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. The earth will then be consumed in His wrath.

There is the thread of mercy in the warnings to those affected, those learning of these judgments: repent! Yet it seems that as time goes on, the more the judgments increase, the harder men’s hearts become. Yet despite all this, God’s door of mercy and love remains open; the door of His grace still remains open. The Church constantly grows under the sovereign grace of God. So we see this increase of evil on one side and the increase of the Church of Christ on the other. Finally Christ will return victorious over evil and the Church will be vindicated and complete.

Let us not prevaricate with God; let us not turn a blind eye to His warnings. When we next see the news and hear of a disaster let us not just say, ‘What a shame!’ Let us examine our hearts and be sure we are ready to meet our Maker as our Friend not our Enemy.

These judgments are not just the whim of an angry God; they are the tools of warning!

15. THE MIGHTY ANGEL WITH A LITTLE BOOK

Revelation 10

We now consider John's vision of the mighty angel and the little book. Through this vision we learn more of the glorious character and purposes of God.

The God Who makes Himself known

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices' Revelation 10.1-3.

John sees in his vision a mighty angel descending from Heaven, symbolising Jesus Christ. See also *Revelation 1.7, 17; 4.3*.

- **'Clothed with a cloud'**. This is a symbol of the divine majesty of God.

'Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory' Mark 13.26.

- **'A rainbow on His head'**. This is the symbol of God's divine faithfulness to His covenant promise. The rainbow on earth is the evidence before our eyes of the covenant promise made by God to Noah. God would no longer allow the earth to be completely flooded (see *Genesis 9.8-17*). We see on earth a segment of the rainbow in its various colours. John saw, in *Revelation 4* at the throne of God, a complete circular rainbow emerald green in colour. This is a symbol of completeness and hope, as an emblem of the covenant of promise

Things Which Must Take Place

– the promise that God has made with Christ as the Head of the Church and all his people in Him.

‘For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you’ Isaiah 54.9.

‘Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure’ 2 Samuel 23.5.

‘Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ Romans 5.1-2.

- ***‘His face like the sun’***. Here is a symbol of God’s glory. It shines in Jesus face!

‘...and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light’ Matthew 17.2.

‘For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty’ 2 Peter 1.16.

‘But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves’ Malachi 4.2.

- ***‘His feet like pillars of fire’***. This is a symbol of God’s strength, the firmness and stability of all His ways and purposes. Far better for us to bow to the will of God than to resist and fight God .

‘His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars’ Song of Solomon 5.15.

The Mighty Angel with a Little Book

- **His posture.** Our Saviour rules the world and His message must be published to all. God has absolute dominion and power over all the world. Placing your foot on something indicates subjection and possession. The outcome of the demonstration of God's authority over all is certain.

'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"' Psalm 110.1.

'For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet' 1 Corinthians 15.25.

Through this mighty angel, symbolising Jesus Christ, are revealed characteristics of our God. The believer can take comfort from these words – God is full of majesty, faithfulness, glory, power and authority. God has His one foot on the land and one foot on the sea.

'And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"' Matthew 28.18.

The God Who keeps His secrets

'Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets' Revelation 10.4-7.

John heard the thunderous voices and the content of their utterances was revealed to him. He was about to write it down. Was this not the *Book of Revelation*? But God said, 'No!' God reveals some things

Things Which Must Take Place

and hides others. God keeps His secrets! There is no possible way we can find out what the thunders said – they are a sealed secret.

Now here is a time when we must humble ourselves before the living God. Is our faith big enough to cope with not knowing everything about God's will?

'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law' Deuteronomy 29.29.

There will come a day when all will fit into place, everything will make sense: His permissive will, the prosperity of the wicked despite their mockery of God, the disasters, the famines, the diseases, the disabled, the accidents, the rise and fall of evil leaders, the persecution, the suffering, the trials. There will be a day when the believer will be blessed with God's full revelation. Meanwhile we say with the Apostle Paul:

'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known' 1 Corinthians 13.12.

In this life there are some things that remain incomprehensible to our minds. There are things God does not reveal because we could not cope with it if He did. For example, Job never knew what really lay behind his sufferings.

The believer should not question God, accuse God or doubt God. The mark of faith is resting in the revealed will of God and trusting Him in the unknown way.

'Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then

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your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words...’ Isaiah 58.9-13.

The mark of faith is obedience, and the test of faith is trusting God in the unknown way. Let us await the outcome of world history and our personal history with holy fear and deep humility.

There is much unknown to man about the last days – caution is needed when being dogmatic. What we do read here is that a day is coming when God will say, ‘Delay no longer’. A day of victory and vindication for the Church is coming for the glory of God. Be assured and encouraged.

God’s little book which is sweet to taste and bitter in its effect

“Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, “Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.” So I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book.” And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings”” Revelation 10.8-11.

Things Which Must Take Place

John was told to take the little book from the angel and eat it. He was told it would be sweet to taste but bitter in his stomach. He then received the command to prophesy. This is symbolic – it is a vision. It is important to remember that much of the *Book of Revelation* is symbolic, while a smaller portion of the Revelation is literal. The danger comes when we say all is symbolic, or all is literal. We need to discern between the literal and the symbolic.

For example, we know that Jesus Christ is God made Man; He is not a Lion or a Lamb literally. These are just symbols of the glory of His character. When John described God's throne he said it was like jasper and sardius stone in appearance. When Jesus said He will vomit the Laodicean church out of His mouth, He is speaking symbolically. But when Jesus speaks of men hiding from Him in the day of His wrath He is speaking of something that will happen literally.

So here John in his vision is told to eat the little book. It is a symbol meaning something profound.

- **What is the little book?** The little book refers to the Word of God: the prophecies, purposes and teaching of God.
- **What is signified by John eating the little book?** This means every believer is called to receive the Word of God not only in the mind but in the heart. It is of no profit being like the man that the *Epistle of James* described:

'But he doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was' James 1.22-24.

'Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and

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beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall' Matthew 7.24-27.

The Word of God is to become part of us. It needs to dwell in us richly.

'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord' Colossians 3.16.

The Word of God is to affect our mind, our heart and our will.

'Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You' Psalm 119.11.

So for John he must digest the Word of God that has to be preached before he could proclaim the Word of God.

- **What is the meaning of the sweet and sour effect?** The Word of God is both sweet and bitter. When we receive the promises of the Word of God by faith it is sweet. As John Newton (1725-1807) says,

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer's ear.

– to know the delight of our sins forgiven, justified before God, adopted as His child.

'Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste' Song of Solomon 2.3.

– to have a glorious inheritance and an indestructible heavenly hope, fellowship with God.

Things Which Must Take Place

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' 1 Peter 1.3-5.

But on the other side the Word of God can also be bitter. It cleanses, challenges and searches our lives. It will not compromise. Jesus said,

'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you' John 15.3.

We are purged and pruned by the Word. This purging and cleansing is sometimes painful. Sometimes we need our hearts and minds jet-washed. The Word of God requires self denial and daily cross-bearing. It convicts us from time to time.

There is also the persecution of the Gospel very common at the time of this Revelation. To remain faithful to God's Word will bring rejection from the world and from worldly-minded Christians.

'Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?' Jeremiah 15.16-18.

'Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me,

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“Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.” So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. Then He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted”
Ezekiel 3.1-7.

It can prove a bitter experience for us as we hold fast to the truth of the Word of God. Those of us who hold to the biblical account of Creation are ridiculed, patronised and dismissed. To speak faithfully about God’s wrath and judgment, about hell and its everlasting nature, will be something bitter. John is told to faithfully proclaim to many peoples, nations and kings, but preaching the judgment of God is a bitter experience. It is not something any preacher should delight in.

The Word of God is sometimes like a two-edged sword piercing asunder (*Hebrews 4.12*), yet at other times it is like sitting under the shadow of God’s love with great delight (*Song of Solomon 2.3*). This is evidenced in the Word of God recording the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel is beautiful to those who accept it by faith as the Gospel of peace, but then there is also a bitter message of judgment to those who reject it. There are two sides to the Gospel – peace of God and justice of God.

Conclusion

In this chapter we see the revelation of the power and might of God in the vision of the mighty angel depicting Christ.

Things Which Must Take Place

We also see the awesome reality of the unknown about God, Who reveals and yet conceals. Faith accepts this. God reveals, and God keeps His secrets.

Lastly, we see that the Word of God comforts, and the Word of God convicts, cleanses and challenges.

16. THE TRUE CHURCH – ITS WITNESS, PERSECUTION AND VICTORY

Revelation 11

As we come to the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos, we need to remember to approach the Word of God with a spirit of humility, reverence and godly fear. We need to understand that it is the Holy Spirit Who is our Teacher, and the opinions of man are simply opinions.

I realise there are a number of ways in which the Lord's people understand the *Book of Revelation*. The position I preach from is that this Book is predominantly symbolic in its teaching pattern to the Church. It is a message to the Church of God to comfort, challenge, direct, encourage, assure, correct and warn.

It is vital that we do not attempt to interpret *Revelation* in a different manner to other books of the Bible. The Lord Jesus clearly showed, in His ministry to the two on the road to Emmaus, how Scripture interprets itself.

'And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself' Luke 24.27.

The test in our teaching of this Book rests in whether or not what we say harmonises with the rest of Scripture. I mention this because it is generally agreed that this chapter is pivotal to our understanding of the whole Book.

We have in this chapter a general picture of the Church as she exists in the present dispensation, the present age. As a whole this age is the time between the first and second comings of our Lord and Saviour

Things Which Must Take Place

Jesus Christ. Here in this chapter is a general description of the line of development which must be expected in the future. This is taught in symbolic picture language.

The focus of the Church is to be on the preaching of the Gospel, according to God's Word in the power of the Spirit. There is an outline of the great battle the Church is called upon to fight throughout this present dispensation. This struggle is particularly intense towards the end. But we have in this chapter an indication of how the Church at such times will receive special grace and strength; how the Church is finally delivered before the end of time in the victory of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ had predicted all these great truths in His own discourses about His Second Coming. The development and struggle – the great tribulation of the Church – are evident in this chapter and harmonise with His teaching.

The chapter can be divided into four sections:

- 1. The measuring of the Temple**
- 2. The two witnesses**
- 3. The temporary triumph of evil**
- 4. The seventh trumpet**

1. The measuring of the Temple – the true Church of God

‘Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months”’ Revelation 11.1-2.

The Apostle John is given a reed like a measuring rod. This rod is to be viewed as a rod of authority, a rod in John's hand yet under the authority of God. John is to use this rod to clearly define and measure

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out something; something precious in God's sight, as distinct from something unclean in God's sight. In light of this exercise two other areas are mentioned which fall outside the scope of John's measuring rod – the outer court and the holy city.

Now let us look at this and see how it relates to us. Remember the Revelation is given to comfort, warn and instruct the New Testament Church of God, so this chapter must speak to us, but in what way?

The first verse is a picture of the Temple at Jerusalem before it was destroyed in AD70, but it is applied symbolically and spiritually to the true New Testament Church of God. Remember John wrote these words in AD90 after the Temple had been destroyed. The Temple therefore, as a building in its original form, is being used here as a picture symbolically.

'Now David said, "Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it." So David made abundant preparations before his death' 1 Chronicles 22.5.

'And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house' 2 Chronicles 7.2.

"The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the Lord of hosts' Haggai 2.9.

'Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"' John 2.19.

'For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious' 2 Corinthians 3.9-11.

Things Which Must Take Place

We are taught in this chapter about the true nature of the Church of God – who belongs to it and who does not belong to it. Only those who are truly trusting in Christ Jesus, abiding in Him and following Him are in the Temple.

• **Born of the Holy Spirit**

The Temple of God speaks symbolically of the new birth by the Holy Spirit of God – to be in Christ Jesus. This new birth must be evident in the life of everyone who becomes a Christian. Jesus said to Nicodemus, *‘You must be born again’ (John 3.7)*.

On a number of occasions the word ‘temple’ is used to describe the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God.

‘...in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ Ephesians 2.21-22.

‘Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are’ 1 Corinthians 3.16-17.

In the Old Testament God dwelt in a very special way in the Temple at Jerusalem. But now God dwells, by His Holy Spirit, in Christian believers who are one in Christ Jesus. The true Church of God is the whole family of God on earth and in Heaven, a body of spiritually born-again believers whose bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God in Christ Jesus. They are united in Christ Jesus the Lord.

• **Washed in His blood**

The altar speaks to us of the place where God ordained that sacrifice is to be made for the atonement of our sin. In the Old Testament the altar was pointing ultimately to the sacrifice for sin to come. It pointed to Jesus the Messiah, Who came and gave His life upon the

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cross, dying to save us from our sin. His shed blood confirmed the only sacrifice through which atonement could be made between us and God. The cross of Jesus Christ is the altar upon which Christ was slain. This is God's altar and our faith is measured by this rod.

What are we depending upon? Only those who are washed in the precious blood of Jesus Christ – that is God's altar – are within the Holy Place. The cross of Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's Holy Place!

'For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself' Hebrews 7.26-27.

• **True worshippers**

John's rod measures out those who are truly worshipping God.

'But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth' John 4.23-24.

Worship which is truly acceptable to God comes from those who believe in Him; from those who desire the glory of God in worship, in their praise and prayers, in the preaching and in their observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (those various ministries of the Church are to bring praise to God); from those who desire Christ to be exalted and the Word of God to have free course and be glorified; from those who love to hear of people being saved; and from those growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We do well to examine the foundations of our faith. Only those who truly worship fall within John's measuring rod.

Things Which Must Take Place

‘Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified’ 2 Corinthians 13.5.

Do we have those three distinctive marks as in verse 1 – born of the Holy Spirit, washed in His blood, and true worshippers?

- **The outside**

The Holy City and the outer court cannot be included as part of the true Church of the living God. Here is a picture of the religious world outside the real Church.

- **The outer court**

The outer court represents liberal Christianity, compromised Christianity, hypocrisy and the worldly church. They are actually on the outside, albeit they may profess to be on the inside!

‘Therefore by their fruits you will know them’ Matthew 7.20.

The time has come to speak clearly and boldly according to the Word of God – they are outside.

- **The Holy City**

‘The Holy City’ refers, in its original meaning, to the most favoured city on earth, Jerusalem. Here the name of God was worshipped in the Temple; here the sacrifices were made that pointed to Jesus Christ. However, history shows that this city became defiled by idolatry by the Jewish nation and they were judged. There was a return from captivity after seventy years, and a rebuilding and a revival and return to God’s way of worship. God’s Holy City again became a centre for true religion – for a way that pointed ultimately to the coming Christ.

However, once again there was a backsliding among the Jews, so when the Messiah came He was rejected. See *Revelation 11.8*:

‘And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.’

The True Church – Its Witness, Persecution and Victory

Remember it was in the vicinity of this city where our Lord was crucified. This verse refers to the present dispensation, wherein Jerusalem has now become the centre of other religions that reject Jesus Christ alone as the way of salvation, all vying for importance. They reject the God-given New Testament pattern of worship, and the Jewish nation still reject Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus Christ is portrayed by other religions in an idolatrous manner through statues and icons.

This passage is speaking of the present situation in God's Holy City. If you have ever been to the city of Jerusalem you will find it to be a very religious place. There are many so-called 'holy' places, but try and find a truly Christian Church that worships God in spirit and in truth! In Jerusalem you will find many religions: Islam, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Millions of people come to worship the holy places and bow down to their respective icons and idols. A great deal of money is made out of this in the name of religion. Religion and the world, politics and sin are mixed together, and the end result is spiritual destruction.

The material, physical Holy City, Jerusalem, once so favoured by Jehovah God, has rejected His Son Jesus Christ. It has become a centre for other religions. Jesus and the Church are trampled underfoot. To speak of Christ as the only way of salvation is considered political suicide, so they say all religions have something to contribute, many religions have a place in Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem and the outer court now represent the mixture of the world, politics and false religion. They are the wrong side of the measuring rod and cannot enter into the true Church of God unless they repent.

But positively, the Holy City was originally named such as it symbolised spiritually the Church of God. Today the Holy City, termed the 'New Jerusalem', is the Church of Jesus Christ, the spiritual city of God. It is Christ and His Church which is trampled underfoot.

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'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name' Revelation 3.12.

'Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' Revelation 21.2.

2. The two witnesses – preaching the Gospel

'These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire' Revelation 11.4-6.

The true Church still remains in view, in the central part of the chapter, in its witness and faithfulness. Many suggestions have been made as to who these two witnesses are, including Moses and Elijah; Elijah and Elisha; Enoch and Elijah; the Law and the Prophets; the Law and the Gospel; or the Word and the Spirit. But here again we see something symbolised by the two witnesses.

The Gospel for the glory of God speaks of both the grace of God and the justice of God. *Revelation* is centred in this reality; the Church living in a pagan world preaching the Gospel of God, the witness to His grace and His justice. These witnesses symbolise the Church bearing testimony to the Gospel throughout the New Testament age. The two witnesses – the Gospel of grace and justice. The two olive trees and two candlesticks symbolise the Spirit filling and anointing the Church for the true witness of the Gospel of God. The Gospel is powerful.

The True Church – Its Witness, Persecution and Victory

‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes’ Romans 1.16.

History proves that God has the power, through the preaching of the Gospel, to demolish Satan’s strongholds, but those who work as destroyers of the Gospel will either find their arguments destroyed by the Gospel and will be converted, or in the Day of Judgment will be destroyed because they rejected the testimony of the Gospel. Do we respect and believe in the glorious, destroying power of the Gospel?

‘For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled’ 2 Corinthians 10.4-6.

To emphasise this we are reminded of the way God gave amazing power to Elijah and Moses. Through Elijah’s testimony to King Ahab, God shut the heavens and so no rain fell. Through the testimony of Moses God turned the River Nile into blood and sent plagues over all the land of Egypt. What we need to realise is that God does send judgments as warnings. They are not accidents of nature, but serve as warnings to those who are continually rejecting the Gospel.

Notice how these two witnesses are pictured preaching the Gospel. They understand the depth of their message, and they weep for the lost. They proclaim the message as dying men to dying men. They understand the urgency, importance and greatness of their message and work.

3. Temporary triumph of evil – persecution of the Gospel

‘When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the

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great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth' Revelation 11.7-10.

Throughout history there have been times when it has seemed that God's Church has been overthrown. It seems as if false religion, politics and worldliness win the day, as it was just before the Reformation, or just before the revival under Whitefield. The world and false religion rejoices that it has quenched the challenging message of the Gospel, choosing eternal death by rejecting the Gospel rather than receiving it and finding eternal life. But then God appears when it seems all over and sends a mighty revival, an answer to the small remnant who cry out to Him.

But just before the end of the world the Church as an organisation will have been destroyed by Satan. The Church remains, but its world-wide witness of the Gospel is stopped. It will seem that Satan has succeeded in quenching the glorious light of the Gospel. The true Church will be driven underground, and false religion and the world will congratulate themselves: true evangelical witness has been destroyed!

There will be plenty of united religion in the world but it will be worldly and political. It will deny Christ as the only way of salvation. The remnant of God's people will be oppressed and unable to evangelise.

'He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time' Daniel 7.25.

The True Church – Its Witness, Persecution and Victory

‘At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book’ Daniel 12.1.

4. The seventh trumpet – victory of the Gospel

‘Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was [g]and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.” Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail’ Revelation 11.15-19.

Then the Day of Judgment will come, and the Church of Jesus Christ will be seen in all its glory and power. Its message vindicated, horror will come over the world and religious people who rejected Christ. They will realise their error. It will be too late. The day of salvation will be over. The Church will be called up to the heavens and their enemies will behold them. God is honoured and glorified, every knee will bow and say, ‘Jesus is Lord’. Christ will reign forever and ever; the kingdoms of the world are His.

The twenty-four elders representing the Church, the whole multitude of the redeemed, will bow and worship God.

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'Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed'
Daniel 7.14.

The Ark of the Covenant (see verse 19) is seen representing the most intimate fellowship between God and His people. God's redeemed people are reminded through this vision that God is full of mercy and grace.

But the enemies of God have no comfort. For them is the terrible experience of God's judgment and justice – the storm, the earthquake and the hail. The two eternal aspects of the Gospel are vindicated: grace to His people, and the terror of His justice to the lost.

Conclusion

All this may seem to some of you as idle tales, or you may be challenged in your mind. Do not be like Felix who, when witnessed to by Paul with these same truths, trembled and told him to go away and come back when at a more convenient. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel, or underestimate or neglect the application of it to your own life.

'How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?'
Hebrews 2.3.

'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' 1 Timothy 1.15.

Repent of your sin, turn to the Refuge for sinners, and find safety in Christ before it is too late!

17. THE WARFARE AGAINST CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Revelation 12

We have reached the second section of the *Book of Revelation*. The theme in this section is dealing with the warfare of Satan against Christ and His Church. Within the chapter we have assurance of the final victory in Christ of the Church over Satan and his followers.

The second part of *Revelation* is dealing particularly with the behind-the-scenes aspect and spiritual nature of this warfare. It explains the real reason behind it.

‘And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”’ Revelation 6.10.

‘Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth’ Revelation 12.1-2.

The vision in chapter 12 reveals a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and having a crown of twelve stars. This woman symbolises the Church of God from the beginning of time in her majesty and beauty. The Church of Jesus Christ is one holy nation, one chosen people in Christ comprising those saved in Jesus Christ from the Old Testament time and those from the New Testament time – all spiritual believers who are in Christ and are of the faith of Abraham.

Why a woman? The Church in the Old Testament is described in *Isaiah* and *Hosea* in terms of motherhood. Here it is revealed to John that she is with child waiting to be delivered, symbolising the role of God’s Church in the forthcoming birth of Jesus Christ, born of the seed of David.

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‘...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh’ Romans 1.3.

In this sense the Church, relating to Christ’s humanity as born of a woman, is depicted as a mother. It is in relation to her Old Testament role in the travail in the build-up over the years to the birth of Christ.

‘And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne’ Revelation 12.3-5.

But in the vision it is revealed to John that a great red dragon is waiting to devour the child at birth. This is clearly depicting the evil activity and intentions of Satan, first against Christ and then the Church.

Then it is revealed to John in his vision that the man child is born. This symbolises the birth of Christ. In New Testament times from Christ’s birth Satan attacked first Him, then later the New Testament Church. But we can also see in this chapter God’s response in His judgment upon Satan, the way He gives His Church the victory in Christ.

Note that in this chapter and the next, periods of time are mentioned. They symbolise the period of time from the ascension of Christ until just before the Judgment Day. ‘*One thousand two hundred and sixty days*’ (Revelation 12.6), ‘*a time and times and half a time*’ (Revelation 12.14), ‘*forty-two months*’ (Revelation 13.5), all equivalent to three-and-a-half years, relating to the same period. During this period of time the Church comes under Satan’s attacks. Individual believers are targeted by him in a special way.

The Warfare Against Christ and the Church

The warfare against Christ

Satan hates Christ more than anyone else in Heaven or on earth. He hates Christ because in Him men and woman, boys and girls are delivered from his darkness. They are delivered from Satan into Christ's marvellous light (1 Peter 2.9). Christ is Enemy Number One for Satan; therefore it follows that all those in union with Christ must be Satan's enemies.

Originally before the Fall on earth, Satan had been thrown out of Heaven. He, together with his angels, had attempted to usurp Christ's position. Then Satan introduced evil into this perfectly created world. The Garden of Eden was the first place where Satan tried to spoil God's creation. He succeeded in getting Adam and Eve to disobey God. He must have thought he had destroyed the world of God in one hit. But then heard an amazing statement from God that would counteract and overpower his evil design.

'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel' Genesis 3.15.

Here God proclaimed to humanity the promise of the Messiah. This promise formed the battle line which Satan must cross if he was going to thwart the glorious purposes of God in sending a Saviour. From this moment Satan was all out to stop the fulfilment of this prophecy. We can trace the history of the promised seed of Jesus the Messiah, and see the many times Satan was trying to destroy and stop the fulfilment of this prophecy.

- **Abel**, the man of God, was murdered, but then Seth was born. Satan had some understanding that the family of Seth was predestined by God to bring forth the promised seed.

'And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of

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Abel, whom Cain killed.” And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord’ Genesis 4.25-26.

He whispered into the ears of Seth’s family, who lived in the mountains apart from Cain’s family living in the valley, to forget the heritage of their forefathers Seth and Enoch who walked with God. He suggested they move down among the women of Cain and intermarry. So the sons of God, as they were known because of their forefathers, came in unto Cainite daughters of man. Satan succeeded in mixing a godly people with an ungodly people. Just one person and his family were left in the world who remained godly and separate from the world –

- **Noah**, a righteous man and his family, the man who found grace in the sight of God. As God sent a flood to destroy, only Noah and his family survived, but the Seed was preserved.
- But then it seemed like all hope was gone when **Abraham** and Sarai got to old age, and still the promised son was not born. Surely Satan had won, having even made Sarai laugh at the impossibility of the situation. But Abraham and Sarai prevailed in faith, and Isaac was miraculously born to Sarai in her old age.
- Through **Isaac** the promised seed was preserved. But then God called Abraham to offer up Isaac on the altar. Satan thought, ‘Surely I am going to get my own way after all. I will attack Abraham going up the mountain.’ Isaac was going to be destroyed, but then God called from Heaven and saved the life of Isaac.
- Later Isaac’s son **Jacob** was threatened with death by Esau.
- Then, after seeking the Seed’s destruction in Egypt, Satan nearly succeeded at the foot of Mount Sinai. There the **Children of Israel** made the golden calf and worshipped the devil. God said He would destroy them in His anger, but **Moses** interceded as a type of Christ.

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- As Satan tracked the Seed of Christ, he made a great assault on God's servant **David**, a man whom God loved, who was in the line of the coming Christ. Working through Saul, Satan made several attempts on his life but David was preserved.
- Then again, the **family line of Christ** was attacked.

'When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs' 2 Kings 11.1.

In spite of Satan's attempt to wipe out the family, the youngest son, Joash, was rescued by his aunt Jehosheba, and was kept hidden for six years. At the age of seven Jehoiada proclaimed him king, and Athaliah was destroyed.

- Going on to the captivity in Babylon, Satan worked through **Haman** on a terrible scale. Never mind just the seed of Seth, but the whole Jewish nation was in grave danger of extermination. But **Esther** was raised up for such a time as this. We see God's sovereignty in a secular society, and Satan is foiled again in his attempt to destroy the promised Seed.
- At the birth of Christ Satan influenced the religious elite to want nothing more than a political deliverer. The **religious leaders** had no spiritual appetite for a Messiah, only a political Messiah. In any case, they thought they were good enough in their religion to please God without a Saviour. By now Satan had got right into the very epicentre of religion in Jerusalem. Just a few godly people remained who still looked for the promised Seed, the Messiah and Saviour.
- Then **Jesus** was born in humility of Mary, and laid in a manger, and God's power is magnified. But still the dragon Satan refused to admit defeat. Through **Herod** he destroyed all the little boys in the area under two years old. Joseph and Mary, having been warned of God, fled into Egypt and the dragon was foiled once more.
- Directly after the baptism of Jesus, Satan made another great assault

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in the temptation in the wilderness. But again he failed, and Jesus the Lord triumphs through the Word and the Spirit. Jesus spoke while here on earth of Satan falling as lightning to the earth, overcome by Christ's almighty power (*Luke 10.18*).

- But then finally the dragon had Jesus betrayed, falsely accused, and crucified. As Jesus was crucified and died on the cross Satan, the dragon, with the religious leaders, thought, 'This is it! We have conquered. Jesus the Messiah is dead and buried. Seal up the tomb! Have a guard stand by!' Yet what Satan meant for evil God had foreordained to be the way of sacrifice and salvation. His birth and death were really victories of God over Satan. Three days later God confirmed the victory with the resurrection. After forty days Jesus was caught up to God in Heaven.

The travail and the victory give us great comfort. God won the battle against the dragon!

The warfare against the Church

'Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

'Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

The Warfare Against Christ and the Church

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

'Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth' Revelation 12.6-16.

The Church found its refuge from attack in the wilderness, in a place prepared for her by God. This symbolises separation from the world to live for Christ strengthened by the Spirit and the Word. The Church finds its refuge and comfort from God and Him alone.

'Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach' Hebrews 13.13.

God feeding her with spiritual food the world knows nothing of, speaks of the Word preached and meditated upon. The Church is perfectly protected spiritually in the souls of all its members from Satan.

*There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.*

Cleland Boyd McAfee (1866-1944)

Nevertheless the Church is still subject to his attacks. Now, in John's vision, there is warfare among the angels in the heavenly places

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unseen by man. There is a tremendous battle between the forces of evil and the power of God led by Michael the archangel. At the time of Christ's death, resurrection and glorious ascension, Michael the archangel made war with the devil and his angels in a battle against the darkness of this world. While this picture is symbolic, it reveals the absolute victory of Christ over principalities and powers. The accuser of the brethren, Satan, in this battle is cast down, falling as lightning to the earth, overcome by God's almighty power. Following the victory, Satan and his angels were thrown out of the vicinity of Heaven permanently.

Before this we know that, while Satan and his angels had been banished from Heaven before the Fall, nevertheless they were still permitted to assault the gates of Heaven. Consider Job's experience. Satan was still able to converse with God in his accusations against God's people. However, Christ's death and resurrection confirmed the victory over the accuser of the brethren (see verses 10-11). Christ spoiled all principalities and powers and has gotten the victory over Satan for time and eternity.

In the vision, having been thrown out of Heaven, Satan vented his wrath on the Church on earth (verse 12). Throughout the Gospel age the dragon does not give in, but sends a flood to try and sweep away the Church: floods of heresy, compromise, 'anything goes' attitude, worldliness, liberalism, look-alike faith and persecution. But the true Church is not drowned, and the water is deflected. The true Church finds its refuge in the Word of God and in following Christ, separating from worldliness. The Church remains, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

The warfare against individual believers

'And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the

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*commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ'
Revelation 12.17.*

The dragon also vents his attack upon individual believers. The Apostle Peter says, 'Be alert!' (1 Peter 5.8). He waits to pounce like a lion; he prowls around seeking to devour; he seeks to draw us back into sin; he tries to overwhelm us with a view of our past sins as our accuser; he suggests that perhaps after all our sins have not all been wiped away; he will remind us of our frequent lapses, but he also tries to persuade us that repentance is an easy matter – just say sorry without really making an effort to leave the sin. He does all he can to take away our assurance of salvation; he draws our attention to the supposed freedom of those who are walking in sin.

For it is those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ that Satan hates. Following the Lord Jesus will make us enemies of Satan, but it is eternally better to be an enemy of Satan than an enemy of God, in God's army with God's people.

Remember the greatest enemy in the world is Satan.

- **the great dragon** (verse 9). Satan is described in picture language in a way which confirms his character; the fiery red dragon, someone who strikes us with terror and confusion (verse 3). This word has the meaning of a monster, one intent on destruction, hurt, pain, suffering, terror and murder. The red colour of the dragon symbolises war and bloodshed.

'You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it' John 8.44.

He is described as a great dragon, one who has tremendous power.

- **the serpent of old** (verse 9). Satan is also described in a totally different manner as a wily old serpent. He is not only a roaring lion

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but a great deceiver! It was in this guise that he deceived Eve, and subsequently Adam.

'For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' Genesis 3.5.

'But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ' 2 Corinthians 11.3.

Satan even tried to deceive Christ, so let us not be surprised he deceives the world and millions in it. But Satan has been defeated by the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He knows his time is fast coming to an end, and that he has but a short time to work evil on earth (verse 10). We must remember that Satan is ultimately a defeated foe and he knows it (verse 12).

The point being made is that behind the sin and suffering in this world are the activities of Satan. He is the world's Enemy Number One. Satan causes the eternal death in hell of billions. We need above everything else to find a way of overcoming Satan himself. To overcome we must turn from the world's greatest enemy to the world's greatest Friend.

The greatest Friend of sinners in the world is Jesus Christ (verses 10-11). We are faced with a situation which is unavoidable in life. There is an enemy, Satan, and he is creating havoc in the world and in our lives. So we ask ourselves the question, 'How should I live in such an uncertain world?'

Where can we go to find a Friend Who understands?

- One Who understands about grief, suffering, loneliness, pain, death, and the evil working of Satan;
- One Who can deliver me from my greatest accuser and enemy Satan, Who can forgive my sins and make me right with God;

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- One Who really loves like no one else can ever love, Who loves with an everlasting inseparable love;
- One Who gave His life, not to kill people but to save people;
- One Who can give an inner peace and take away the fear of death.

There is a Person, a precious Person, the greatest Friend of sinners this world has ever known and will ever know – Jesus Christ the Lord. Believers are overcoming because of a victory that has been accomplished in Christ.

We are given three reasons for this victory in Christ, three beacons of hope, in verse 11:

1. They overcome through the blood of the Lamb – faith through Christ’s death, believing in Him and trusting in Him.

‘In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins’ Colossians 1.14.

Jesus said,

‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ John 16.33.

‘Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?’ 1 John 5.5.

‘He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son’ Revelation 21.7.

‘But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ 1 Corinthians 15.57.

2. The word of their testimony – witness here is a reference to believing in the Word of God. Such faith in the Word of God has a blessed effect upon the testimony of our lives. Their testimony should attract people to Christ. They should be people who are not ashamed of Jesus Christ, their Saviour and Lord.

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3. **The sacrifice of their lives** – eternal perspective on life here is another vital point. John sees in his vision those who were willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice, to lay down their lives as a martyr rather than deny their precious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From this we learn that if Satan does his worst in death, he cannot take away eternal life in Christ Jesus. Believers are given an eternal perspective on life – nothing can separate from the love of God or faith in Jesus Christ.

‘Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal’ 2 Corinthians 4.16-18.

18. SATAN'S TACTICS

Revelation 13

In the last chapter we considered how Satan's objective is to attack Christ, the Church and individual members of the Church. We now consider the nature and the tactics of Satan in influencing this world for evil against God and His people. God's people are designated in the chapter as saints, whose names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.

John is shown in his vision two beasts, one which rises from the sea, and one which rises from the earth. The first was terrible and horrible to behold, and depicts the wickedness and evil of Satan. We need to see Satan for what he is, horribly evil, devastatingly destructive and full of bitterness and wrath. This beast, working on behalf of Satan, is simply a reflection of Satan himself.

The second beast appears gentle and harmless to the eyes, looking like a lamb. But when this second beast began to talk he spoke just like Satan, the dragon. Here we are given a picture of the terrible deception of Satan. He can appear acceptable, peaceable and harmless, but when he speaks he can only speak evil. Here is Satan in devastatingly deceptive mode, from his appearance as an acceptable lamb but speaking evil.

The activities of these beasts are further described, picturing two ways in which Satan works in this evil world

The beast from the sea – Satan's hand, persecution

'Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave

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him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

'And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

'If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints'
Revelation 13.1-10.

When the Bible speaks about the sea, it is often in terms of nations and government.

'Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas, and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!' Isaiah 17.12.

This symbolises the persecuting power of Satan working through nations and governments throughout history. Satan works through evil rulers, evil kings, presidents, prime ministers, government officials and policy makers.

The beast has different heads, symbolising earthly powers that rise up. One of these heads was wounded and yet rose up again. When

Nero committed suicide, the Roman Empire was severely wounded, and yet Domitian became the ruler and Christians were once again persecuted. In more recent times, when Communism took what seemed a death blow, it too began to rise again, with part of its intent to persecute Christians. Fascism took a death blow but it begins to rise again, and hatred of others is promoted, especially against Christians. Rulers will come and go, but the principle remains. Satan is ever on the lookout to attack and persecute the Church. He continually works through governments to achieve his aim, the outcome being persecution of the Lord's people, loss of employment and increasing hardship.

This beast is given great satanic power and authority, and it is greatly admired by the world. The devil is worshipped through books like *The God Delusion* and *The Da Vinci Code*; through children's books whose authors admit need to get darker and darker as they progress; through violent computer games; violent and immoral films; pornography and anti-biblical social agendas. Whether presenting his agenda as a lamb, under the name of love and tolerance, or a lion, in the name of violence, Satan is always a terrible beast and he intends to constantly get the world to worship him and bow to his lead. Worship of the devil is in a manner which imitates true worship that belongs to God alone. There is a throne, there is authority, and there is awe for the beast. One example is the idolatrous worship of Herod.

'Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died' Acts 12.20-23.

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Throughout the Gospel age governments take to themselves authority which rightly belongs to God. All who dwell on the earth will worship Satan, even if they do not recognise him as such. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will refuse to bow down. See *Daniel 3*.

The world admires humanistic thinking, self-fulfilment, image, its horoscopes, virtual worlds and liberal aims. Continually throughout time, until the coming again of Jesus Christ, there will be conflict between the true Church and the State, the power of evil against the Church of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Even when in history the Church and the State joined, the Church was still attacked by forced conversions and political Christianity.

In Elijah's day the prophets of Baal said all the 'right' things to the state power and ate at Jezebel's table. Elijah said all the 'wrong' things according to the State, and was driven into the wilderness.

So this beast is depicting the outward persecution of the Church, terrible in its attack, which is depicted by the leopard, lion and bear. Its great objective is to blaspheme God and overcome the saints.

Every day as we walk along the street young and old are taking the name of the Lord in vain. The precious name of Christ is used like a swear word; God's name is ridiculed by the media and by leaders. For example, on one occasion some years ago the Prime Minister of the day attended an evangelical Church. At this Church they sincerely prayed for him and his family, which is the right thing to do biblically. The next night he was addressing a union leaders' meeting, and opened his speech by joking about the prayer time of the previous night. Different place – different agenda.

This chapter is a vivid description of the world living under the sway of Satan, willingly subjecting themselves to his authority and his power, having no respect for God and His power.

'And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' Matthew 10.28.

The beast from the earth – Satan's forehead, persecution of the mind

'Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name' Revelation 13.11-17.

We have seen how the first beast is Satan's perversion of society through government and its persecution against the Church. Now this beast symbolises a different tactic of Satan. Here the tactic is one of deep deception. He appears not as a terrible leopard, lion and bear, but as a lamb. He performs lying wonders to impress the people, so that by the signs they are convinced he is to be believed. Pretending to be one thing, but in reality something very different, is one of Satan's cleverest tricks.

'For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan

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himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works' 2 Corinthians 11.13-15.

'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves' Matthew 7.15.

'For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect' Matthew 24.24.

He brings counterfeit preaching, counterfeit miracles, counterfeit experiences and counterfeit healings. He is the beast of counterfeits. He brings in false religions and false cults. They have a veneer of respectability, some even confused for being a type of Christianity, but they are designed to bring dishonour and hatred upon the name of Christ.

We see this continually happening in the world in which we live. Confusion reigns, every man doing what seems right in his own eyes. There are new ideologies, new theologies and new religions. Those adhering to the Word of God are considered yesterday's men, behind the times and the new way of thinking.

But then we see another attack upon the Church; those who follow the beast receive the mark of the beast. That means those who accept his way in their mind, his way of thinking, align themselves to Satan by their actions and their words; those who worship the beast. The mark is upon their forehead or upon their right hand. This speaks of the mind and the action being affected. Only those who truly follow the Lord have no mark and this brings with it severe economic restraint. Those who will not be dishonest in business, those who refuse to follow the beast, will find their businesses and livelihoods affected, not being able to buy and sell and work for a living. Economic

sanctions are put upon those who refuse to conform to the world order of the beast. It seems that before the end of the world there will be a world order united under satanic control, a world order which suits man, designed to fulfil man's worship of Satan, a world order acceptable to the vast majority of humanity, yet rejected by God's people.

Conclusion

'Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666' Revelation 13.18.

These two beasts represent anti-Christian government and anti-Christian ideology and religion. They already have had, and will have, devastating effects upon this world. They are both basically at their heart anti-Christ!

Now all this can make us feel downhearted, challenged and fearful of the future. We need to pray to be kept by the power of God, to be given strength to stand for what is right. To say this is one thing, in a time of relative comfort in this land of ours, but to live it out needs grace.

Now this chapter tells us about the working of the evil one, but it is not a chapter without hope for God's people.

1. The security of God's people lies in their names being written in the Lamb's Book of Life from eternity.

2. They remain faithful not through demonstrations, not through waving placards demanding their rights, or through making attacks on the beast using worldly methods to resist. Their steadfastness is in their faith and patience!

3. They have the wisdom of discernment to understand the number of the beast. The number six depicts incompleteness. Man was created on the sixth day, but it was on the seventh day man found his spiritual fulfilment in the worship of God. Seven is the complete number in

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the Word of God. The number six depicts man without God in his life – 666 depicts life without God – incomplete and lacking vitality.

Amidst the power of the evil one, amidst the deception of the evil one, amidst the lying wonders of the evil one, the Christian believer must see it is lacking God, incomplete. 666 stands for incompleteness, imperfection, persistent failure, frustration, and missing the mark. This is why it is called man's number.

We must test the spirits whether they are of God. When we face new inventions, new thinking, new ideas and new ways, we must see what it all adds up to. Does it fall short of God's standard? Is it for God's glory? Is it bringing us closer to God?

'Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.' Here is wisdom! Failure is certain for those following the beast's evil and folly; triumph awaits those who follow Christ's wisdom.

'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple' Psalm 19.7.

'Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it' Proverbs 8.33.

'[Wisdom] cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors' Proverbs 8.3.

'He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed' Proverbs 13.20.

'Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them' Hosea 14.9.

'For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"' 1 Corinthians 3.19.

Satan's Tactics

'Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen' 1 Timothy 1.17.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction' Proverbs 1.7.

'Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding' Proverbs 3.13.

'Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth' Proverbs 4.5.

'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion' Proverbs 8.12.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' Proverbs 9.10.

'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy' James 3.17.

'Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord is His treasure' Isaiah 33.6.

19. ETERNAL JOY OR ETERNAL SORROW

Revelation 14

In the previous two chapters we considered some of the awesome realities of the work of Satan and his tactics: how he attacks Christ, the Church and the individual members of the Church to destroy and to deceive. Now we come to consider, first of all, a passage of great comfort and assurance to the Christian, but then move on to consider the solemn reality and truth of hell and God's judgment.

In this chapter we are faced with the reality of two eternal destinies, – Heaven and hell. *Revelation* has a theme running through it. The theme reveals the great and eternal difference between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, the Kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. If we do not remember anything else about this Book, hold on to the reality of two kingdoms. This one reality will serve us well, if we take time to seriously consider its implications.

First, we have encouragement and assurance to those who are trusting in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But then the passage continues with a warning regarding the wrath of God and the reality of eternal punishment. This is one of God's contrasting chapters of inspired truth. There is no place for sitting on the fence; there is no room for compromise; there is no place of escape from reality, and no possibility that we can accept one truth and push the other under the carpet. If we accept the doctrine of Heaven, then we also must accept the reality of hell. If we believe God is a God of love, we must at the same time worship Him as the God of justice. We cannot pick and choose with God; we cannot accept one part of God's character and reject another. We are faced with the awesome, eternal implications and eternal extremities of God's character.

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‘...where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the centre’ John 19.18.

The glorious joy, purity and security of the Church of Jesus Christ

‘Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads’ Revelation 14.1.

The one hundred and forty-four thousand are symbolic of the Church of the Jesus Christ. They are all standing with Him on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is a picture of the glorious presence of God, the dwelling place of God.

‘Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever’ Psalm 125.1.

‘But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels’ Hebrews 12.22.

They have written on their foreheads the name of God the Father. They are a complete family – not one is missing. There are four glorious characteristics of the Church given here.

a. They are happy

‘And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth’ Revelation 14.2-3.

One of the ways we express our happiness naturally is by music and song. In Heaven blessedness is symbolised in a pure way by music and song. Here a new song is being sung, a song that had to be learned, a

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new song inspired by the Holy Spirit of God; a new song sung in perfect harmony, which perfectly encompasses God's purpose in worship: truth accompanied with music in perfect harmony.

The Church is united, focused, filled with the Holy Spirit and is awesome in song as the glorious army of God. In Scripture music and singing is an essential and vital part of worship.

'Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy...Chenaniah, leader of the Levites, was instructor in charge of the music, because he was skilful...Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn, with trumpets and with cymbals, making music with stringed instruments and harps'
1 Chronicles 15.16, 22, 28.

Here we are told of a glorious celebration which will be enjoyed by all the redeemed. They are singing a new song that only the redeemed can sing. It is a heavenly song, not a mixed congregation in Heaven; it is a song of depth, harmony, doctrine, assurance, joy and praise. It has the fruit of pure emotions. There is no problem with the Author for the Author of the song is God Himself – it is a divinely inspired song! Here, finally, the real meaning of happiness and joy will be realised.

*The Lamb with His fair army,
Doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory—glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land.*

Anne R Cousin (1824-1906)

b. They are pure

'These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He

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goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God' Revelation 14.4-5.

These verses speak symbolically of a pure people. They obviously do not imply that all the redeemed are men, neither do they imply that all the redeemed of God are single or celibate. We know marriage is ordained of God. However, I believe those called to singleness on earth as part of their Christian walk will be rewarded in Heaven. These verses use the symbol of faithfulness, as opposed to adultery, as a symbol of total commitment to God. This passage is symbolic of purity, living a life free from sinful relationships, knowing you are the Lord's. It speaks of how the Lord's people are sanctified, separated in Christ Jesus and are in His righteousness alone. It is a picture of all the redeemed of God's people who are faithful to God, totally committed to God.

In the Old Testament the unfaithfulness of the Children of Israel was symbolically described as them committing adultery with other gods.

'O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and your judgments are like light that goes forth. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings' Hosea 6.4-6.

They defiled themselves with the Canaanite gods rather than remain faithful to Jehovah God. But here is a symbolical picture of God's Church in its purity, completely sanctified and righteous in Christ Jesus, gloriously summed up in the last sentence in verse 5: *'without fault before the throne of God.'* Their purity is in Christ, their

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justification before God is in Christ. They are followers of the Lamb wherever He goes.

c. They are secure

‘And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God’ Revelation 14.5.

They are able to stand before the throne of God; they are without fault! But what an amazing expression here where the glories of Christ’s righteousness are fully displayed. ‘Without fault’ means security before God, standing before God as pure as Christ Himself. This means eternal security in Christ, because of Christ, chosen, saved and secure in Him.

The redeemed of the Lord are a happy, pure and secure people. While here on earth they continually strive and press on with joy, commitment and assurance looking to the time when they will enter into the perfect experience of joy, purity and security in Christ.

‘Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen’ Jude 24-25.

d. They have true comfort of soul

‘Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on’”’ Revelation 14.12-13.

- patience – pressing on, looking unto Jesus in obedience, motivated by love
- the faith of Jesus and His example – Father, Your will be done (see *Matthew 26.42*);

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- assurance of the prospect of Heaven – there is coming a glorious eternity;
- God's promise – God does not lie.

*Jesus, lead me by Thy power
Safe into the promised rest;
Hide my soul within thy arms;
Make me lean upon Thy breast.
Be my guide in every peril,
Watch me hourly, night and day;
Else my foolish heart will wander
From Thy Spirit far away.
In Thy presence I am happy;
In Thy presence I'm secure;
In Thy presence all afflictions
I can easily endure.
In Thy presence I can conquer,
I can suffer, I can die;
For from Thee, I faint and languish;
O Thou Saviour, keep me nigh.*

William Williams (1717-91)

A message of direction, warning, destruction and judgment

The second part of this chapter is in total contrast to the revelation of the joy, purity and security of the redeemed. As we pointed out at the beginning, this Book is a book of contrasts. It reveals the eternal contrast between God's Kingdom and Satan's kingdom. Angels bring messages to the earth from the throne of God.

The first part brings the message of the everlasting Gospel going out to all the world, which is unchangeable, eternally effective and which

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has eternal results. The Church must convey this message to all the world. The Church is not only happy, secure and pure in Christ – it also has the most essential message the world needs.

a. The message of direction and warning

‘Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water”’ Revelation 14.6-7.

In the Old Testament, when the Children of Israel had departed from the living God, men of God like Jeremiah were called by Him to proclaim a message of warning. God was going to bring judgment. It was a message that vindicated the cause of God against a rebellious people. The Children of Israel were called to repentance but their hearts were set on rebellion.

Just before the end of the world we see a similar picture only worldwide. Note the constant theme of rebellion and persecution amidst God’s mercy and judgment. In a way *Revelation* simply states the world order since the Fall. However, in the end times the difference will be the scope – it is worldwide, just as it was before the Flood. So in one sense the last times are all the period between Christ’s ascension and return, but in a more particular sense *Revelation* focuses here on the actual last days of the last times worldwide. The message is simple: Fear God, worship Him because He Who has created the Heaven and the earth, is coming with judgment.

Here we see the great and wonderful love of God right up to the end in the call to fear God, and the warning of judgment for those who reject the message. It is important that we honour God, not only with the comfort of the Gospel, but in the warning of the Gospel. God’s name is equally honoured in both.

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It was said of John Bradford, a holy servant of Christ who died at the stake at Smithfield in 1555, that in his preaching he spoke the thunder of judgment and the music of mercy.

But this message of warning to unbelievers to worship God also serves as a message of comfort to believers. Fear God and worship Him; give glory to God, for the time of the vindication of God and His holiness and majesty has come. Deliverance is nigh; the antichrist is about to meet his doom.

Please notice here the merciful longsuffering character of God to a rebellious world. Right up until the end of time the Gospel will be preached, even amidst persecution and underground. The everlasting Gospel of God is the vital message. At the end of time the only message that will have any relevance and meaning whatsoever is the Gospel. It is the Gospel that will reveal with absolute clarity both the grace and the justice of God through Christ Jesus.

b. The message of destruction

‘And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”’ Revelation 14.8.

The second angel follows on and pronounces the doom of Babylon. Babylon in the *Book of Revelation* stands for the world with all its sinful seduction and charms. It has succeeded in getting the world at large to drink the wine of her fornication. The world is now drunk with her deception and delusion; like in the Old Testament, when the Children of Israel were given over to idolatry, their hearts were hardened and they rejected the message to turn to the living God. They rejected the message of the impending judgment of God. As in the days of Noah so it will be when Christ returns. He will return to a world living under the delusion of Satan, choosing darkness rather than light.

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‘But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be’ Matthew 24.37-39.

But the pride and rebellion of Babylon worldwide will fall and crumble.

c. The message of judgment – eternal hell

‘Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name”’ Revelation 14.9-11.

These words describe the awful end of the unbeliever. Remember in the previous chapter we read of the world order where the mark of the beast gave entitlement. Only those who bowed down to Satan and carried his mark could trade and function in society comfortably. The Church was totally rejected and driven underground. Here we are told of the awful end of those who worship the beast and who have his mark. Here we face the awful and awesome truth of hell.

It is revealed here that hell is a place of eternal torment. It is described in a manner to bring forth the terrible nature of the place, the terrible nature of the suffering of its inhabitants.

‘...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know

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God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' 2 Thessalonians 1.8.

We cannot escape the awful implications of verse 11. Hell is as eternal as Heaven! The inhabitants of hell will be clear in their realisation that Christ is the Conqueror. Those who occupy hell do so because of their rejection of the Lamb.

d. The vision and message of the judgment harvest

'Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs' Revelation 14.14-20.

Here again Jesus reveals, in his vision to John, the judgment of God, this time under the symbolism of a harvest, reaping with a sickle. When Jesus was here upon earth He spoke of the judgment of God being like a harvest, when the sickle cuts, and the wheat is gathered and the tares are separated. The wheat symbolises the elect of God, and the tares the wicked ones.

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In this passage we are given a picture of two harvests: one of corn reaping, and one of grape gathering. The sickle is under the direction and control of the Son of Man as the Judge in His glory and majesty. The crown signifies Jesus as Conqueror and Redeemer of His Church, and the sickle represents Jesus as Judge of all the earth. His work is according to the timing and command of the Father, together with the assistance of angels. The wrath of God is symbolised as a great winepress, characterising the trampling of God over His enemies.

‘Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?—“I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth”’
Isaiah 63.1-6.

Conclusion

Once again in this chapter we are directed to the two kingdoms that exist: the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God.

The reward of grace for those following the Lord is eternal rest as they die in the Lord. In stark, eternal contrast is the eternal reward of justice in the eternal unrest of the wicked.

In conclusion, we go back into the Old Testament to a Psalm which speaks of this time. It tells of the only answer to this day for us:

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Psalm 2

‘Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.

‘Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.” “I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ”

‘Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.’

20. VICTORY AND VINDICATION

Revelation 15-16

We continue in our consideration of the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to His servant John. The history of the world since the Fall of man evidences a constant pattern in the battle between good and evil. God in His righteous dealings, amidst His longsuffering mercy, does at times ordain judgments upon the world. These are given to provide a solemn witness against sin and rebellion, and to reveal His holiness and justice. The purpose in judgment serves to encourage repentance, while revealing the hardness of heart in refusing Him. The dealings of God, in whatever manner they are displayed in history, will ultimately always glorify His name.

Chapters 15 and 16 reveal to us the culmination of God's judgments in time, revealed at the end of the world. Since God's awesome judgment at the time of the Flood, there have been constant tasters of the final judgment: famines, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, fires and disease – all evidences of life in a fallen world.

But now our attention is focussed upon God's judgments through nature that will take place in the final days.

God's wrath – great and marvellous

'Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God' Revelation 15.1-2.

God is most certainly the eternal God of love, but He is also the eternal God of wrath. We read in the Word of God of the various attributes of His character. He is light, truth, eternal, the God of all

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comfort, holy, merciful and love, but here the wrath of God is being taught.

When we speak about God's wrath it does not mean that God has passionate and irrational fits of anger and rage, or that God has a temper tantrum, or flies off the handle, or gets beside Himself as we know sinful anger and wrath. The revelation of the fulness and completeness of God's wrath was something great and marvellous. John was given a revelation of the final and completed wrath of God in terms of earthly time.

In this part of the Revelation the end of the world is nigh. In John's vision it was actually something holy and pure, to be worshipped as the vindication of God's pure justice. The wrath of God was so wonderful that it brought forth a song of victory from God's people, for they had overcome, in Christ, the beast and his influence, delusion and deception.

John saw in his vision something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. Now this picture helps us to understand the character of God's wrath. God is a holy God, a pure God; He is a righteous God like a sea of glass. But when the righteousness of God meets sin, there can be only one outcome – the fire of His wrath. This must be the outcome because God is holy and cannot look upon sin with any degree of allowance. When the holiness of God meets sin without Christ in between, there can only be one outcome. So the sea of glass is mingled with fire.

'...for our God is a consuming fire' Hebrews 12.29.

God's wrath is His holiness stirred and kindled into action against sin. When we consider the wrath of God, it is essential for us to remember that the wrath of God is totally just, because it is directed at the wicked, those who hate God, those who have not the covering of Christ's righteousness!

Victory and Vindication

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' John 3.36.

'Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him' Romans 5.9.

A W Pink said:

'The wrath of God is as much a divine perfection as His faithfulness, power or mercy,'

and Augustine commented:

'No one is redeemed except through unmerited mercy, and no one is condemned except through merited judgement,'

God's wrath brings forth a song of victory

'They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvellous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested"' Revelation 15.3-4.

The redeemed were standing on the sea of glass. Their assurance, peace, joy and victory were in the perfect righteousness of Christ. They were singing a victory song with harps given to them by God. God means us to sing of His greatness, majesty, power, and justice here in time in our worship. He has given us words, voices, music and harmony – all to be used for His glory and praise.

But here is a heavenly song, sung by the redeemed of the Lord after the great victory over Satan and his followers. God Himself provides harps to support the singing of the inspired Word of God in song. The song is entitled *'The song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.'* This reminds us of the unity of the Old and New Testament ages: believers united together, singing one song which demonstrates

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the awesome character of God. The redeemed of the Lord understand the time has now come for the completion of the wrath of God in time. Understanding the implications of this, they break forth into a glorious hymn of praise.

- Great and marvellous are God's deeds;
- Just and true are God's ways;
- Fearful and glorious is God's name;
- Holy and righteous are God's acts.

It is called the song of Moses. Back in the Old Testament, when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt under Moses, they looked back and saw the judgment of God upon their enemies. This recollection brought forth a song similar to the one sung here by the redeemed: deliverance and judgment of God related in song (*Exodus 15*). It pre-figured the final deliverance and judgment of God at the end of the world.

'And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; it consumed them like stubble' Exodus 15.7.

This deliverance and judgment is centred in Christ Jesus: deliverance to all those who trust in Him, judgment to all those who hate Him. Reference is made here back to Moses to help us to understand something of the God with Whom we have to do.

The Children of Israel cried out to God in their slavery and He delivered them according to His power. The plagues of Egypt bear a marked similarity to the plagues mentioned in this passage of Scripture. The plagues were given as a warning to the king, but his heart was hardened until finally he relented. But having let them go, he then decided to lead his army and recapture them. The Children of Israel were at the shore of the Red Sea. In the distance they could hear the rumbling of Pharaoh's chariots. God sent a mighty wind and parted the Red Sea and the Children of Israel passed through.

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Pharaoh led his army intent on cruelty and slavery into that same pathway God had made. But when they were in the midst they struggled to drive the chariots and God rejoined the sea. The whole army, together with Pharaoh, was drowned and God's mercy and judgment declared for His glory. The God that divided was the same God that rejoined the Red Sea. A victory song was composed.

Now all this is typical of the great salvation in Jesus Christ. He leads us out of the land of bondage and sin. But Satan and the world are still intent on destroying the Church and pursue it until it seems impossible. The Children of Israel stood on the shore of the Red Sea awaiting recapture, slavery and death, yet the Lord appeared wonderfully. So the Lord will appear and protect His Church and deliver them from the enemy of souls at the end of time. He will finally destroy the enemy as He did Pharaoh and his army. When it seems impossible to escape and Satan seems to be assured of victory, then the Lord will come. This is why this is called the song of Moses, and it confirms and reminds us of the power of God in history.

Now we may have some difficulties in our mind accepting how the wrath of God can be praised. Surely this means we are rejoicing over the downfall of others; we are rejoicing in other people's suffering. But we need to remember that when the redeemed rejoice it is because, in His wrath, God is actually bringing glory to His holy name, truth, Word and justice. The cause of Christ and His Church is finally being vindicated. As God comes to magnify His name among the wicked, the praise is for God's honour and glory.

When we consider the wrath of God, it is helpful for us to remember the plea of Abraham interceding for Lot.

'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Genesis 18.25.

Throughout history from the Fall of man, God has demonstrated from time to time His wrath and judgment. We learn from history that God demonstrates His wrath and judgment in certain parts of

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the world. They are given to warn and to punish, but generally speaking man takes no notice.

In this chapter, the final completion of God's wrath here on the whole earth is described. It is now worldwide; it is the final judgment in time on all those who have their backs turned upon God.

This wrath was sent for the glory of God which is seen in His holiness and justice.

'The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed' Revelation 15.8.

Seven bowls of wrath are poured out onto the earth. The first four relate to spheres of nature:

1. On the land;
2. On the sea;
3. On the rivers and springs; and
4. On the sun.

The latter three relate to the very end of the last days:

5. Attack upon Satan's throne;
6. The Battle of Armageddon; and
7. The final judgment over evil.

The first bowl

'So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image' Revelation 16.2.

The whole earth is diseased – its soil, its crops, its mineral resources, what people rely upon for their existence. The effect of this contamination is to bring disease upon mankind.

The second bowl

‘Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died’ Revelation 16.3.

Men turn in dependence to the sea as the land no longer is fruitful. The sea becomes contaminated and all the living creatures within it die. No more fishing, no more commerce and trade via the sea.

The third bowl

‘Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood’ Revelation 16.4.

The rivers and springs are affected, and the water supply is contaminated. The picture given here is of all the comforts and necessities of life being taken away. Life will become increasingly unbearable in the last days, yet people will continue to live their lives without repenting or turning to God, showing the same hardness as in Noah’s day. In the midst of these judgments the angel of the waters explains his praise to the Lord. He explains the relevance of the judgment of the waters.

‘And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due”’ Revelation 16.5-6.

The fourth bowl

‘Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory’ Revelation 16.8-9.

The sun now becomes the servant of God’s wrath, and its rays and

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heat burn the bodies of men. The ozone layer protecting the sun's rays becomes so weak by pollution as to make the sun to be hurtful. The heat is unbearable and yet the name of the Lord is blasphemed. *'They did not repent and give Him glory.'* The vision given to John teaches us that in the last days there will be much suffering, but these judgments harden men's hearts; they do not soften them, they do not repent and give God the glory.

The fifth bowl

'Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds' Revelation 16.10-11.

The throne of the beast is the centre of anti-Christian government. The darkness resembles the increasing darkness of the anti-Christian movement, all worldly government in rebellion against God will collapse. Yet men, in despair, in the darkness of their fall, in the pain of their diseases, in the disappointment of government, blaspheme and accuse God and still do not repent of their deeds!

The sixth bowl

'Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared' Revelation 16.12.

What this Armageddon of the *Book of Revelation* symbolises is God's final and mighty battle with evil. All the forces, governments and powers that are hostile to Christ and His Church gather together. When all the evil powers are united together against God and His people, it seems all is over. Then finally and suddenly Christ will appear to deliver His people.

'Behold, I am coming as a thief' Revelation 16.15.

The seventh bowl

‘Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”’ Revelation 16.17.

The final judgment has come; awesome noise and thunder and lightning, a mighty earthquake. The angel cries, ‘It is done!’ God’s judgments for time are completed. As Christ cried upon the cross, ‘It is finished’, the work of salvation was accomplished, so the cry will go out regarding God’s judgment.

Conclusion

C H Spurgeon said:

‘It is shocking to reflect that a change in the weather has more effect in some men’s lives than the dread alternative of Heaven and hell.’

In the last days the whole earth will be filled with the wrath of God. There will be nowhere to hide for the wicked. God will glorify Himself both in the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of His people. But those who trust in Jesus have a hiding place, a glorious Deliverer. Between God’s people and the thunder clouds of His wrath stands the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is our Propitiation, our Wrath-Bearer. Christ is hope for the hopeless, the shelter from the storm. If we belong to Christ the wrath of God will never touch us, for Christ has endured it on our behalf.

*‘...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come’
1 Thessalonians 1.10.*

*If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured,
The whole of wrath divine;*

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*Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.*

Augustus M Toplady (1740-78)

*'Behold I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and
keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame'
Revelation 16.15.*

The Lord's people are to consider the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory. He will steal them away from their persecutors and the judgment coming to the world. They will be lifted up on high from danger, then will come the terrible judgment when the world will be burned up.

When the Lord comes for His people, the true Christians will be walking with Him. The effect of the worldwide persecution will have been of refining the Church, inasmuch as only true believers will endure to the end. Here is meant the patience of the saints – we patiently wait for God to vindicate His cause, and He will!

21. BABYLON THE GREAT?

Revelation 17-18

We continue in our consideration of the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to the Apostle John. Our messages have centred upon the teaching of the symbolism found in this Book. As we continue we need to constantly remember this principle: this Revelation is given to the Church for its encouragement and edification. It is not given to fascinate, or as a puzzle. It is not given to enable us to calculate all manner of dates and times, or to be used as some type of mathematical formula to arrive at prophetic conclusions.

The *Book of Revelation* is given for the spiritual edification of the Church. It is given to help the Church understand the reason why it suffers persecution; to assure the Church of its final victory; to remind the Church it is, for certain, in a battle. It is the gift of Jesus Christ to the Church to help them understand what has gone before, what is now, and what will be in the future, to the end of time.

We are told in this Book the eternal difference between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Therefore, I do trust and pray that these messages serve both to comfort believers and to warn unbelievers of their need to come from the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of God.

Now in this part of *Revelation* we can consider the meaning of the name 'Babylon'; the character of Babylon; and the end of Babylon.

The meaning of the name 'Babylon'

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

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'So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marvelled with great amazement'
Revelation 17.1-6.

In John's vision, Babylon is symbolised as a woman dressed up in rich clothing, adorned with precious stones. She has in her hand a golden cup from which pours forth evil. The woman is sitting on a dreadful and evil-looking beast which very clearly is anti-Christ and anti-Church. It is proven to be so in its declaration of blasphemy.

The Word of God tells us clearly in verse 5 that the woman on the beast represents or symbolises Babylon. Her character is one of evil seduction with all the different abominations of the earth.

As we come to consider in more detail the character, way and motive of Babylon, it will be helpful for us to rest upon other passages of Scripture that form a foundation for these chapters.

'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever' 1 John 2.15-17.

Babylon in the *Book of Revelation* stands for the world with all its seductions and charms, reserved for judgment. From the golden

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cup of Babylon, which signifies something attractive, pours forth all manner of evil. Nothing good pours out of her cup, everything is anti-God; she is the enemy of God.

The character of Babylon

To help us understand the character of Babylon we can go back to the historical site and city of Babylon given to us in *Genesis 10-11*.

- **Power** *Genesis 10.8*. Nimrod used his power and skill as a mighty hunter. His power went to his head and he formed a kingdom called Babel. He stood in rebellion before the Lord.
- **Possession** *Genesis 10.10*. Nimrod extended his kingdom. He was an expansionist, a restless hunter, continually on the move, never satisfied, continually wanting more.
- **Pride** *Genesis 11.4*.
- **Proposal** *Genesis 11.6*.
- **Persecution** *Revelation 17.6*.

John marvelled greatly when he saw the real motive behind Babylon. It was not just to sin but to destroy. Verse 6 shows us John's awe at her power.

The purpose of the woman on the beast

‘But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is”’ *Revelation 17.7-8*.

The woman represents evil, and is described in verse 18 as a great city, a great city of evil. From this woman proceeds all manner of evil.

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Her motive is to attract and seduce the peoples of the earth to join in her anti-Christ and anti-Church activities. The beast represents her vehicle of evil – corrupt governments, corrupt institutions. She rides on the beast of false religions, false churches, false denominations, false doctrines and philosophies.

The woman and the beast also represent unity between sinful people and evil structures throughout the world. The woman sitting on the beast represents the way she works her evil through different man-made structures throughout the world, and by people in organisations. Sadly, at times she works even through the professing church.

For example, the Church of Rome (for all its wholesome position on morality, in terms of spirituality) has sadly been a structure upon which the harlot Babylon has had opportunity to sit and promote false beliefs, deflecting from the Christ alone of the Gospel. This type of teaching and activity, under the name of Christian religion, is actually anti-Christ. It simply provides a structure upon which the harlot can ride.

Another example is when a church becomes nothing more than a social gathering. The preaching of the Gospel is replaced with a little talk to make people feel comfortable in their lifestyles. Dressed up in sheep's clothing, the minister is really serving the devil. He may not even realise what he is doing, but he is not fulfilling his responsibility to warn the people. The church becomes the structure upon which the harlot rides.

Again, the humanistic, liberal anti-Christ social agenda becomes the beast the harlot of sin rides on. If we consider the news from this viewpoint taught in the Word of God, we will begin to notice the ways in which Satan works his evil through organisations and structures.

The woman here represents the evil seduction of people. The beast represents the structure through which the evil is promoted. The Word of God tells us that the beast has seven heads and ten horns.

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Each represents authorities that have arisen, and will arise, through which the evil is promoted. The harlot uses these authorities for her evil ends.

In his vision John saw those on the earth marvelling at the beast *'that was, and is not, and yet is'*. Authorities come and go, they rise up in great power and then diminish, only to rise up again in some other form. Throughout the history of mankind Babylon has had the habit of bouncing back, inspired from the very pit of hell. She comes again and again with the same old seductions, dressed up in different ways, her aim is to keep people in the slavery of sin.

“Here is the mind which has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” Revelation 17.9-12.

At the time of writing the Revelation five kingdoms had fallen: the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and Greek Empires. Another empire had arisen, the Roman Empire, spreading its power throughout the world. Then John is told there is one not yet come, representing the empire at the end of the world. This empire is all the anti-Christian forces united together under the body of the beast. The ten horns represent authorities considered mighty on earth, such as art, education, industry, commerce, entertainment, philosophy, false religion, and governmental power. These will finally unite together in a type of common market, common cause, serving the central authority; serving the beast in opposition to Christ and His Church.

“These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and

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the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful' Revelation 17.13-14.

One mind, one purpose. In history we see this pattern of evil working through authorities, culture, media, education and commerce. In the last days it will be the open and common united cause, totally anti-God. As God's judgments increase, man will harden his heart and fight with all his strength against God.

These verses teach us then that the harlot Babylon needs people.

'Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues"' Revelation 17.15.

She needs structures and authorities, governments, false religion and churches upon which to ride. These come and go, but in the last days authorities will be united in their opposition to Christ and His Church. This united movement corresponds with the teaching of Armegeddon in the previous chapter.

Look out for the harlot on the beast. Remember her snares. Remember how she works through institutions, governments and authorities. Look how she is currently riding on anti-Christian legislation, all done in the name of freedom. Beware that you are not a person Satan can use as his tool, as the woman riding on the beast.

John marvelled greatly when he saw the real motive behind Babylon; it was not just to sin, but to destroy. Yet God remains in divine control.

'For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled' Revelation 17.17.

The final end of Babylon

See Revelation 18.1-24.

The people who constitute the anti-Christian world under the spell of Babylon ultimately turn against her. This is all part of the judgment of God coming upon Babylon and its followers: the world turns in on itself. The mighty ones in the world, who were so much in love with the ways of Babylon, in love with its allurements, its culture and its luxury, come to realise how mistaken they have been. But by now it is too late; they have passed the line of God's longsuffering mercy. In desperate despair they acknowledge that the world has disappointed them.

As their love for Babylon turns to hatred they unite as one in despair, but still under the banner of the beast. The beast is their only hope, however disillusioned they are, for pride will not allow a change of heart and mind, having hardened hearts – a people destined for destruction; a disillusioned and angry world realising too late the deception of Babylon.

Now we see this pattern throughout history; as people get older they often become disillusioned with life. The Babylon world has not satisfied their needs. But in their despair and bitterness they hate what has disappointed, but simply resign themselves to the system; what will be will be, and the system tells them not to worry. They become just a number, and deny they are still a person with a never-dying soul.

In Chapter 18 we have this destruction of Babylon more fully described. '*Babylon the great is fallen*' (verse 2). Its sin has reached to Heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. Babylon is now exposed for exactly what it represents – the dwelling-place of evil.

All the nations of the world have been diseased by her allurements, have been trapped, and now see all that their lives depend upon, all their dreams, all their security, swept away. The kings weep, the merchants weep, the seamen cry out. All the economy of the world is

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bankrupted in a worldwide crash. Nothing is worth anything any more from a financial point of view.

So often this has happened in the history of the world. Depressions, recessions; these times which have happened and continue to happen. These are just foretastes of the worldwide nature of the fall of Babylon in the last days. These verses simply remind us that in the past, in the present and in the future, Babylon is an insecure home. Materialism, one of the ways in which Babylon lures us, will disappoint us.

‘The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all’ Revelation 18.14.

If our lives depend upon them, possessions do not bring ultimate security.

The final verses speak to us of the finality of the fall of Babylon. In so doing it gives us a picture of what hell is like.

‘The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing... The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore’ Revelation 18.15, 22.

There is no music in hell, no beauty or colour; no light, no joy, no love and no union. There is judgment of persecution.

‘The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived’ Revelation 18.23.

Conclusion

This is the last of the judgment messages of *Revelation*. Will you not be warned about the reality of the God of wrath? God has left this

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Book on record to encourage the believer and warn the unbeliever!
How do the Lord's people respond to such teaching?

- Assurance in Christ – called, chosen, faithful: *Revelation 17.14.*
- Separate from worldliness: *Revelation 18.4.*
- Call to separation from the deceitful charms of Babylon: '*Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*' *James 4.4.*
- Rejoice in the just judgment of God avenging the martyrs: *Revelation 18.20.*

22. THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS

Revelation 19.1-10

We have passed through the dark and difficult rooms of Chapters 15-18 and now come to Chapter 19, the Church in Christ victorious.

The hallelujah chorus

‘After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”’ Revelation 19.1-6.

The just and final judgment of God against Babylon brings forth a glorious chorus of praise in Heaven. The chorus is praising God for His various and wonderful attributes. We hear the expression ‘Alleluia!’ many times. What does it really mean? It means, ‘Praise the sacred name’. It is the highest expression of praise to Almighty God. It is an expression of praise and amazement at the glorious power of God. Whereas the world uses God’s name in vain, blaspheming His holy name, the believer uses the word ‘Alleluia!’ as an expression of praise and reverent amazement.

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So in Heaven God's people unite together in a glorious chorus of praise which starts with the word 'Alleluia!' It then continues by expanding on what it really means by this word.

Verse 1:

- Salvation belongs to God. He is the only Saviour and Deliverer.
- Glory belongs to God. All the glory goes to God.
- Honour belongs to God. The united desire is to honour God.
- Power belongs to God. The source of the true power is praised.

Verse 2:

- His judgments are true and righteous. He has judged, He has avenged.

Verse 3:

'*Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?*' (Genesis 18.25). His judgment is eternal. Never again will Babylon persecute the Church.

Verse 4:

- His will is perfect. The Church and Creation represented by the elders and the four living creatures cry 'Amen!'

Verses 5-6:

- He is almighty. '*But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases*' (Psalm 115.3). It is God's right that He should be praised, He alone is worthy of all our praise. Note also verse 10.

It has been said, 'He who does not praise God while here on earth shall in eternity be dumb.' While here upon earth we attempt to worship God. Our praise and worship should reflect the perfect truths of heavenly worship. We should aspire to heavenly praise, looking forward to the time when our praise will be perfect and without sin, in unity and truth in Heaven.

'God's servants are to praise the Lord until the world's end, and in the next life world without end.' God gives blessings to us so we can give glory to Him.

The marriage of the Lamb

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God” Revelation 19.7-9.

- His description as the Lamb (v 7)

In the Old Testament way of life (that is before Jesus came to this world) God commanded those that believed in Him, every day to sacrifice a lamb without blemish as a payment because of the sins of the people. This sacrifice was just a symbol to remind the people that God demanded a payment for their sin. It foretold the day when God would give His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as the perfect Sacrifice for sin. So when Jesus started His ministry here on earth, John the Baptist said of Him, *‘Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’* (John 1.29).

- His character as the Lamb

The name ‘the Lamb’, is given to describe the tender, pure character, of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It speaks of His perfect submission to the will of His Father in Heaven. Therefore His death on the cross, on behalf of needy sinners, was foretold as Jesus as being *‘led as a Lamb to the slaughter’* (Isaiah 53.7). So Jesus the Bridegroom is described here as the Lamb to remind us that He is the Substitute for His people, dying in their place upon the cross, the everlasting and only sacrifice for sin! The Church will eternally look up to her Bridegroom with admiration for the way in which He has redeemed her. This is the focus of her praise, the way of her union and the reason for her perfection.

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*The bride eyes not her garment
But her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.*

Anne R Cousin (1824-1906)

- The Bride, the Church (v 7)

She is made up of the whole company of believers, those who trust in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. John describes the song of these people ultimately in Heaven.

'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"' Revelation 7.9-10.

- The Bride: the preparation for the marriage (v 8)

Hendriksen explains this very helpfully¹:

‘To understand the meaning of this passage we must review the marriage customs of the Hebrews. First comes the betrothal. This is considered more binding than an ‘engagement’. The terms of the marriage are accepted in the presence of witnesses. God’s blessing is pronounced upon the union. From this day groom and bride are legally husband and wife.

‘Secondly comes the interval between betrothal and the

¹ *More than Conquerors*, chapter 13, Baker Books, 1998

The Hallelujah Chorus

wedding-feast. During this interval the groom pays the dowry to the father of the bride if this has not yet been done. Sometimes the dowry is in the form of service rendered.

‘Thirdly comes the procession at the close of the interval. The bride prepares and adorns herself. The groom, arrayed in his best attire and accompanied by his friends, who sing and bear torches, proceeds to the home of the betrothed. He receives the bride and conveys her, with a returning procession, to his own home or his parents.

‘Finally there is the wedding-feast, which includes the marriage supper. The usual festivities last seven, or even more days.’

On more than one occasion Scripture uses marriage based on love as a symbol of a far greater union.

‘This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church’ Ephesians 5.32.

From the Hebrew tradition of marriage spiritually applied we see the Church ‘betrothed’ to Christ. Christ, moreover, has paid the dowry for her; He has bought His bride, the Church.

*From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy Bride,
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.*

Samuel John Stone (1839-1900)

The interval of separation has come, awaiting the final marriage ceremony. This is the time between Christ’s ascension to Heaven and His coming again. During this period the bride must make herself ready. She arrays herself in fine linen, glistening and pure.

The fine linen symbolises her righteous acts, her sanctified character. Her deeds have been washed by the blood of Christ. Remember, however, that this righteousness is given to her by God’s sovereign

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grace. A bride goes to great lengths to prepare herself to look beautiful for her bridegroom.

This reminds us today of the way the Church is preparing itself to meet its Bridegroom. The Church is being arrayed (clothed) in the righteousness of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, covered with the beauty of His holiness and purity.

The practical evidence of this while here on earth is the way in which lives are being cleansed and purified, the righteousness of Christ imparted, working in them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian believers demonstrate this in their lives walking by faith and by righteous works.

At the end of this time at the end of the world the Bridegroom, accompanied by the angels of glory, comes in glory to receive His bride, the Church. The wedding-feast begins. To that most glorious moment our passage refers in the words: 'It has come' – the wedding, or wedding-feast of the Lamb – *and his wife has made herself ready!*'

The Church has a glorious, wonderful and perfect marriage to look forward to! The Church looks forward to the prospect of living forever with Jesus Christ in a perfect relationship, ultimately in the new heavens and the new earth.

One of the great purposes of salvation is that Jesus Christ brings His bride into an eternal, glorious, peaceful and pure union with Himself. What a wonderful prospect: no more pain, no more suffering, no more sin, no more uncertainty! The Bible tells us about this:

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' 2 Peter 3.13.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said

The Hallelujah Chorus

to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" Revelation 21.4-5.

- The marriage supper of the Lamb (v 9)

This is the glorious, holy celebration that awaits the Church of Jesus Christ at the end of the world, when every person ordained to eternal life, who believes and trusts in Jesus, is finally gathered together in a victorious and triumphant manner to be united with their Bridegroom. The family of God will enjoy the riches coming from the provision of Jesus Christ for evermore.

Who are the really blessed (divinely favoured) people? Are they only the famous, clever, powerful, rich, attractive, successful, popular and talented? The truly blessed people are those who have been called by God's grace and favour; that is they have heard His message of salvation and responded to it. They have repented of their sin before a holy God; they have confessed their sin, and have come by faith to trust in Jesus and in Him alone for salvation. The blessed people are those who obey the Word of God, and look forward to their eternal home with Jesus. The truly blessed people are those who live out their belief while here upon this earth; who bring honour to their Master, Jesus Christ; and who demonstrate their faith in Jesus by their works of righteousness.

The word 'blessed' used here is one which describes the wonderful state of the Lord's people. All peoples of the earth are blessed in the limited sense of God's creative provision. God shines on the righteous and the wicked; each shares in the wonders of His creation. Creation remains as something precious and marvellous, even though it groans under the curse of sin.

But here the word 'blessed' is used in its fullest sense. It means to live under the divine, eternal favour of God. It means to be living under His smile for all eternity in an eternal, unchangeable state.

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This verse is one of the jewels upon which faith looks with admiration. Take it out and polish in your mind. Maybe this jewel has become tarnished with the busy scenes of life. The jewel is this: the Revelation has been showing the blessed state of those who are in union with the Lamb, those who have put their trust in the Lord, who are clothed in Christ's righteousness, those whose lives have been sanctified in Christ.

The verse concludes, *'These are the true sayings of God.'* Now John, when he heard these words, fell down and worshipped the one who spoke the words.

'And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"' Revelation 19.10.

Faith worships God for what He has done, for what He has said, and what He has promised. Faith loves this jewel and remembers these are the true sayings of God. You cannot go beyond truth; God has the final word, God is truth. God says that Heaven is entered by union with the Lamb and in no other way.

23. THE VICTORIOUS LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 19.11-21

We have before us verses which describe in symbolic language the glorious power of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in His office as Judge. We will focus on the nature of the Judge rather than the just judgments He will bring to bear.

He appears for the second time on this earth as the Judge of the whole earth in His glorious power. There is an awesome and tremendous difference between the first and the second coming of Christ. The Apostle Paul describes this perfectly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God.

‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ Philippians 2.5-11.

God the Father is well pleased with the saving work of His Son, but He will be equally pleased with the judgment work of the Son as Judge.

We are given a picture of the glorious Christ in His office as Judge.

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He is not only the Saviour of the world, but He is also the Judge of the world. These verses describe for us the wonderful characteristics of the Judge of the whole earth, King Jesus.

He is faithful and true

'Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war' Revelation 19.11.

We live in a day of broken promises and broken marriages, when man's word is no longer his bond. We live in a day in which truth has departed from the streets. Can a truly faithful man be found throughout the world? Can we absolutely, without reservation, place our total trust in a person? Can we have total confidence that for certain they will never, ever let us down in any way whatsoever? Where are we going to find such a person?

The Person is found here in this verse – Jesus Christ the Lord. He is the faithful Bridegroom and Husband of the Church, One Who remains absolutely and totally faithful in all He does and in all He says – Faithful and True. In God's faithfulness lies eternal security.

'If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself' 2 Timothy 2.13.

'Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people' Hebrews 2.17.

'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' 1 Corinthians 1.9.

He judges righteously

'Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war' Revelation 19.11.

The Victorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

King Solomon was given great wisdom to judge, but *'indeed a greater than Solomon is here'* (Matthew 12.42). Here we are reminded that all Christ is doing and is going to do in terms of judgment is done perfectly, Christ having a perfect knowledge of all those powers against Him and all those people who have rejected Him. As Christ is viewed in His office as Judge, worship Him as the One Who goes forth with wisdom knowing exactly whom He is going to judge, and how He is going to judge.

Faith rests itself upon the glorious truth of this vision. Sometimes we can read the Word of God and be inspired by tremendous statements of faith. In *Psalms* 96 we have such a statement by one looking by faith not only to the Saviour, but also to the Judge.

'Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day...Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth' Psalm 96.2, 11-13.

He has divine vision

'His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself' Revelation 19.12.

I remember once seeing a documentary on television about how the police can track down people in the darkness with a heat-seeking camera. A police helicopter with such a camera was tracking a burglar who was trying to run away and hide in a shed, but even in the shed the form of his crouching body was visible. Here it is revealed that Christ, as the Son of God, has divine vision, sight which can penetrate the darkness, and the evil.

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'Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known'
Matthew 10.26.

When Hagar was fleeing from Sarai with Ishmael, God came to her and she realised that God knew exactly where to find her. After this experience Hagar called God *'The-God-Who-Sees'* (Genesis 16.13). Let us bow before the One Who has divine vision, the One Whose eyes are like a flame of fire.

He has many crowns

'His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns' Revelation 19.12.

These crowns symbolised the great and wonderful works of Christ already accomplished: the glorious Creator's crown, the Saviour's crown (Psalm 21.3), and the High Priest's crown.

He has a wonderful name

'He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God' Revelation 19.13.

Only Christ fully knew the written name, but in verse 13 we are told what He is called in His office as Judge. He is called *'The Word of God'*.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' John 1.1, 14.

As God and Man He goes forth to judge the world, perfectly fulfilling the meaning of His name *'The Word of God'*. In Him God fully and perfectly expresses Himself!

He is clothed with a blood-dyed robe

'He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God' Revelation 19.13.

The Victorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

It is helpful for us to remember that Scripture interprets Scripture. To help us understand the meaning of this symbol we can turn to *Isaiah 63.1-3*:

‘Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? “I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes.’

We look to Christ the Saviour as the One Who shed His precious blood upon the cross. We look to Christ the Judge Who has upon His robe symbolically the blood of His enemies.

He has a great army

‘And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses’ Revelation 19.14.

Behind Him is the great army made up of the angels and His people.

‘When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory’ Matthew 25.31.

See how perfectly the Revelation unites with the Word of God. Not only are the angels with Him but also His people, described here in the verse below:

‘Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads’ Revelation 14.1.

Here is the one of the great honours for a believer, to be in Christ’s army, to be entrusted as one of His soldiers. Even now here on earth

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we are called to be soldiers of Jesus Christ, but there will come a time when God's people will have the honour of standing behind Christ in His army, finally eternally victorious over the enemies of Christ and the Church.

He has a sword and a rod

'Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God' Revelation 19.15.

In this vision is a sword, symbolical of the Word of God spoken by the Son of God in condemnation.

'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth' Revelation 2.16.

This voice will be like thunder, awesome in its power, heard throughout the whole earth; the inescapable voice of Christ, a voice which cannot be muted, a voice which demands an answer. Christ is speaking now through His Word, through Creation, through conscience, but finally in the great Day of Judgment Christ will speak in such a way as to be inescapable.

The Anointed One of God spoken of in *Psalms 2* comes forth in all His glory. He comes with the sword, His Word, and with the rod symbolising His destructive judgments.

He is called King of kings and Lord of lords

'And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS' Revelation 19.16.

The people cried when Christ was to be crucified, *'We have no king but Caesar!'* (*John 19.15*). In the early New Testament Church many lost their lives standing for the title and authority of Christ. Caesar is lord, or Christ is Lord! At the end of the world there will only be one King and One Lord. All other kingdoms will pass away.

The Victorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

He is victorious over the enemy

‘Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.”

‘And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh’ Revelation 19 v 17-21.

The final verses refer us again to what is known as Armageddon when, at the end of the world, all the powers of evil, all authorities and people throughout the world, will be united in their opposition to Christ and His Church. Christ and His Church will be Enemy Number One. Finally they reach the pinnacle of their evil anti-Christ, anti-Church activities, but then Christ appears visibly upon this earth to confront them.

Up until this time the warfare has been against Christ Who is invisible. The judgments against the world have come from Him Who is invisible to men on earth. But now at the end of the world Christ appears and destroys the evil power structures and deception. He destroys the anti-Christ persecution and the anti-Christ philosophy. By the Word of His mouth He destroys the followers of the beast.

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Conclusion

Now the Word of God is very clear: Christ is not only Saviour but Judge.

‘...where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the centre’ John 19.18.

24. THE SOVEREIGN LORD OF ALL

Revelation 20

One of the grand purposes of this vision given to the Apostle John is to assure the Christian Church that in Christ they will be victorious. With Him as their Leader and Captain the victorious outcome is assured. The entering of the Church finally into that victory draws closer to its ultimate fulfilment as each day passes. However, although the outcome is certain, the Church enters into this glorious victory with their Lord through a pathway of suffering. This is God's sovereign plan and purpose.

We have now before us the dealings of the Lord with Satan on this issue. The first point we can notice in these dealings is that even Satan is not beyond the sovereign power of God! Three fundamental points regarding God's dealings with Satan and how it affect God's people are in this vision:

- the binding of Satan for a thousand years;
- the releasing of Satan for a little while;
- the final judgment of Satan.

The binding of Satan for a thousand years: the view from earth

'Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while' Revelation 20.1-3.

The binding of Satan takes us back to the first coming of the Lord

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and Saviour Jesus Christ to this earth. Consider the state of the world before Christ's appearing. Satan was freely roaming throughout the world; only a very small number of the world's population, mainly Jews, believed in God. In fact, it seems that at the birth of Christ only a handful of people were anticipating His coming. Many nations were stirred up by Satan and were continually at war. The Roman Empire was extending throughout Europe.

Imagine just for a moment how it would have been in England. Men and women were worshipping the sun god, the god of thunder and the god of the moon. The origin of day names like Sunday, Monday and Thursday come from pagan worship. The Bible tells us the world was walking in darkness until the great Light, Jesus Christ, appeared.

From the birth of Jesus Christ here on earth Satan has been bound. In what way? Surely evil abounds. Things are getting worse and worse; evidence is clearly before us that evil abounds. In what way then has Satan been bound?

Satan has been bound as regards the building of the Church of the living God. Jesus said, *'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it'* (Matthew 16.18). To help us answer this question we have to go then to Christ.

The power of Christ over Satan and his evil spirits was clearly demonstrated while He was here upon earth. In the wilderness there was a tremendous struggle between Satan and Christ – the power of Satan and the power of Christ. Christ said to Satan, *'Get behind Me Satan!'* (Luke 4.8).

While here upon earth Christ cast out demons; they were powerless against the pure power of Christ. When Christ died upon the cross He made the way possible for us to come from the slavery of Satan. He overcame principalities and powers to bring us into the glorious liberty of His saving power. When He was buried, a great stone was set in front of the tomb. It was sealed with the Roman seal and guarded

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by Roman soldiers. Here Satan tried to bind Christ in the tomb, but glory be to God, He rose triumphant from the grave.

*Up from the grace He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes!*

Robert Lowry (1826-99)

While we may see clearly the awesome power of Christ over Satan then, we may still be saying in our minds, 'In what way is Satan bound in this evil world today?'

Christ said that the Gospel was to be proclaimed throughout the whole world. The Gospel, the message of salvation through Christ Jesus the Lord, continues to be proclaimed despite Satan's opposition. Satan is bound; every time a sinner is saved by the grace of God Satan is powerless to stop that grace working. The Church continues to grow and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it' Colossians 2.15.

'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' Hebrews 2.14-15.

'He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil' 1 John 3.8.

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered.

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Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" John 12.27-32.

Satan is a roaring lion, he is a deadly foe, but symbolically he is chained, and the length of the chain of his influence and power is governed by the sovereign will of God.

'Where were you...when I said, "This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!" Job 38.4,11.

The binding of Satan for a thousand years: the view from Heaven

'And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years' Revelation 20.4-6.

This same period of time is now viewed from the heavenly aspect. Here are the souls of those who had been martyred, and of all those who had not received the mark of the beast. This means all true believers who had died and their souls had gone to Glory, the immediate glorification of believers when their souls are immediately with Christ in Glory after death. This is described here as the first resurrection. They live and reign with Christ in Glory.

The first resurrection is the translation of the soul from this sinful

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earth to God's holy Heaven. The second resurrection is when Christ comes again from Heaven to this earth. At this momentous event the body of the believer will be glorified and reunited with the soul. When a believer dies his soul goes immediately into the glorious presence of Christ. He enjoys the spiritual riches in Glory in Christ, Who has been first raised from the dead.

'Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection'
Revelation 20.6.

The release of Satan for a little while

'Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them' Revelation 20.7-9.

Now we may ask the question, 'Why does God allow Satan to be released for this little while?' Here we must bow before the sovereign purposes of God. Satan goes forth with greater power on a world-wide deception offensive. He knows deception is his most effective weapon. In the last days Satan's deception will be at its worst. Behind his deception is the objective of gathering all his followers against the Church of the living God.

'For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect' Matthew 24.24.

'For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into

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ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works' 2 Corinthians 11.13-15.

It is the final struggle of a godless world against the Church symbolised here as the camp of the saints, the beloved city of God, the uniting together against the common enemy, the Church of the living God. Satan will succeed in stopping all missionary activity; the Church's outreach and evangelism will be stopped; the world will be united against true Christianity.

God's Church here on earth will be surrounded symbolically by its enemies who are intent on destroying it. Whereas past persecution has been within national boundaries, at the end of the world it will be worldwide. This gathering together of the world against the Church takes us again to the battle of Armeggeddon. This battle symbolises the final onslaught of Satan against the Church.

In this vision an Old Testament event is used to symbolise this New Testament truth. The attack of Gog and Magog (Syria under Antiochus) was the last great attack upon the people of God in the Old Testament (*Ezekiel 38-39*). The enemies' forces were numerous and the tribulation was terrible, though of limited duration. The defeat of the enemy was sudden and complete.

'And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness' 2 Thessalonians 2.8-12.

The judgment of Satan for ever

‘The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever’ Revelation 20.10.

Suddenly the Lord will appear. When all seems against the Church, then the Lord will appear and overthrow the devil, sending him to his eternal doom.

‘For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ Matthew 24.27-31.

Now let us remember Satan cannot go further than God permits.

‘And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord’ Job 1.12.

‘If we endure we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us’ 2 Timothy 2.12.

The final verses of *Revelation 20* affect every single person who has ever lived upon this world.

‘Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was

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found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire' Revelation 20.11-15.

All the events here upon earth, the good and the bad, have their assessment here in these verses. We live in a world where assessment is one of the 'buzz' words. People, products, relationships, companies, schools, books, holiday locations – all are assessed. Judgments are made as to their worth and ability.

Assessment and judgment are not unfamiliar terms in our life. We are daily making our own judgments on matters; decisions and assessments have to be made. Some we make are right and some wrong – this is part of life.

Here in these verses we are considering the ultimate assessment, the ultimate judgment of all persons. Finally, when all is done and said, it is the judgment of God which has the final say on all matters. All people that have ever lived upon this earth will be judged. The Word of God says that all must appear before God!

'I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom...' 2 Timothy 4.1.

'And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment' Hebrews 9.27.

The Word of God clearly reveals to us the reality of this day!

God

'Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it' v 11a

The Day of Judgment starts with God. The Word of God tells us that God the Father has committed all judgment to His Son.

'For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man' John 5.22-27.

So here we have Almighty God revealed in Christ Jesus. His glorious purity is symbolised by the white throne; His glorious majesty is symbolised by the great throne. Here we are reminded with awesome words the absolute sovereignty of God.

'Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all' 1 Chronicles 29.11.

'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory' Matthew 25.31.

'Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the

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wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ Genesis 18.25.

‘And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”’ Matthew 28.18.

We can be confident that God’s judgment will be correct, just and perfectly righteous. There will not be one mistake or one mistaken identity. We will not need to produce our passport or some means of personal identification before Christ. He will know exactly who we are.

Time

‘..from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away’ v 11b

Nothing will be able to stand in the way of the sovereign purposes of God.

‘But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’ 2 Peter 3.10-13.

This verse helps us to understand in a deeper way the temporary nature of time things and of time itself. All will be swept away under the awesome power of God’s final judgment. This is the end of the world being revealed here; no one can stop this day approaching. Every second brings us relentlessly nearer to this day!

The Sovereign Lord of All

Consider the awesome implications of this verse for a moment. Everything will go before the face of God. When we consider the word 'time', it encompasses the world from Creation.

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'
Genesis 1.1.

Time commenced, and with it the sovereign purposes of God in Creation. This verse brings us to the end of time. In the beginning God created time; in the end God stopped time. The old is to be replaced with the new, a glorious habitation for God's redeemed people, not for time but for eternity. The old flees away, time departs and eternity reigns supreme.

'Also their slain shall be thrown out; their stench shall rise from their corpses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood'
Isaiah 34.3.

'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away' Matthew 24.35.

'Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea'
Revelation 21.1.

'...while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal'
2 Corinthians 4.18.

Eternity

Behind verses 12-15 lies the awesome reality of eternity. The great Judgment Day is the ultimate seal upon our eternal, unchangeable state. There are some important characteristics of the Judgment Day.

1. All will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Every single person who has ever lived will appear before the

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judgment seat of Christ. He who created the world out of nothing will resurrect every person from wherever and whatever. Abraham will be there, David, Mary, Judas, Paul, you and I will all be there. This is an appointment in God's diary which will not be postponed or cancelled. No one will be late for this appointment, and no one will escape this appointment. The first man who ever lived, Adam, will be there, and the last person to be born upon this earth will be there. This judgment encompasses all humanity, small and great.

'Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences' 2 Corinthians 5.9-11.

2. We each will have to give an account of our life before God.

'So then each of us shall give account of himself to God' Romans 14.12.

'But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment' Matthew 12.36.

This will be God's perspective of someone's life, rather like the television programme 'This is Your Life!'

There are two books, one of which reveals our works, and the other is called 'The Lamb's Book of Life.' This Book has in it the names of all God's chosen people; those who, while here upon earth, repented of their sin, who by God's grace have put their trust in the Lord; those who by God's grace in the Saviour Jesus Christ are covered by His glorious righteousness and reconciled to God in Christ. They are not reconciled on the basis of their works, their own merit, their own righteousness, their own life, or their own death, but on Christ's

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works, merit, righteousness, life and death as they stand before their Judge.

The book of works will reveal much cause for shame in and of ourselves. The good that we should have done but have not will be missing; the evil works we should not have done will be recorded. The good works that we have done will be recorded but there will be realisation that our best is stained with sin. Nevertheless these good works the Lord will reward graciously in Heaven as they have been cleansed. As believers, we are cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ clothed in His righteousness – we are saved.

The glories of our Redeemer will shine like a glorious rainbow across the cloud of our sinful failures and works stained by sin. God's people have nothing to fear at the Judgment Day, even though they have to stand before their Maker. Their names are in the Book of Life and they will have a reward for following Jesus, all of grace!

We spoke of the spiritual resurrection which begins here on earth at conversion and has its victory in Heaven. A believer dies physically but goes into the immediate spiritual presence of Christ in Heaven, a perfect state (see verse 6). This state is described as the believer's resurrection life in Christ Jesus because it is through the resurrection life of Christ we are saved and our eternal destiny is secure in Christ.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
John 11.25-26.

'And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' Ephesians 2.1,5-6

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'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God'
Colossians 3.1.

An unbeliever who dies in time goes immediately to Hades, separated from God, a place of spiritual anguish, thus to await the great Day of Judgment when all will stand before the throne of God. This passage is describing the resurrection of the body, thus uniting it with the soul on the Day of Judgment.

God's people will receive incorruptible and glorified bodies for the new heavens and the new earth. Those who have resurrection life in Christ and glorified bodies will not be hurt by the second death. The second death is describing the final, eternal state for unbelievers following the Day of Judgment.

'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation' John 5.28-29.

'This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day' John 6.39-40.

'...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death'
Philippians 3.10.

The great Day of Judgment serves not only to bring all our life before God, but also to determine the level of punishment for the wicked in hell, and the rewards of the righteous in Heaven.

'Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be

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exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you' Matthew 5.11-12.

'For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works' Matthew 16.27.

'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work' Revelation 22.12.

Death and Hades, the state of the unbeliever's separation from God now, before the Judgment Day – these two realities will be cast into the lake of fire. All unbelievers will be also cast into the lake of fire.

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' Revelation 21.8.

Conclusion

What is our response to this reality – repentance?

'...“because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them' Acts 17.31-34.

Or is it rejection?

'Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him' Acts 24.25-26.

25. ALL THINGS MADE NEW

Revelation 21.1-8

‘Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

‘Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”’

We have now come to the revelation of the grand and glorious purposes of God in Christ Jesus for His people. There are a number of significant verses here; sermons could be preached upon each individual verse. However, we are giving an overview of *Revelation* so we will continue in this manner for these final chapters.

The Alpha and Omega is now revealing to John and the Church the glorious ‘Omega’ part of His work. To help us understand the

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significance of these verses which are at the end of the Word of God, we need to compare them with the verses at the beginning of the Word of God. By this comparison we see what is being revealed here is even more glorious than God's first work of creation.

The first work of creation was marvellous in its perfection and glory, but sadly marred by man's sin. God's second work of creation will be marvellous in its perfection and glory, but will never be marred by sin.

'And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him'
Revelation 22.3.

In the second work of creation God will presence Himself and actually dwell forever with His people. This is foreshadowed now in the way that, upon conversion, our bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. To appreciate the great wonder of God's new creation we compare the first and last part of the Word of God.

- *Genesis* describes how God created the heavens and earth; *Revelation* describes the new heaven and earth.
- *Genesis* describes the sun, moon and stars; *Revelation* describes the Lamb as the Light: *'The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light'* *Revelation 21.23.*
- *Genesis* describes Paradise lost; *Revelation* describes Paradise restored: *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God'* *Revelation 2.7.*
- *Genesis* describes the cunning of the devil and his success in deceiving Eve; *Revelation* describes the devil bound and hurled into the lake of fire: *'The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever'* *Revelation 20.10.*

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- *Genesis* describes man after the Fall running away from God; *Revelation* describes in Christ Jesus an eternal and perfect unbroken communion with God: *'He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son'* *Revelation 21.7.*
- *Genesis* describes the earth after the Fall under the curse of sin and unbelief – pain, sorrow, toil and death; *Revelation* describes the new earth as being pure and totally blessed: *'And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts"... But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life'* *Revelation 21.6, 27.*
- *Genesis* describes the tree of eternal life being guarded by an angel; *Revelation* describes the tree of life accessible: *'Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city'* *Revelation 22.14.*

By this comparison we can see the glorious power of God in His complete, all-conquering victory over the devil, God's new work of creation coming into its wonderful fulfilment. God's people in Heaven know perfect fellowship with Him in His presence for ever. This brings us to the heart of Heaven – knowing God's presence.

People have many views of what Heaven is like. Some people view it as a beautiful garden; others look forward to the beautiful singing. Some people look forward to seeing the lion lie down with the lamb, while others look forward to meeting people in Heaven. I heard someone say he was looking forward to seeing the Apostle Paul to ask him some questions. Some see Heaven simply as a place of peace; some as a place of joy and happiness.

There may be some truth in these desires, but they miss the grand part of Heaven which is God's presence. This was the most precious reality of the Garden of Eden before the Fall, communion with God.

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In Heaven the most precious experience, superabounding all else, will be God's presence. If we long to know God's presence with us now in our lives, then we will appreciate its fullness in Heaven. This is one of the tests of true Christianity. Whatever we may imagine in our minds about Heaven, if our first desire and hope is not for God's presence, to see Christ in His glory, there is an issue with our faith.

All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE'
Ezekiel 48.35.

God is there!

'And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God"' Revelation 21.3.

The passage of Scripture we are now looking at revolves around God's statement in verse 5:

'Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."'

a. John saw a new heaven and new earth

'Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea'
Revelation 21.1.

In his vision John saw the new heaven and earth created by God. Does this mean a totally new universe, or a renewed earth? The Bible has two words for 'new'; one of them is used in a brand new sense, like the first creation, the other is used in the sense of something renewed, transformed, rejuvenated. It is in this sense that the Greek word 'new' is used here. The old will be burned up and a renewed heaven and earth will replace the old. Nature, under the hand of God, will be

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revealed in its eternal state – unmarred by the Fall. Creation, which has been groaning under the curse of sin, will be fully released. God will make all things new!

‘For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind’ Isaiah 65.17.

‘Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’ 2 Peter 3.13.

As in the Flood, the universe will experience an awesome upheaval. Everything that has the curse of sin stamped upon it will be burned up. No more volcanoes, no more fault lines causing earthquakes, no more storms, hurricanes, floods or disease. Nothing will remain which belongs to the curse of sin.

In the new earth John notices that there is no more sea – the restless sea has gone, the separation of land by sea has gone. This reminds us of the stability of God’s new creation.

b. John saw the New Jerusalem

‘Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ Revelation 21.2.

Note verses 9-11 in relation to verse 2:

‘Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal’ Revelation 21.9-11.

The city is referred to as ‘her’ not ‘it’. This is not a literal city but

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symbolical of the Church of God coming to dwell forever in the new earth. It is the Church triumphant being presented to her Husband, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As in a wedding the bride is prepared, and slowly comes up the aisle to meet her husband. So in a perfect sense the Church is adorned for Christ.

'He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied' Isaiah 53.11.

The Church is spoken of symbolically as a city, as the Old Jerusalem in the Old Testament was God's holy city, Jerusalem, the holy city, being the centre of the old covenant worship. So the Church, in a spiritual sense, became the New Jerusalem under the Covenant of Grace in Christ.

c. John heard the divine promise of fellowship and peace in the new way of life

'And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"'
Revelation 21.3-4.

God here reminds us of the motto of His covenant promise. God dwells with His people by His Holy Spirit. Christ dwells in our heart by faith. But, while we live here on earth, sin still mars this relationship. We will struggle against the old man of sin until the day we die. In the new order God will truly and perfectly live with His people. Gone will be pain, tears and sadness for ever.

It may seem too good to be true, but God confirms it, assuring us of the trustworthy nature of His words. Isaac Watts caught the fragrance of these verses:

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*Sin, my worst enemy before,
Shall vex my eyes and ears no more;
My inward foes shall all be slain,
Nor Satan break my peace again.
Then shall I see, and hear, and know
All I desired or wished below;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time’ 1 Peter 1.3-5.

d. John heard the divine promise of eternal life and eternal inheritance in the new earth

‘Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts”’ Revelation 21.5-6.

This is the grand theme of God’s free grace in Christ Jesus giving us eternal life.

‘How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For

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with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light' Psalm 36.7-9.

Note He will give the fountain of the water of life freely! He gives eternal life with cleansing and purity in Christ Jesus. The requirement to receive this wonderful gift is:

- thirst, a longing as in a dry and thirsty land:

'O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water' Psalm 63.1.

- desire:

'Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You' Psalm 38.9.

'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require' Psalm 40.6.

'So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him' Psalm 45.11.

- seeking:

'And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart' Jeremiah 29.13.

e. All things made new

'Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful"' Revelation 21.5.

f. All things for the overcomers

'He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son' Revelation 21.7.

What have the overcomers to overcome?

When we were small, most of us had the dubious experience of entering the obstacle race at school. Along a track were laid various obstacles to overcome. To get to the end required determination, effort and commitment; each obstacle had to be overcome until eventually the finish was in sight. The overcomers spoken of here also had great obstacles to overcome; obstacles that they could not overcome in their own strength; obstacles that stood like mountains before them.

I would like us first to consider some of these obstacles and then, secondly, how the obstacles are overcome.

a. The obstacle of sin

Sin is something that, if it is not dealt with, chokes our lives. It is rather like doing weeding in the garden. Sin is something which has dreadful sting attached to it – ‘*The sting of death is sin*’ (1 Corinthians 15.56). Sin is something which cuts us off from God, and drags us down to hell. It must be dealt with!

b. The obstacle of worldliness

This means that our life is taken up with time things – we have no concern about our eternal destiny. Our life is built on time things, and we are taken up with the sinful attractions that are in this world. It is an aspect of sin that has to be dealt with if we are to be overcomers!

c. The obstacle of the flesh

This means that our life is self-centred, all our decision-making revolves around Number One – ‘What’s in it for me?’ So we have broken homes, men and women taken up with extra-marital relationships to serve self; men and women demanding their right to having sinful relationships with each other; abortions by the millions each year because of the so-called ‘rights’ of the mother. The world is obsessed with self, and sinful self is a great obstacle that has to be dealt as an overcomer.

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So often our life is like the big 'I', the capital letter at the beginning of a sentence: I think – I did – I know – I want. When really the 'I' in our life should be like the little 'i' in the middle of a word. Is the 'I' in our life like a capital letter, or is it prepared to be a like little 'i' in the middle of a word? The selfish self has to be dealt with if we are to be called an overcomer!

d. The obstacle of the devil

We cannot see the devil, but be sure of one thing: the devil is very active. He works in people, he works through circumstances, through deceit and guile. The devil is a great obstacle. People laugh about the devil – hallowe'en is playing with the devil. The devil is often seen as nothing more than the figment of man's imagination. But the devil is a real being who seeks to destroy us, whose greatest satisfaction is to see someone die without faith in Jesus Christ thereby entering into eternity separated from God. The devil has to be overcome!

e. The obstacle of unbelief

Unbelief is a great obstacle and barrier to the experience of God's blessing.

'Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief' Matthew 13.58.

After Jesus had risen again He rebuked His disciples because of their unbelief. Unbelief is a horrible thing and must be considered as such. But Satan turns unbelief around into something which is considered acceptable. Unbelief is sin and must be dealt with. An overcomer is someone who believes!

f. The obstacle of persecution

Here again is another barrier that often stands in the way. How will we cope if we follow Jesus? How will it be when we face rejection, ridicule?

All Things Made New

We have given, then, some of the obstacles that have to be overcome. But now the big question is, ‘How can we overcome these great obstacles that stand in the way of Heaven?’

How are the obstacles overcome?

a. The obstacle of sin.

‘Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”’ Revelation 7.13-17.

‘And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’ Revelation 12.11.

b. The obstacle of worldliness.

‘For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith’ 1 John 5.4.

c. The obstacle of the flesh.

‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit’ Galatians 5.22-25.

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d. The obstacle of the devil.

‘Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” Matthew 4.1-10.

‘I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one’ 1 John 2.14.

e. The obstacle of unbelief.

‘Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?’ 1 John 5.5.

‘[Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God’ Romans 4.20.

All Things Made New

‘Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief’ Hebrews 4.11 (AV).

f. The obstacle of persecution.

‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ John 16.33.

The reward of the overcomers – all things!

- Eternal life in the Paradise of God:

‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God’ Revelation 2.7.

- Eternal security. They will not be hurt by the terrible judgment of God:

‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death’ Revelation 2.11.

- Eternal riches, received from all the fullness of Jesus Christ:

‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat’ Revelation 2.17a.

- Eternal token – a white stone representing the pure character of the recipient now in Glory:

‘And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it’ Revelation 2.17b.

- Eternal power. In the great Day of Judgment the Church will reign with Christ:

Things Which Must Take Place

'And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations' Revelation 2.26.

- Eternal purity, clothed in the righteousness of Christ:

'He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels' Revelation 3.5.

- Eternal stability, and in God's presence:

'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name' Revelation 3.12.

'One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple' Psalm 27.4.

- Eternally united, in the closest possible communion with Christ:

'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God' Revelation 21.3

Conclusion

So the promise to the overcomers is to inherit all things and enjoy unspoilt communion with God.

'But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' 1 Corinthians 15.57.

By contrast John was reminded once again of the end of the wicked in their new judgment:

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in

All Things Made New

the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' Revelation 21.8.

The Word of God from beginning to end is a Book of contrasts, separating good and evil, believers and unbelievers, salvation and judgment, godliness and worldliness. The final separation comes to fulfilment.

26. THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

Revelation 21.9-22.5

These verses reveal to us in symbolical language the glory which awaits the Church of God, the eternal Church of the living God in its glorious fulfilment. The Church will know absolute and total perfection, and absolute, unbroken communion with God. Our message is centred upon this profound truth.

There is a people saved by God's grace while here upon earth, whose eternal destiny will be infinitely blessed. They are described as a glorious city whose builder and maker is God (*Hebrews 11.10*), shining with His glory.

It is right and proper that we should devote time to the rivers of God's certain purposes for His Church. Faith is strengthened when we magnify God in our thoughts, when we contemplate the wonders of salvation, the greatness of His love, the power of His sovereignty, the wonders of His grace. Here we are considering another amazing truth: God is going to share His glory. His Church is going to reflect, and be part of, His glory.

'Come I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife' Revelation 21.9.

Glorious

'And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal' Revelation 21.10-11.

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The Church is adorned with the glory of God.

'Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!' Psalm 87.3.

Remember, Christ died to bring His people to this state of glory. John describes the brilliance of God's glory as like a jasper stone.

'And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance' Revelation 4.3.

The jasper is a most precious stone, absolutely clear and brilliantly bright. John uses this stone to symbolise something most precious. The word 'jasper' has its origins in a Hebrew word meaning 'to be bright.' So John describes something in creation which most closely resembles what he was seeing. Richard Brooks says this in his book *The Lamb is all the Glory*:

'The glory of God is at last imparted to the glorified Church and thoroughly reflected in her. All God's infinite perfections and virtues, all His knowledge and grace and righteousness and love and holiness and wisdom and goodness are reflected in the Church. The Church is adorned with the glory of God radiated with it, filled with it, aglow with it.'

'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord' 2 Corinthians 3.18.

'...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' Ephesians 3.19.

'...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish' Ephesians 5.27.

Later on John brings in other precious stones to describe the city

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revealed to him in the vision. The point here is to remember the glory of God in the Church – everything will be for God’s glory!

United

‘Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb’ Revelation 21.12-14.

These verses describe for us the wonderful unity of the Church. The Old Testament people of God are represented by the twelve gates, the New Testament people of God represented by the twelve foundations.

‘Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ Ephesians 2.19-22.

The gates of the city were placed in the east, north, south and the west, symbolising the reception in the Church of people coming from different places. This reminds us of the worldwide, cosmopolitan nature of the Church. This is one of the great and glorious truths of the Church: there will be no divisions or disability in Heaven. Every one of God’s people will have a glorified body after the resurrection. Everyone will be radiant, full of God’s glory and reflecting God’s glory.

Perfected

‘And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is

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as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal' Revelation 21.15-16.

By this is meant completeness; its length, breadth and height are equal.

'And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power' Colossians 2.10.

'But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen' 1 Peter 5.10-11.

Anything added to or taken away from one part will destroy the perfect proportion – it is perfectly complete. Nothing is missing and nothing can be added or taken away. It is a perfect cube, measuring 1,400 miles in its breadth, length and height. Here is a picture of the perfect, complete result of the saving power of the Triune God.

This amazing vision gives us also some idea of the size of the Church of God. It is not only glorious, united and complete; the Lamb's wife, the Church, is also immense! This picture also reminds us of the perfect communion of the Church with God.

In the Word of God there is another place which measures as a perfect cube: that is the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple.

'The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid it with pure gold, and overlaid the altar of cedar' 1 Kings 6.20.

'Then he set the cherubim inside the inner room; and they stretched out the wings of the cherubim so that the wing of the one touched one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall. And their wings touched each other in the middle of the room' 1 Kings 6.27.

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Constantly worshipping

‘But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it’ Revelation 21.22-26.

We may ask ourselves the question, ‘What will God’s people be doing in Heaven?’ The main activity in the new earth will be worship. God’s people will be constantly walking in the light, worshipping in the presence of the light of the Lamb. There will be no need of a temple in which to worship God. The radiance of God’s majesty and glory in all its fullness fills the entire city; everywhere is God’s presence.

‘And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him’ Revelation 22.3.

In the city, we are told, is God’s throne. The citizens come to a perfect understanding of His sovereign pleasure. Man was originally created by God to worship Him. Now in the new order, the redeemed Church can fulfil the original purpose of man and woman’s first creation.

Fulfilled

‘And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations’ Revelation 22.1-2.

It seems that the water of life and the tree of life symbolise constant

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refreshment and nourishment. The waters never fail and the fruit never fails.

- The Water of Life

Its source is the throne of God. Its quality is pure, clear as crystal. Its position is flowing in the middle of its street. This speaks to us of the God-given, satisfying life of the Church in Glory. Water symbolises refreshment and satisfaction.

- The Tree of Life

Fullness of life in the Holy Spirit is ultimately realised in Heaven. We are encouraged in this picture to remember the blessedness of eternal life. Not only do the waters symbolise refreshment, but the tree of life symbolises never-ending nourishment, for the great multitude is healed from every sickness and hurt. The curse is removed and they can enjoy life-giving nourishment from God.

Enlightened

'They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever' Revelation 22.4-5.

Christ openly acknowledges the inhabitants of Heaven as His own. God gives them light.

'For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light' Psalm 36.9.

'This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all' 1 John 1.5.

We are told of certain things that symbolise and characterise the new heavens and the new earth, that the Church of the living God will not experience any more: no more night, sea, sorrow, crying, pain, curse or death.

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As the days get shorter as winter approaches we appreciate natural light all the more. God tells us there will be no more night. Darkness is banished forever! But then there is another way we can consider this light: wisdom and truth are depicted in the Word of God as walking in the light.

‘This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin’ 1 John 1.5-9.

Everything will become perfectly clear in Heaven. We will have direct knowledge of God. His Word will be perfectly understood. No more commentaries; preaching on earth will have fulfilled its purpose, for knowledge will flow like a river.

Crowned

This is the promise of the spiritual crown, which is:

- an incorruptible crown:

‘And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown’ 1 Corinthians 9.25.

- a crown of righteousness:

‘Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing’ 2 Timothy 4.8.

- a crown of glory:

‘...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away’ 1 Peter 5.4.

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Conclusion

The true Church in the world is often despised, ridiculed, rejected and considered out-of-date. These verses remind us of the wonderful state of the Church in Glory.

27. GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH

Revelation 22.6-21

We have now come to the conclusion of the *Book of Revelation* and the final passage in the Word of God. I would like to point out at the outset one of the key points being made, which forms the heart of the message. There is a clear emphasis upon the Word of God – see verses 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 18 and 19.

There is also clear emphasis placed upon the Second Coming of Christ. These verses right at the end of God's Word instruct us to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ. They are filled with a sense of urgency.

We live in a world of distractions. Everywhere we go we are faced and challenged with adverts demanding our attention. There is no doubt that Satan is using the pace and distractions of life as a smoke-screen in our minds to stop us spending time considering eternal issues. Jesus spoke of this while here upon earth.

Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets

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and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper'” Luke 14.15-24.

These were legitimate things!

When a godly person comes to the end of their life they often have an urgency regarding the Gospel of God. I was told recently of a godly man who, just a few hours before he went to Glory, sat up in bed. He earnestly implored the person standing at his bedside to preach the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Here in these verses we are told three times that Jesus is coming again quickly. He most certainly will return. Can we say with the Apostle John, 'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!' (verse 20)? Here at the end of the Word of God we are faced with challenging statements. Can we say readily and with assurance, 'Come, Lord Jesus?' or do we say, 'Not yet Lord! I am not ready!?' Here is one of the most searching tests in the Word of God.

If we cannot say, 'Come, Lord Jesus,' we need to urgently examine the reasons why. It may be we are not bothered; or we are so taken up with the things of this world we have no appetite for His coming. It may be we are backsliding in our Christian life and we dare not say 'Come, Lord Jesus.' It may be we are not sure about our standing before the Lord, and we genuinely tremble to say such a thing from our heart. Or it may be we are so sleepy about eternity we do not realise the danger or urgency of this matter. Quite simply, the state of our heart before the Lord can be measured by these words, whether or not we can say them from our heart.

God's Word is Truth

If we are truly trusting for our salvation in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, if we are walking in the way of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, then we can say at this moment, 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

'Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect'
Matthew 24.42-46.

Not only is there a tremendous flavour of urgency in these final verses, there is also a non-negotiable statement made, which affects the whole Word of God from *Genesis* to *Revelation*: 'These words are faithful and true' (*Revelation 22.6*). It is this point which I believe we should be considering together as we come to the conclusion of this Book: not only the urgency of being right and ready for the Second Coming of Christ, but the reality that these words are true, both here in *Revelation* and in all the Word of God. John Wycliffe was once asked why he believed God's Word was the truth. He replied, 'Because it is!'

Responding to the truth

'Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place' *Revelation 22.6.*

The Word of God reveals to us something of the amazing character of God. God is faithful to His purposes, His Person, His perfection and His people. No one will be able to say at the great Day of Judgment that we have been deceived by God. They will be able to clearly see they have been deceived by Satan, but not by God. No. God is faithful; He has faithfully warned, invited, corrected, guided, cleansed

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and saved by faithfully revealing His Word in a Book and in a Person, His Son Jesus Christ. Because God is faithful to all aspects of His character and creation, we are without excuse.

Now we have to make a decision in our minds before God; these words demand a response! God is saying to us, *'These words are faithful and true.'* Everything in the *Book of Revelation*, and indeed the whole Word of God, is faithful and true. Therefore it is not God, but us who have to decide whether we accept His Word as truth or not. It is not God Who is in the dock, but us. God says these words are faithful and true. Do we believe God's Word to be faithful and true, or is God a liar?

The *Book of Revelation* speaks of Heaven and hell; of the great Judgment Day; of a God who controls history; of the power of the evil one and his final destruction. The *Book of Revelation* has clear messages to the Church. It speaks of the power of Christ and His Second Coming, of the new heavens and the new earth, when this old world will be burned up and destroyed. Do we believe it?

We may say, 'I do not believe it!', or, 'I believe part of it.' We may say, 'I believe it is simply one of a number of good books', or we may say, 'I believe the Word of God is the Truth, and nothing but the Truth. I believe God has divinely inspired it through the power of His Holy Spirit, and I believe in it.'

If we have made a positive response to the first question, we now move on to obeying the truth. The truly blessed and wise people are those who obey the truth. They accept the truth and obey the truth. The point Jesus is making here is how we are to be ready for His coming. The way we show we are ready for His coming is by obedience to His Word.

'As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, "Please

come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord”
Ezekiel 33.30.

*‘Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness,
and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to
save your souls’ James 1.21.*

Earlier in this Book the Lord Jesus gives a precious promise on this point to those who overcome, to those who place their trust in Him as Saviour and as Lord. Jesus tells them their obedience brings a precious reward.

‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God’ Revelation 2.7.

‘And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’ Revelation 12.11.

‘Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city’ Revelation 22.14.

Revealing and responding to the truth

‘And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand”’ Revelation 22.10.

‘And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely’ Revelation 22.17.

Right up until the end of the world the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be preached. Christ is to be proclaimed as Saviour and Lord. Whoever thirsts, whoever has a desire, can come and take of the waters of life freely. Right up until the Second Coming of Christ the door of salvation stands open.

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The emphasis in this verse is on the free grace of God, the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit's work to convict and to give the desire; it is the work of the Church to proclaim the Gospel.

Sadly verse 11 reminds us that many are determined to be ungodly:

'He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still' Revelation 22.11.

They reject the truth, they become harder and harder in their lives. Their hearts become like concrete and they live as they want to live, rejecting what is good for them. Jesus says finally, people who continually reject His Word, and continually reject the free offer of the Gospel, will have these words applied. There is this terrible, *'Let him be.'* The Word of God uses the word 'let' in a positive and a negative manner. The first example we can consider is positive.

'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon' Isaiah 55.7.

But then there is the other way it is used, as in this verse.

'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone' Hosea 4.17.

This is a difficult subject, but we have to understand the terrible danger and evil of unbelief. Unbelief is ultimately is the ungodly's condemnation.

'He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil' John 3.18-19.

Our final, eternal destiny is determined by the state of our

relationship with God when we take our final breath. But while the unbeliever is determined to reject God, the believer, described as the righteous, must hold on their way until the end.

Respecting the truth

'...and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book' Revelation 22.19.

There are those who try to add to the Word of God, and those who try to take away from the Word of God. Jesus warns against either adding or taking away from His Word. He tells us He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (verse 13). Any attempt to add or take away is a direct attack upon Christ. When we deny the inspiration of God's Word, we are making a direct attack upon Christ.

These solemn words of our Lord remind us of the great importance and significance placed upon God's Word. God is not pleased when we reject His Word. Rejection and lack of respect for God's Word bring with them judgment.

We know by comparing Scripture with Scripture that God's people are chosen from eternity. None of Christ's sheep will be lost. Here, however, we are warned if we show disrespect to God's Word, if we treat it with disdain, if we discard it, or add to it, or take away from it, we finally demonstrate we have no part in God's Book of Life. We will, however, have part in God's judgment.

Rejoicing in th truth

'He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!' Revelation 22.20.

This means not only being ready but looking forward to His coming. When we have visitors come to stay we either look forward with

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anticipation for their coming, or we look forward with heaviness, wondering how the visit will go, wondering what they will say and how they will behave. How we wait for our visitors depends on what the current state of our relationship is with them. If it is good we look forward with anticipation; if it is bad we look forward with heaviness and nervousness. So it is with Jesus, how is our relationship with Him?

Here the Holy Spirit and the Church unite together in their cry to the Lord Jesus: 'Come!' When our relationship is right with Christ we anticipate and look forward to His coming. Not only is this cry a united one concerning the Second Coming of Christ, but it is also a united cry concerning the work of Christ before His coming. 'Come Lord Jesus – revive the Church. Come Lord Jesus – bless Your Word. Come Lord Jesus – be present in our worship. Come Lord Jesus – may Your name be honoured and glorified.'

Conclusion

The *Book of Revelation* is full of Christ. Here in these final verses Christ describes Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. He describes Himself as the Root and Offspring of David, the Messiah and the Bright and Morning Star. Do we see, by faith in God's Word of Truth, a beauty in Christ? Do we see a beauty in His love, grace, wisdom, power, righteousness, authority and intercession? If we do, as we come to the end of this Book, let us say from our heart, *'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'*

If we are depending upon His grace, living by His grace and saved by His grace we can say, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' What an amazing blessing to remind ourselves that the final words in Scripture contain the greatest desire for any person here on earth – the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.