

Reflections on
The Prophetic Word
in the
New Testament

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The Author would suggest that the Reader should refer to the various Scriptures, not quoted in full for the sake of brevity, but of which the chapter and verse are given: that thus the links that exist in the Word of God may be verified in the mind of the Reader.

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The Prophetic Word in the New Testament.

MATTHEW.

IN the Gospel by Matthew our Lord's advent into this world is stated to be according to *promise* and *prophecy*. The Spirit presents Him to us as the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers, in that He is regarded as the "Son of David, the Son of Abraham". We read (Gal. iii. 16), "Now to Abraham and [to] his seed were *the promises* made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, *which is Christ*". And again with regard to David, "Of this man's seed hath God according to *his promise* raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts xiii. 23).

In His birth we have the fulfilment of *prophecy*, "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (Matt. i. 22, 23). Isaiah vii. 14 is then quoted. The place of His nativity is given to us also as the fulfilment of prophecy (Micah v. 2). Further, the taking of the 'young child' into Egypt, so that the history of Israel might be taken up afresh in the Person of Jehovah's servant, is said to be in fulfilment of that "which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, Out of Egypt have I

called my son " (Hosea xi. 1). His being taken with His mother into Galilee on the return from Egypt, fulfilled that which prophets had spoken, " He shall be called a Nazarene "—a term of reproach (John i. 46). We do not find in the prophets the exact words, but the words give the concurrent testimony of the prophets.

The beginning of our blessed Lord's ministry was in Galilee, " that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet " (Isa. ix. 1, 2, is then quoted). Where the people walked in darkness, there light sprang up through the Lord's ministry. And again, it fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah liii. 4, " Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses " (chap. viii. 17). Furthermore, the word in Hosea vi. 6, " I desired mercy, and not sacrifice ", is twice repeated by our Lord, in order to show that Jehovah's attitude towards Israel was fully borne by our blessed Lord.

There is another passage to which I would refer (Rom. xv. 8), " Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, *to confirm the promises made unto the fathers* ". The apostle then quotes *prophecy after prophecy* as to *mercy* going out to the Gentiles, that God might be glorified in showing it (see Psa. xviii. 49; Deut. xxxii. 43; Psa. cxvii. 1; Isa. xi. 10). But this mercy is linked up with the promises made *to Israel*. So at the close of Matthew's Gospel the discipling of *the nations* goes out from Galilee. But Luke speaks of another commission given by Christ in resurrection, and about *to ascend* to heaven. The gospel of the grace of God

goes out from a resurrection sphere that is outside of this world, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. The *wealth* of mercy was brought to light in the conversion and preaching of Paul. It delights in exuberance of language, "God, *rich in mercy*, for *his great love* wherewith *he loved us* . . . hath quickened us together with Christ . . . that in the ages to come he might shew *the exceeding riches of his grace* in his *kindness* toward us through Christ Jesus". But Matthew does not speak of the Lord's ascension nor of that which is connected with it.

We may gather, from the way in which Matthew speaks of the Lord's entry into the world, the distinction that Scripture makes between promise and prophecy. His coming here in fulfilment of *promise* is according to the sovereignty of the grace of God—the out-going of His own purpose of love. So David speaks, "According to *thine own heart* hast thou done all these great things" (2 Sam. vii. 21). His coming according to prophecy was the result of the *mercy and faithfulness of God* (Psa. lxxxix. 1, 2), to those who had broken down under the first covenant. But Christ, the Heir of promise, was refused and rejected—the footsteps of God's Anointed were reproached, yet "*the sure mercies of David*" remained, according to God's faithfulness, in resurrection.

In further illustration of the character of promise, I would refer to John xiv. 3, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself" is *not prophecy* (which would give it the character of an

expected *event*), but a blessed promise which attaches the heart to *Him* who promises (so also 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

To return to Matthew. Chapter x. 16-23 has somewhat of the character of prophecy, as it carries on the mission of the twelve to the cities of Israel, which then began, to the day when the Son of man will come. There is another instance of the fulfilment of prophecy in the ministry of Jesus (chap. xii. 17-21), its unobtrusive and yet victorious character. A servant He was in whom Jehovah delighted and whom He upheld.

The *mysteries* of the kingdom of the heavens in chapter xiii. assume a prophetic character when the Lord unfolds the varied similitudes which the kingdom in mystery would take. The Lord couples the parabolic form of His teaching with the prophetic as in Psalm lxxviii. There is nothing mysterious in the scattering of the seed of the word; the effect would be to produce another generation begotten by the word of truth—those who receive the word and bring forth fruit. In the similitude of the wheat and the tares the mysteries begin. The fact that it was *while men slept* that the enemy sowed tares, conveys to us the truth that the Lord had left the charge of the field, in which He had sown wheat, in the hands of men. The fact of tares being found among the wheat—mere professors among the children of the kingdom—prepares us for the two next similitudes. A great tree rooted in the earth does not savour of the character of Christ as given in chapter xii. 18, 20. Then the

leavened meal foreshadows the way in which the teachings of men would thoroughly adulterate the pure word of the kingdom (see chap. xvi. 12). Formalism and infidelity would vitiate the truth.

In the similitudes of the treasure hid in the field, and the pearl of great price, we learn that the mysterious form of the kingdom while Christ is absent will yield to Christ that which He came here to seek, and for which He gave up all His rights as Messiah and King. The parable of the net cast into the sea carries us on evidently to the close of the dispensation, as does also the interpretation of the wheat and the tares—hence their prophetic character.

There are several prophetic *intimations*, I judge, into which I do not enter. Such as Jesus going up on high while His disciples were crossing the stormy sea, an intimation of His present place of intercession in heaven. Another is in Peter leaving the shelter of the ship for the sake of companionship with Christ. I pass on to that which is more strictly prophetic (chapters xxiv., xxv.). These chapters are preceded by the Lord's tender yet solemn pronouncement on guilty yet beloved Jerusalem, together with His quotation from Psalm cxviii. 26. They would no longer see Him until they should say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah". It is the contrast to him who comes in his own name (John v. 43). Thereupon He left the temple—a solemn forsaking—and took His seat upon the mount of Olives with the city and temple in view. There He pronounced the total destruction of the

temple itself. This brought forth from His disciples three questions: (1) When shall these things be? (2) What shall be the sign of Thy coming? (3) and of the end of the age?

Before answering the questions, the Lord warns them against deception. Of old the same people had said, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isa. xxx. 10). There would be those who would profess to come in Christ's name—that is, in the name of the Jewish Messiah. Next, there would be wars and rumours of wars, such things must be: it is the continuation of the holy judgement of God as depicted in Jeremiah xxv. 32, evil going forth from nation to nation. The rejection of Christ made way for this, but "*the end* is not yet". This the Lord distinctly says, for the upheaval of the nations might be a temptation to regard it as ushering in the last days. There is an indefinite period during which these and other troubles would take place. They are the *beginnings* of sorrows, not the *end*.

The disciples are regarded as *Jewish disciples*, and such they were, and as such had the character of the Jewish remnant. The ministry of Paul, as of one born out of due time, had not then taken place, and the sweeping away of all distinction between Jew and Gentile consequent on Christ's *heavenly position*. He is not speaking here from heaven, but from the mount of Olives. During this time of the beginning of sorrows this Jewish remnant would be persecuted. It was so in Peter's day (1 Peter iv. 12-14), and will be

when a Jewish remnant is brought out in the last days. In Acts xii. there is a foreshadowing of the close of Jewish history, the apostle James, killed by Herod, representing the martyred remnant, and Peter the persecuted but delivered remnant. Not only would there be persecutions, but many would be stumbled, and hate and betray one another. False prophets would arise and deceive many, but the Lord adds, "he that shall *endure unto the end*, the same shall be saved"—the people thus saved are for the millennial earth, but doubtless in its principle *the continuance* of the saints in the faith always applies. In Colossians i. 23 this continuance is in view of being presented faultless in glory. In Hebrews iii. 14 it is in view of becoming companions of the Christ (Psa. xlv. 7, "thy fellows") now that He is severed from earth and in heavenly glory, His God and Father has given Him companions with *a heavenly calling*, and the Sanctifier and the sanctified are 'all of one'.

"The end" here is "the end of the age" (Matt. xxiv. 3), that is, of the Jewish order of things under the old covenant. It was *morally* ended at the death of Jesus (see Heb. ix. 26; John xii. 31), and He then became the Mediator of the new covenant. "The end" does not come until the *gospel of the kingdom* has been preached for a witness unto all nations. God does not wind up the history of this present evil age until the witness of judgement, just about to come and clear away all that offends and does iniquity, has been preached among all nations. Revelation

xiv. 6, 7 teaches us that this everlasting gospel (*deliverance* from evil by judgement on evil) proclaims that the hour of God's judgement *has come*. Psalm xcvi. follows upon the summons to Israel in the previous psalm, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart"; then they that have heard His voice will say among the nations that Jehovah reigns, and show forth His salvation and declare His glory among them. Thereupon the nations are summoned to give unto Jehovah (Jesus) the glory due unto His name.

Matthew xxiv. 15 carries our thoughts from an indefinite period to a very marked and definite time—that spoken of by Daniel the prophet. It will be known by the abomination (an idol) which brings in the desolation of Jerusalem, standing in the holy place, that is, in the temple then rebuilt in unbelief, only to be again desolated. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psa. cxxvii. 1), while Psalm lxxiv. 3-7, and Psalm lxxix. 1-3, describe the desolations. It is the time of the great tribulation (the last half-week of years of Daniel ix.), such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be. So said our blessed Lord. It is clear that this has not yet taken place, because *immediately* after the tribulation, the powers of the heavens are shaken (Haggai ii. 6) and the sign of the Son of man appears in heaven, and He is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

On this follows the gathering of the elect of Israel from the four winds of heaven. This

evidently is not "*our* gathering together unto him", by the elect saints of this period being "caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (2 Thess. ii. 1 ; 1 Thess. i. 10 ; iv. 16, 17). We are in Jewish scenes and circumstances in the former part of this chapter, and the generation of unbelief—deceived by false Christs and false prophets—will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.

From verse 36 and onward it is evident that the actual circumstances of the coming of the Son of man are spoken of—it is at an unknown and unexpected moment, but the judgement will be as far reaching, and yet as sudden, as in the days of Noah, while it will discriminate between those who may be found very close together: "one shall be taken, and the other left". Then, from verse 45 to chapter xxv. 30, the Lord prophetically indicates that the period of His tarrying would be a time of testing to those who had taken the place of serving in His household during His absence, as to whether they had the expectation of His return before them. In chapter xxv. His tarrying would test those whose profession is that they are not the children of this world, but children of the bridechamber; and lastly, it tests His *own* servants into whose hands He had delivered His goods. In the first case it was the care of His household, here the use of His goods. In both cases they all had *the name of servants*, as those belonging to an absent Lord, and in the other case they all had *the name of virgins*, as those uncontaminated by the world.

In the end of Isaiah the same discrimination is finally made between the false religious nation and those whom Jehovah calls 'my servants'. It has been noted that at the beginning of Christianity no question was raised as to the reality of profession. And here the Lord regards the professed body according to the position which they had taken. We think of things differently as we have before our minds a Householder, a Bridegroom, and an absent Lord. Failure in those who stood in these privileged relations does not prevent the Lord securing an answer in the faithful (they are the remnant) of fidelity and affection. His desires and expectations will be met in those who seek to give His household meat in due season, and watch for their Lord's return.

In the wise virgins who woke up to the advent of the Bridegroom, and were ready to go in with Him to the wedding, there is recovery to the first 'love of espousals' (Jer. ii. 2), which alone can satisfy the heart of the Bridegroom. Paul's jealousy as to the saints at Corinth, that he might present them as a chaste virgin to Christ, was a ministry in accord with the Lord's prophetic intimation of awakened affection for Himself. In Peter also, we may see one who so used the gift of grace entrusted to him in caring for the Lord's flock, as to minister to the Lord's joy in them.

In chapter xxv. 31-46 Christ's sessional judgment is before us, when the Son of man is seated on the throne of His glory. Solomon (in 1 Kings ii. 12-46) is a typical illustration of such a judge-

ment. Here it is all the nations (the Gentiles) whom He judges in view of the millennial kingdom. Joel iii. 12 may be read in connection with this. Jeremiah xxv. 15, 33^{*} describes the judgement of the system of nations *connected with Jerusalem* of old by means of Babylon. But in this chapter the nations are judged according as they have received the everlasting gospel preached to them by the messengers of Christ—those whom He owns as ‘these my brethren’. We have an analogous scene in Acts viii. 1, 4. The persecution which arose after Stephen’s martyrdom scattered the flock at Jerusalem, and the scattered disciples went everywhere preaching the word. So the great tribulation of the last days will again scatter the elect remnant of the Jews (from Jerusalem and the land of promise) among the nations, and we may justly conclude from Revelation xiv. 6, 7, that by special angelic agency doors will be opened for this gospel of the kingdom to be preached to every nation. The warning that the hour of God’s judgement *has come* must go forth everywhere before God strikes. Isaiah lxvi. 19 speaks of this promulgation of Jehovah’s glory among the Gentiles. The final judgement of the nations is not on account of open hostility to Christ, that was executed by Christ as the Rider on the white horse (Rev. xix. 11), when He will smite the nations with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked (Isa. xi. 4; 2 Thess. ii. 8); but this sessional judgement discovers the enmity of the heart in its indifference to Christ. Hebrews vi. 10

shows us God's appreciation of work and labour of love in ministering to His saints, and this was written to Hebrews.

Thus we have the history of Judaism, of professed Christianity, and lastly of Gentile belief and unbelief prophetically traced by Christ, and their course and end foreshadowed.

MARK.

THE Holy Spirit by Mark, in chapter iv. 26, adds another parable to those which we have already considered in Matthew xiii. We may note that the *sowing* of the seed of the word is prominent in Mark's Gospel—in Matthew it is the *Sower*, and in Luke the *seed*. The parable before us prophetically states as to the *sowing* of the Son of man, that unseen by man, and apparently as if the Sower were asleep (see vers. 27, 28), the seed would grow, first the blade, then the ear, and finally the full corn in the ear, and then that He who sowed would intervene publicly and put in the sickle. The harvest day will surely come. The apparent inattention of the Sower need not dishearten us. Hidden forces that belong to the word of God ("the earth bringeth forth") are at work. The word that goes out of Jehovah's mouth "shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. lv. 11). "The words that I speak unto you," said the Lord, "they are *spirit*, and they are *life*" (John vi. 63); and again, "The word of God is quick and powerful" (*living and operative*). Hence we get three stages of growth, and

then the harvest—the moment of Christ's direct intervention.

An incident follows His teaching on the subject of the word. "*The same day,*" we read, "when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side." We may say that when Jesus and His disciples embarked in the ship, the testimony of God, of which Christ Himself was the Centre and Sum, was indeed launched on the restless waters of this world, but He was *asleep on a pillow*. Could the testimony of God in Jesus be wrecked? "Master," said the disciples, "carest thou not that *we* perish?" How frail all appeared, and He asleep!

"Calmly He rose with sovereign will,
And hushed the storm to rest.
Ye waves, He whispered, peace, be still!
They calmed like a pardoned Breast."

We need not be dismayed. We often think more of our danger, as we suppose, than of the all-sufficiency of Christ. "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?"

In chapter xiii. Mark does not give the dispensational order of things connected with the sowing of the word. (In Matthew the parables are largely connected with the thought of the introduction and mysterious course of the kingdom of the heavens.) The disciples, in calling their Master's attention to the stones and the solidity of the temple buildings, were ignorant, or at least unmindful, of the fact that He was "the stone which the builders rejected" (chap. xii. 10), and that He was leaving the temple to

its desolation. "There shall not be left," He said, "one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." This overthrow of the temple, the very centre of Jewish worship and religious associations, led the disciples to ask the question, "When shall *these things* be? and what shall be the sign when all *these things* shall be fulfilled?" That is the only question which the Spirit records by Mark. Hence, though prophetic details are given, the state of things consequent on that of which our Lord had spoken, and the conduct of the disciples in that state is before the mind of the Spirit.

The Lord's answer to the question of the disciples points out three periods as occurring on account of His rejection by Israel, and of His departure from the temple. The first is characterized by the impending overthrow of Judaism through the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem. Secondly, an *indefinite* and prolonged period is indicated, in which there would be wars and rumours of wars—nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. This undefined period is characterized as "the beginning of sorrows [or throes]" (compare Jer. xxx. 6, 7), and it may be considered as extending over the prolonged times of the Gentiles, in which case the present upheaval comes in; or it may be looked at in the crisis after the withdrawal of the church saints from apostate Christendom, and in this case would embrace the opening of the seals by the Lamb in Revelation vi. The preaching of the gospel among all nations is spoken of indefinitely

also. It would be rather the kingdom of God as Paul preached it (Acts xx. 25), than the kingdom as about to put down evil on the earth—the world kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. xi. 15).

The third period is very definitely marked by the abomination of desolation *standing where it ought not*. Matthew tells us that it stands in [the] holy place; it does not exactly say “the holiest”, the Spirit of God could not speak of such a place, and Mark gives its character—“where it ought not”. The third period is called “the days of affliction” such as never were before, nor should be after (Mark xiii. 19), and spoken of in verse 24 as “that tribulation”. After it the Son of man comes in the clouds with power and great glory.

These periods lead the Lord to speak of three characters which should mark the conduct of the disciples. (1) A spirit of vigilance—four times the Lord says, “Take heed”, especially against the deceptions of those who professed to be Christ. The apostle John in his epistle distinctly states that the spirit of truth confesses *Jesus Christ come in flesh*. All else is the power of the Anti-christ. (2) During the above-named indefinite period the Lord’s disciples would render testimony for the true Christ by *the teaching and power of the Holy Ghost*. (3) They were *to watch and wait* for the return of the coming One, because they knew neither the day nor hour when it would take place. Our Lord makes a remarkable statement here, that not only were men and angels ignorant as to the time of His coming, but that “the Son”

did not know. It is beautiful to see the spirit of subjection in the exalted Man, "Son" though He be; He does not move from the throne where the Father has seated Him until the time appointed of the Father. This is part of the perfection of Jesus. That all these things are prophetically stated, the Lord's own words declare: "Behold, I have *foretold* you all things".

The bearing of this prophetic statement is intended to have a moral effect upon *us*. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken. The Spirit of God cites Haggai ii. 21 in Hebrews xii. 26 as a *promise* to us. It must be so, in order to introduce for us the kingdom that cannot be shaken. The overthrow of the massive stones and the buildings of the temple swept away the centre of opposition to Christ. The convulsions among the nations would turn to a testimony; the disciples would be brought before kings and rulers on account of their gospel testimony among the nations. At the end there would be not only the shaking upon earth, but also the heavens: "the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken", and the Son of man comes in the clouds, the seat of celestial authority. Isaiah xxiv. 19-23 refers to these days.

It is beautiful to see that immediately the Son of man comes, the first thing that He does is to gather His elect together from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven (compare Psalms i. 5). The very convulsions among the nations may be the sieve that God will use to discover the true grain

(Amos ix. 9). This elect remnant are upon the heart of Christ. "The ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. xxxv. 10).

But there is another circle in which the Lord's *present* interest is shown, a household whose care He committed, on taking His journey into a far country, to His servants—"to every man his work and . . . the porter to watch". While we cannot look for stability upon the earth, yet God's foundation stands sure. Our occupation is not with events upon earth where everything is shaking, but with our Lord's household—"to every man his work". We wait for a kingdom that cannot be moved, but better still, *for Him* into whose hands all is given of His Father. We wait for Him.

"What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

LUKE.

WE must not expect to find the same kind of prophetic intimations by our Lord, such as we have considered in Matthew and Mark (as to the course of events upon earth), where the dealings of God with His earthly people of Israel have been prominent. We do get the casting off and scattering of Israel (chap. xxi.), but that has been the reconciling of the world, bringing the Gentiles (or nations) into the place of privilege with regard to the gospel, and this goes on until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Faith will then recog-

nize that Israel is God's people and Jerusalem His city.

Luke's Gospel is addressed to a Gentile, and while "salvation is of the Jews", and at Christ's birth the angel announced that "Unto *you* [Israel] is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord", yet it contemplates Gentiles as becoming possessed of the blessings of the gospel of the grace of God. Simeon's word, "A light to lighten the Gentiles" (chap. ii. 32), and the Lord's word at the close, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations", indicates the character of the gospel.

It should also be remembered that Gentiles had no *divinely given* inheritance upon earth, as the Jews had—an inheritance which the blood-guilty nation has forfeited through accepting the guilt of crucifying the Lord, saying, "His blood be upon us, and on our children" (Matt. xxvii. 25). Hence in Luke's Gospel it will be found that after the account of the transfiguration, the Lord seeks to associate the hearts of His disciples with heaven, *whither He was going*. In chapter ix. 51, we read that He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem—not to sit upon David's throne—but "the time was come that he should be *received up*". He had no home on earth (ver. 58). Then in chapter x. He bids His disciples rejoice that their names *were written in heaven*—it was not then the time for being written as of Zion, though glorious things were spoken of her (Psa. lxxxvii.). More blessed purposes were in view. Thus in

chapter xiv. the "great supper" contemplates *God's house* being filled from the highways and hedges of this world (the Gentiles), as well as from the streets and lanes of the city (the Jews). The parables also of chapter xv. contemplate "the lost", *whoever they may be*—they are recovered for God, for heaven, and for the Father's house. Without going into other details, we may note how the dying malefactor, cast out from earth, gets a place with Christ in paradise. All this points to heaven as far as it could be then. *Now* Christ has entered in, the Holy Spirit has come from thence, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews the light of heaven shines down upon the pathway of the saints here.

In the prophetic details of chapter xxi. the "great tribulation" connected with Israel's history is not given; nor is the setting up of the "abomination" that causes the desolation of Jerusalem, but its desolation is referred evidently to its being compassed by the armies of the Romans under Titus; and *the present* treading down of the city by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, is disclosed by the Lord. I refer to all this as coinciding with the character of the gospel, and will refer to the details of the chapter further on.

In chapter xvii. is given the first strictly prophetic announcement by the Lord in this gospel. It is given in answer to a question, asked by the Pharisees in irony, I judge; they demanded "*when* the kingdom of God should come". Here let me add another characteristic of Luke's Gospel.

It was said by Simeon (chap. ii. 35) that the child then born was "set for a sign . . . *that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*". Hence the *moral character* of much of the Lord's teaching in the middle of this Gospel, because the utterances of men, who thereby revealed *the thoughts of their hearts*, gave occasion for the unfolding of the truth of God. In their question the infidelity of the heart of the Pharisees is laid bare. The Lord's answer showed that the kingdom of God was a moral state of things introduced in the Person of the Lord, not with outward show. It could not be pointed out nor seen by nature's eye, but it was in their midst, for all its features could be known as the heart was occupied with Jesus; it was not a question of *time*.

The Lord, then, in contrast, I judge, to the question of the Pharisees, speaks to His disciples, not of the kingdom, but of *the days of the Son of man*; there would be a *time* of His appearing. It is interesting to observe that the first time the Lord speaks of Himself as "Son of man" is to say that the Son of man had authority *on earth* to forgive sins (chap. v. 24), and at the close (chap. xxii. 69), He tells the rulers of the people, "Henceforth shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God". His disciples had witnessed the patient toil of the lowly Son of man as day by day He passed along through this world, but not so would be the day of His revelation from the right hand of the power of God. As the lightning shines from one end of heaven to the other, thus would the Son of man be in His day. Every eye

shall see Him—but first He must suffer and be rejected by that generation. He then gives two instances of the suddenness of the judgement of God when He does strike. One in which the whole world was involved in the days of Noe. From that world Noe had stood apart as a preacher of righteousness. Warned of God he prepared an ark for the saving of his house. Secondly, the days of Lot on the contrary had this character, that lured by the fair appearance of the well-watered plain of Sodom, Lot had consented to dwell in the midst of the ungodly world, thereby vexing his righteous soul daily, and at last he was saved so as by fire (compare Isa. xxvi. 20, 21). Noah had a hiding-place, and Lot a place to which he escaped, so the godly remnant of the last days will have to flee before the storm of judgement.

It will be a day of close discrimination in the judgement, and when once the way of escape is opened it will be fatal to turn back. "Remember Lot's wife." To try and save that life of the flesh which hankers after the world is always ruinous; to give it up is to gain a life that is beyond the judgement poured out upon *all flesh* in the day of the Son of man. In the days of Noe God had said, "The end of *all flesh* is come before me" (Gen. vi. 13); and in the day of the Son of man it is written, "For by fire and by his sword will Jehovah plead with *all flesh*: and the slain of Jehovah shall be many" (Isa. lxvi. 16). Through grace Christians accept this judgement of *all flesh*, in the cross of Christ, and in contrast to Lot's wife it belongs to them to

forget the things behind and reach forward to the things before.

In Daniel vii. the Son of man who comes with the clouds of heaven and receives the kingdom from the Ancient of days is shown to be Himself the Ancient of days (compare vers. 13, 14 with ver. 22). The term, "Ancient of days", is equivalent to the name of Israel's God—Jehovah. The disciples ask, "Where, Lord?" The answer shows that the judgement of God will reach to all that has the sentence of death upon it, without any way of escape.

The parable of the unjust judge follows this prophetic utterance of our Lord. It teaches us that God hears the cry of His elect for the avenging of evil, though He may bear long before the lightning flash comes. The cry of the elect in both the psalms and the prophets is "How long?" The answer of God found here is that *He bears long*.

Before entering upon the strictly prophetic unfolding contained in chapter xxi. it would be well to refer to the thoughts of the crowd that followed the Lord, as mentioned in chapter xix. They thought as He drew near to Jerusalem that the kingdom of God was about to be immediately manifested. It was not the infidel question of the Pharisees which we have considered in chapter xvii., but an entirely mistaken apprehension of the Lord's pathway. He could not establish His kingdom over revolted subjects apart from the sword of judgement clearing the way, for "his citizens hated him". Jerusalem was to be the

place of His exodus from their midst, as Moses and Elijah had spoken on the holy mount. He was going into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return. During His absence, in confiding love to His own servants, He entrusts them with that which, if faithfully used, would augment the revenue of His kingdom. Each soul gathered into His kingdom during His absence will draw forth His "Well done!" to those who laboured for Him. We read in Psalm xxi., "His glory is great in thy salvation", and surely the labour of His servants "is not in vain in the Lord", as they gather, by means of the wealth of His grace, heirs of glory into the kingdom of their coming Lord.

In chapter xix. 37, the Lord riding upon the ass's colt draws near to the city, and the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God, taking up the words of Psalm cxviii. 26; but as taught of God they add the words "*peace in heaven*, and glory in the highest". It is a prophetic anticipation, but first there will be war in heaven (Rev. xii. 7). There cannot be peace there while the dragon and his angels occupy the heavenly places. When they are cast down immediately it is said in heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ".

Then as Jesus drew near to the city and beheld it He wept over it. These tears of Jesus—think of them, my soul!—are most affecting. Jerusalem did not know the things that belonged to *her peace*, nor the day of her visitation. Nothing

awaited her but destruction, and on account of this Jesus wept !

As in Mark's Gospel, so in Luke's, the Lord's utterances as to the devastation of the temple buildings is preceded by the widow casting her two mites into the offerings of God. The *goodly stones* of the temple and *its adornment*, which attracted the eyes of the disciples, were not objects of attraction to her. To her widowed heart it was the place of Jehovah's name, and it is written, "*Jehovah* relieveth the fatherless and widow". The goodly stones would be all thrown down, but this widow's appreciation of the place of Jehovah's name is recorded for all time.

The answer of the Lord to the question of the disciples is much the same as in Mark's account. These are the preliminary sorrows which lead to a definite period. The definite period in this Gospel is the impending desolation of Jerusalem by the Gentile armies—those of the Romans under Titus. Till that moment the disciples were to possess their souls in patience, but *then* those which were in Judæa were to *flee*—this is the *Lord's direction* for them. Out of ordinary trouble the saint has not to flee, but to go through it in patience ; but here the path is plain—those in the country places were not to enter into the city for protection, for those days would be days of vengeance. It has been noted that in chapter iv. the Lord reads from Isaiah lxi. the prophetic announcement of the character of His ministry and stops at the words, " to preach the acceptable year of the Lord "—then He closed the book.

Now in Luke xxi. He seems to refer to the following words of the prophecy—"the day of vengeance of our God"—"These be the days of vengeance", said our Lord, and He further adds, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". These times are still going on, concurrently with the days of vengeance on guilty Jerusalem, but they close with distress of nations (or Gentiles), with perplexity at "the roar of the sea and rolling waves". This betokens the break up of the *system of nations* which prevails on the prophetic earth* and marks at present the times of the Gentiles.

It is not difficult to apprehend the *tumultuous* state of the nations described by "the roar of the sea and rolling waves". Both Balaam's prophecy (Num. xxiv. 17, "Sheth" means tumult) and Jeremiah (chap. xlviii. 45) refer to "the children of tumult" as being destroyed. Compare also Revelation xvi. 17-21 for this overthrow of all that has been accounted stable on the earth. It is not the great tribulation of Israel, but *the whole habitable earth* is involved, for *the powers of the heavens* shall be shaken (compare Haggai ii. 6, 7). Then it is that the Son of man comes with power and great glory. The break up of systematized rule and authority, and the desolation that comes on the whole habitable earth is not the hope itself, but the coming of the Son of

* The term "comity of nations" is being used now as a thing to be achieved by the late war.

man is the hope of the elect ; then the redemption of those saints draws nigh, and the kingdom of God on the earth is near.

We learn from Revelation iv. and v. that the heavenly saints will have left the earth for heaven ; they have been kept from the hour of temptation which shall come on the whole world to try them that dwell on the earth (Rév. iii. 10), but verse 25 of our chapter shows that there are those who have the moral character of being dwellers upon earth. Upon them the day of the Son of man will come as a snare, whilst those earthly saints who have waited for redemption will say, " This is our God, we have waited for him " (Isa. xxv. 9). In Revelation vii. we find the two companies of earthly saints—Jews and Gentiles—foreseen in prophetic vision. The year of their redemption is then come.

The disciples are here regarded by the Lord as representative of the saints on earth when the Son of man comes. They are exhorted to take heed lest the things of earth should hide from them the true character of that time, and also to watch and pray that they might be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of man. The transference of these disciples into the assembly (not then in existence), afterward would give to them an escape from the sorrows of earth, and an entrance to more glorious and heavenly realities. But there will be those, as in Revelation xiv. 1-5, who will be in close association with Him who suffered on earth, but has been exalted in heaven ; very

near they will be to heaven thus, though their place is Mount Zion upon earth.

JOHN.

WE should not expect to find any direct word of prophecy in this Gospel, seeing that it speaks of light and life coming into this dark and dead world in the person of Jesus, the Son of God ; and what is eternal is brought thus into a time scene, but to revert to its own eternity. There are, however, some descriptive details which we can read in the light of prophecy, as they set forth certain dispensational dealings of God in gathering, by the gospel of His Son, first, a company of heavenly saints ; secondly, a company of saints with earthly hopes from both Israel and the Gentiles ; and thirdly, the millennial period comes before us in a mystical way. Our evangelist in the book of Revelation shows us that this millennial period leads into an eternal state, but in that state there are still, as the issue of the ways of God, the heavenly saints as the tabernacle of God, and men on the new earth with whom He will dwell.

In chapters i. and ii. three days are specially marked out. If we date back from the " third day " in chapter ii., we shall find that the first of the three is in chapter i. 35. It is the day of the testimony of John the Baptist to Jesus as *the Lamb of God*. Mark, it is not John's *official* testimony to Jesus as " the Lamb of God, the taker away of the sin of the world ", but his *personal* testimony to Him out of the fullness of his own heart. " Behold the Lamb of God ! "

We must, I think, feel that that first day has lengthened out until now, though it may be near its close. The effect of John's testimony was that two of his disciples left the one who spoke of earthly things to follow the One "that cometh from heaven" (chap. iii. 31), and they find themselves welcomed to Himself and to His dwelling. We are not told where it was, but it had this blessed character, it was *His* abode.

But the scene of the second day is well known. Jesus would go forth *into Galilee*. I must not, however, omit that which gives the first day its full character. Andrew, one of the two who followed Jesus, finds his own brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. Jesus greets him by his old family name as "son of Jonas", but gives him a new name, which linked him with the new structure which was not yet being formed, but in Peter a stone was being prepared for it, got from the quarry of Judaism (see Matt. xvi. 18). Galilee was the place where Jesus found the despised remnant of Israel. There He called Philip to follow Him.* Philip speaks of Him to Nathanael as the One *of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write*, while Jesus speaks of him as *an Israelite indeed*, in whom is no guile. Nathanael also is led to own Jesus according to Psalm ii. as the Son of God and the King of Israel. We are thus on the second day in Jewish associations. In the last verse Jesus passes on to another title,

* As being still on earth, the saints with heavenly hopes and associations have to tread a path *down here*, Christ Himself being "the way". Hence, like Philip, they are called to follow Him.

found in Psalm viii., that of "Son of man"—the One who is set over all things—the Object on earth of the heavens above—His Person as Son of man being the link between heaven and earth.

This prepares us for the third day—the marriage day. Two things specially mark it. Jesus, and the disciples He had attracted to Himself, are invited to the marriage—there is no thought of His rejection here—and the wine of earthly joy is filled into the vessels used for Jewish purification. It is Jesus who provides it—the best wine—when before it was said, "They have no wine". Much more might be said on the character of these three days which would yield present instruction and blessing, but I am only pointing out the bearing of the whole passage in connection with the dispensational ways of God.

I pass on now to chapters xi. and xii.; where again *three* glories that belong to our Lord Jesus Christ come before us. In chapter xi. the Lord speaks thus, when He heard of the sickness of Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, *that the Son of God* might be glorified thereby". The resurrection of Lazarus was a testimony to the glory of Jesus as *the Son of God*. Resurrection glory belongs to another world, but it has visited this world both in the case of Lazarus and of our Lord Himself. Then in chapter xii. 12 there is the testimony rendered by the multitude to the *Son of David*, the King of Israel. This is an earthly glory, but worn by Him who comes from heaven.

Mark here how *the intelligence as to these things* did not come to the disciples until the Lord was glorified. They were not mere incidents in His blessed life, but they had their own foreshadowing of His glories. The owning of Christ's royalty on earth cannot take place until He has first filled heaven with the sons of resurrection—the eternal witnesses of His glory as the Son of God. Thirdly, *the Gentiles*, who came up to worship at the feast, said to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus". This brings before Him the anticipation of His glory as *Son of man*. Three spheres of glory are thus presented to us, but in order to possess these glories He must, as the true corn of wheat, fall into the ground and die. Note also another detail. It has often been said that we must go into heaven in order to come out from thence with Christ. In chapter xii. 1-11 the inside home at Bethany is in review. Three things mark that house, where we may say Jesus was for the moment at home—His presence; resurrection power witnessed in Lazarus; and holy affections flowing out to Jesus as witnessed by Mary's box of ointment. All that were in the house shared in the fragrance of this devoted act. What took place *in the house* was preparatory to coming out with Jesus as Israel's King. The church will come out from the place of communion in heaven, to share the place of royalty with Christ over the earth. There is yet something more in this scene which is worthy of our attention. In chapter xi. the glory of the Son of God in resurrection power fills a scene which in itself was the

valley of the shadow of death. But in chapter xii. *He allows them to make Him a supper* ; *He accepts the service* of Martha now ; Lazarus sits at the table *with Him* ; and Mary anoints His feet. When He comes out *He accepts* the hosannas of the multitude, and the earnest inquiry of the Gentiles. The true bearing of all this we learn now that He has been glorified.

In the end of this Gospel there is a further reference to *three occasions* on which Jesus made Himself known to His disciples after He was risen from the dead. They have a special significance. The first occasion was to the *assembled disciples*. They had been gathered by *the testimony* of His resurrection conveyed to them by Mary of Magdala. Jesus came and stood in their midst, speaking peace to them, breathing His own Spirit of life into them, and giving to them their mission as sent and endowed by Him. -

But unbelieving Thomas was not there. He had missed that which we may call assembly blessing and privilege. There are many who do so now. It was an eight days after, a complete period of time, before Thomas is found in the company of those that had believed. He represents the Jewish state of unbelief. They do not believe in His resurrection-glory until they see Him. The special blessing belongs to those who have not seen and yet have believed (see 1 Peter i. 8). Theirs is "joy unspeakable and full of glory". The faith of Thomas thus expresses itself, "My Lord and my God".

In chapter xxi. a millennial scene is before us.

The gospel record had closed in chapter xx. The gathering of the church saints, and the awaking of faith in the remnant of Israel had been foreshadowed, and in this chapter Jesus makes another visit to His disciples, which has a millennial character. Simon Peter, who had denied Him, as Israel had done, is there ; Thomas convinced by sight ; Nathanael the Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile, are specially mentioned, and the meeting takes place on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias (or Galilee). There this manifestation of the risen Lord takes place. I do not enter further into all the import of this chapter than to notice that these three occasions opened out in figure three manifestations of Jesus. First, the assembly knows Him first—the rejected from earth, and lifted up out of it on a cross—in resurrection life and power. His words were verified to them, “ Because I live, ye shall live also ”. He is known thus to them until they are with Him in the same life where He is. Secondly, the Jewish remnant will yet own Him as their Lord and their God ; and, thirdly, millennial blessing and the bringing in of the Gentiles from the sea of nations depends (for that night they had caught nothing) upon the presence of Jesus with them, not in Royalty as in Psalm lxxii., but in all the gracious and patient and yet attractive outgoing of heart towards them, such as they had known when He first gathered them as the remnant of Israel at the beginning of His service in Galilee in the days of His flesh. Such a scene could not be foretold in the Old Testament, for Jesus had not come.

Mark the words, "On this wise shewed he himself". It was quite unique in its character, but He was the *same Jesus*, their Lord and Master. He is "the same yesterday, *to-day*, and *for ever*". So the apostle tells the remnant who believed in that day (Heb. xiii. 8). In Revelation xiv. 1-5 as the Lamb He is in company with those who 'follow *the Lamb* whithersoever he goeth". He is once more occupied *with Sion*, and the remnant there know Him as *the Lamb*, but what has been before us is in *Galilee*, the remnant are seeking to gather from the sea of (nations), but learn that apart from Him their toil is in vain. This renewed relationship with them is a lovely scene. May we find great delight in lingering over these ways of the risen Saviour.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THE determined purpose of God for the dispensation of the fullness of times is to head up all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth (Eph. i. 10). This is, I doubt not, in view of that which is eternal. Hence, in considering the ways of God in Scripture, we have to keep before our minds this *purpose* of God. The *ways* of God are varied, but they tend to one result. Perhaps among them none holds a more important place than the setting aside of Israel according to the flesh, in order that salvation might come to the Gentiles, and that the blessing of Abraham ("In thee all the nations shall be blessed") might be within their reach in Christ Jesus.

In Acts xii. a picture is given of the close of the special ministry of grace, flowing from Christ in resurrection life and glory, to the nation of Israel. Chapter xiii. then records the beginning of this mission of grace to the Gentiles through Barnabas and Saul, sent forth from Antioch by the Holy Ghost. The picture given in chapter xii. is, I believe, prophetically emblematic of that which will take place in Israel in the last days. There is a wicked and self-exalting king (Herod) reigning in Jerusalem, as there will be during the last half week of Daniel ix., yet to be fulfilled. It is said of him, "the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation [against Israel] be accomplished" (Dan. xi. 36). Herod does not go so far as that, but he allowed the glory due only to God to be addressed to himself, and the angel of the Lord immediately smote him, and he was eaten of worms and died.

At the close there will be those who are slain for the word of God and the testimony which they hold, as here Herod kills James the brother of John with the sword. There will also be a preserved remnant, here foreshadowed by the preservation of Peter from the malice of Herod, willing to please the unbelieving Jews. The preserved remnant out of all Israel is sealed with the seal of the living God by the angel from the sun-rising (compare Luke i. 78) before the storms of judgement burst (Rev. vii. 2). There is also

another remnant in chapter xiv. who are specially brought into association with the Lamb on Mount Sion. They are more connected with Jerusalem. The remarkable preservation and deliverance of Peter by angelic power will be a testimony for the persecuted remnant of the last day, even as the smiting of Herod will be a testimony as to the awful doom of apostate self-exaltation. It is brought down to the pit. The history of Judaism as given in Scripture closes thus in Acts xii.

The character of Paul's commission to the Gentiles is given by himself in Acts xxvi. 16-18. He was taken out from the people (Israel) and from the Gentiles: thus he had no links according to the flesh with either Jew or Gentile, but as one born out of due time became an official minister and witness, sent by Christ Himself to the Gentiles to open their eyes, that they might be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive remission of sins and inheritance among the sanctified by faith in the One that sent him.

But I pass on now to chapter xx., where really Paul is leaving the work among the Gentiles and is on his way to Jerusalem. From Miletus he sent for the elders of Ephesus—a city which seemed to be the very crown of his work among the Gentiles—and took his leave of them, saying that they should see his face no more. It is to them that he makes a prophetic statement as to that which would happen after his departure—that grievous wolves would come in among

them, not sparing the flock, and also that *among themselves* would rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away disciples after them. I do not enter into the *moral bearing* of these words of the apostle, nor into the charge which he gave them in consequence, but confine myself rather to the details of this close of Paul's apostolic history under the overruling hand of God. It was an epoch in the ways of God in connection with the mystery of the gospel, and He who knows the end from the beginning was behind all the details. Let us note, therefore, Paul's statement, "And now, behold, I go *bound in the spirit* unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me". All this was an *outside testimony* to the apostle, not the *direct communication* of the Holy Ghost in divine sovereignty ordering his path and labours. And herein lies the distinction which we do well to consider between a spiritual mind only and the *direct guidance* of the Spirit. We cannot read Romans ix. 1-5 without being conscious of the deeply formed spiritual affection that was in Paul's heart for Israel, his brethren according to the flesh, yet it was not a mere natural affection, but that which *was according to Christ*. He says, "I say *the truth in Christ*, and lie not". Paul in going to Jerusalem is controlled by this deeply formed affection, and by the desire to witness to Israel of the Christ he so ardently loved, and seems to disregard the Holy Ghost's witness *to him*.

In our blessed Lord and Master all was perfection in His service. He was never in a strait betwixt two. His own love for Israel—and it was His love that breathed in Paul—is just as fervent as when He wept over Jerusalem, or said, “Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do”. It is none the less because He now patiently waits, while the church is being gathered, for the day when Israel will see Him whom they pierced, and will then say, “Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord”. But the ways of the Lord are very wonderful, and doubtless His hand permitted that this resolve of His devoted servant should be carried out ; and His grace knew how to use it all, that he might gain a deeper and fuller experience of the thoughts and purposes of divine love.

Arrived at Jerusalem, the same overruling hand of the Lord was in the various happenings to His servant, and thereby he became more conformed to the sorrows and sufferings of his Lord. As it had been with Him, so it was ordered that Paul should be taken, and then fall as a prisoner of the Lord into the hands of the Gentiles. In his defence before the Jewish brethren and fathers they hear him until he recounts that in a trance in that very city of Jerusalem the Lord had said to him, “Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem : for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me”. Yet there he was again. When he quotes the Lord’s word, “Depart : for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles”, they would not hear another

word, but cried out, " Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live ! "

Has this no voice for us ? I think it has, and that my reader will follow with interest the *providential orderings* of the path of Christ's devoted servant, having become a prisoner in the hands of the Gentiles; until he reaches Rome through storm and shipwreck. I would now turn my reader's attention to a verse in Colossians i. 24. " Now," says the apostle, a prisoner in Rome, " I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body, which is the assembly." (New Trans.) Paul had doubtless suffered much in carrying out the ministry of the gospel committed to him (see 2 Tim. iii. 11), but there was a peculiarity in the sufferings that he went through at Jerusalem. I need hardly say that the atoning sufferings of Christ were not left behind by Him—He exhausted them. But in His sufferings from the hand of man there was a filled-up experience of the rancour and hatred to Himself by man, *religious after the flesh*, because He was the revelation of God in perfect love and grace to man. " For *my love* I had hatred." Yet the sorrows of death and the travail of the soul of Jesus was the birthplace of the assembly. We learn in John vi. the rejection of the Lord by Israel from His words, " Ye also have seen me, and believe not". Then His heart relieves itself by adding, " All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ; and him

that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out". As so given to Him of the Father they form *a special company for His heart's affection and comfort*, when Israel was lost to Him. This company He feeds and cherishes in a special way, giving them His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. No other company has ever had the privilege of the memorial supper of the Lord.

In his sufferings consequent on his going to Jerusalem, Paul was given by the Lord to learn *experimentally* this wonderful character of Christ's love to the assembly—a love that passes knowledge. Hence he speaks of *these* sufferings of Christ which he filled up as being on behalf of Christ's body—the assembly. That the mystery of the assembly being regarded by Christ as of Himself was made known to the apostle at his conversion we learn from the Lord's words to him, "Why persecutest thou me?" But these sufferings of which we have spoken give him a deeper experimental knowledge of the mystery, and the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians bear witness to this, while that to the Philippians testifies that to him "to live was Christ."

In this latter epistle he speaks of "being set *for the defence of the gospel*". A prisoner in bonds he was no longer proclaiming it, but he was answering for it by the way in which *he manifested Christ* in every circumstance. Nor is he disheartened; he encourages the Philippians in their fellowship with the gospel by saying, "I would have you know, brethren, that the circumstances in which I am have turned out rather to

the furtherance of the glad tidings " (New Trans.). A helpful word for us in these times of upheaval and distress.

Both in Acts xix. and in Romans xv. the apostle speaks of seeing Rome, evidently desiring to go as the free agent of the Holy Spirit's guidance, but in Acts xx. he speaks in another manner. He did not go to Jerusalem as a *free agent* of the Holy Spirit's leading, but *bound* in the spirit, and from that time he is a subject of the providential ordering of God, and reached Rome through a shipwreck. There is something analogous, I doubt not, in *the history* of the assembly. It declined immediately after the apostle's departure; even before that event they of Asia no longer walked at Paul's elevation, and at length the assembly accepted the favour and support of the civil power of the world. From that time the history of the assembly, as bearing the testimony of a heavenly Christ through this world, has been governed by the *providential ordering* of God. In the address to Sardis (Rev. iii.) Christ presents Himself as having the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, but Protestantism never availed itself of that provision, but placed its dependence on emperors and kings and state patronage. I speak of that which bears the name of 'church' before the eyes of the world in Protestant countries.

Shipwreck and storm the apostle had to pass through, and there is something akin to Peter's deliverance in Acts xii. It was not the sword of Herod, but the tumultuous upheaval below and

the darkness of the sky above. Angelic power was with Paul when "all hope that we should be saved was taken away". Then it was Paul said, "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night *the angel of God*, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee"; and Paul adds, "*I believe God*, that it shall be even as it was told me". And thus eventually Paul reached Rome.

In 2 Timothy, written, I judge, later than the three Epistles before named, Paul speaks of himself as being in bonds, because *Jesus Christ raised from the dead* was the subject of the gospel he preached—One severed from this world by death, and made higher than the heavens—and he adds, "*the word of God is not bound*". In the ways of God the history of the apostle closed as a prisoner in Rome; but the word of God would make its way. There was another thing: in his sufferings Paul had *the elect* in view. Salvation "*with eternal glory*" was secure for them in Christ Jesus; and the apostle's service closes in suffering (so like was he to his Lord) that they might obtain it.

Only one more remark need be made as to the ways of God as they are brought before us in the Acts—the fulfilment finally of the judgement pronounced on Israel, for closing their eyes to the glory of Jehovah, by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. vi. 9, 10), verified in their rejection of Jesus

(John xiii. 39-41), and pronounced by Paul (Acts xxvii. 26, 27), to which he added, "the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it". "The word of God is not bound."

ROMANS.

WE have already noticed that our Lord's entry into this world, as recorded by Matthew, was in fulfilment of Old Testament promise and prophecy. In this Epistle the apostle refers to the same truth thus: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (chap. xv. 8, 9). That ministry of Christ to the circumcision—that is, to Israel—was refused. As to this refusal, there is in Isaiah xlix. 4, the prophetic testimony of the Spirit of Christ by the prophet. "Then I said" (Messiah speaks), "I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; yet surely my judgement is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Israel, man after the flesh, was found to be incapable of seeing in Jesus the promised Son of David or the Seed of Abraham, for, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God".

Chapters ix.-xi. in Romans show that this blindness of Israel put them on the same ground as were the Gentiles. *These* were in total darkness and unbelief as to God and His Christ; and hence, if blessing came to them, it was *pure mercy* alone that visited them, "to open their eyes, that

they might be turned from *darkness to light*, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among the sanctified through faith in Jesus" (Acts xxvi. 18). So it was *the mercy of God* alone that could touch the eyes of the blind of Israel, and give them to see in Jesus their promised Saviour.

Their breakdown at Sinai, through worshipping the golden calf which they had asked Aaron to make, closed the supposition that they could be the people of God on the ground of obedience to the holy law of God. Moses then pleaded with God, "Shew me now thy way". Was there no way by which Israel could still be called 'Thy people'? The Lord replied that He would be sovereign *in mercy*. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. ix. 15). Paul quotes this answer of God to show that this sovereignty of mercy in God enabled Him to extend it to whom He would, Jew or Gentile. The form it took with the Jew had been one of long-suffering and goodness to a failed and failing people who were put back under the law, but as a schoolmaster, *up to Christ*. This long-suffering mercy bore with them until they rejected Christ and were guilty of crucifying Him.

Mercy still held the door open. Raised by God from the dead, and seated at His right hand—the last test was given to them. They had refused to believe on Jesus come to earth. Would they believe on Him as glorified at God's right hand?

The Holy Ghost bore this testimony to them. Jesus was there a Prince and Saviour for them. The stoning of Stephen, and stopping their ears to his testimony, rendered in the power of the Holy Ghost—"I see . . . the Son of man standing on the right hand of God"—closed the period of this long-suffering mercy. One other sin—forbidding to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved—filled up their guilt, for wrath to come upon them to the uttermost.

It is as having reached this climax of their history that the apostle speaks of them in these chapters of Romans. I do not follow the reasoning of the apostle, but state the conclusion to which the mind of the Spirit led him (chap xi. 31). Israel had not believed in the mercy extended to the Gentiles; they would not own that they stood upon the same ground before God as the unclean nations. Nay, in one sense they were lower down in the pit of ruin, for Gentiles had not then *sinned against long suffering mercy and goodness* as Israel had. Their hope then can only be (not in *long suffering mercy*—that they had sinned against time after time) but in *the sovereignty* of mercy existing in the blessed God Himself. Here is the passage of Scripture as given in the New Translation, "So these [Israelites] also have now not believed in your mercy in order that they also may be objects of mercy". Well may the apostle exclaim, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Thus the way is clear for the fulfilment of the unconditional promises of God to the fathers on

this ground of the sovereignty of mercy, and “so *all Israel* shall be saved”. At the present time those saved by the election of grace are added to the assembly (Acts ii. 47), but in the day of which the apostle speaks, after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, “the remnant of his [Christ’s] brethren shall *return unto the children of Israel*” (Micah v. 3). The assembly will then have its place in heaven. The immediate way of this salvation of Israel as a nation is then shown to be according to Isaiah lix. 20, “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob”. So spake Jehovah. He will come to those called by Micah “the remnant of his brethren”. But our apostle quotes from the translation of the LXX. in saying, as taught by the Spirit of God, “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (ver. 26). If the Redeemer comes out of Sion, He must first have come thither.

We have seen that the salvation of Israel as a nation takes place after the fullness of *the Gentiles* has come in. They had, as Gentiles, been grafted into the root of privilege and blessing, which once had been the portion of Israel. The privileges as possessed by Israel are stated in chapter ix. 4, 5, but the unbelieving *nation* had never possessed them in faith, though individuals such as Caleb and Joshua were blessed in believing—but unbelief could not make the faithfulness of God without effect. Israel, through unbelief, entirely failed to realise God’s intention to be glorified in

them (Isa. xlix. 3). It will be so in a coming day, and the whole earth will be filled with His glory (Num. xiv. 21). Meanwhile the Gentiles have been made partakers of the blessings of the gospel of Christ ; but they also can alone stand by faith, and the apostle prophetically views the cutting off the Gentiles from the olive tree of fatness and blessing, and the grafting in again of Israel into their own olive tree.

The new wine of the kingdom of God must have new bottles—vessels wrought by the Spirit of God—if the wine and the bottles are to be preserved. Both with unbelieving Israel and with the Gentiles the old bottles break and the wine is lost to them. It will be a blessed day for Israel when it can be said, “ Sing, O ye heavens . . . [and the assembly will already be there] for Jehovah hath redeemed Jacob, and *glorified himself in Israel* ”.

I close with a further reference to chapter xv. In verse 16 the apostle speaks thus of the grace given to him of God : “ That I should be the minister [or administrator] of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost ”. *The present visitation* of God by His gospel to the Gentiles in order to take out of them a people for His name, committed in a very special way to Paul, he here regards in a manner which gave his service the character of a sacrificial offering up of the Gentiles to God which was acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. It was thus

a foreshadowing of the future gathering in of the Gentiles, as Gentiles, and not as belonging to the assembly, but as associated with Israel. "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people" (Deut. xxxii. 43). And again, "There shall be a *root of Jesse*, and he that shall rise to reign over *the Gentiles*; *in him shall the Gentiles hope*" (Rom. xv. 12). Very different this hope from the utterance of the first head of Gentile power, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . . by *the might of my power*, and for *the honour of my majesty*?" (Dan. iv. 30). Very different also from the strivings of the peoples of to-day. In *that day* the nations of those that are saved shall walk in the light of the heavenly city, radiant with the glory of God and the Lamb. Such is the promised hope for the Gentile world.

I THESSALONIANS.

IN both of these Epistles it may be said that 'the coming' of the Lord is the prominent thought before the mind of the Spirit. It is well for us to seize the import of the term 'coming'. This is the period of *the Lord's absence* from this earth and from the midst of His people. When He was about to leave His disciples, He assured them that He was going to prepare a place for them in the Father's house, and that He would *come again* and receive them to Himself. It was a *promise*.

Again, when He was actually taken up into heaven, as they gazed upward, two men stood by them in white apparel, who said, "*Why stand*

ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so *come* in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven". In this (evidently angelic) statement we may still read the *word of promise*, though with a different thought. The word 'coming' embraces the truth of *His presence*, whereas now He is personally *absent*. In the case of His coming again to receive His own to Himself, it was promised that *where He is, there they should also be*. 1 Thessalonians iv. shows how this is accomplished. They reach His presence by being caught up to meet Him in the air, "so shall we ever be *with the Lord*". The angelic word on the Mount of Olives at Bethany speaks more of His coming back to the place from whence He was taken up. Until the stoning of Stephen the question was open whether the Lord would come back to Israel. Would they repent and believe on Jesus in glory—they had refused Him on earth—but the death of Stephen closed up such an *immediate* prospect. He looked up stedfastly into heaven, and bore witness to Jesus *there*; but they closed their ears to his testimony, and "departing to be with Christ" became the portion of the saints. The restoration of Israel, and the removal of the vail from the face of all nations, remained in abeyance, but the promise of John xiv. and the way of its accomplishment as in 1 Thessalonians iv. was still the hope of the saints. It is evident from Luke xii. and from other Scriptures that the saints of this present period were to be *always* like unto men waiting for the Lord with loins girded and lamps

burning, in readiness to open to Him immediately. There is nothing properly prophetic in this. Our portion, whether it be watching and waiting or falling asleep, is *to live together with Him*. Hence the apostle desires that the hearts of the Thessalonian believers—and ours also—may be directed into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. He is patiently waiting until the moment of the Father's purpose, when He will arise from His Father's throne, and exercise the first act of His power by taking His own to be *where He is*.

2 THESSALONIANS.

It would appear from chapter ii. of the second Epistle that the Thessalonian saints had been shaken in mind and troubled by false teachers, who pretended that “the day of the Lord *was present*”—for so it should be read. The persecutions and trials *they* were enduring were used to this end. Numberless passages in the Old Testament speak of the day of the Lord as the day when He would arise “to shake terribly the earth” (Isa. ii. 19); it comes “as a destruction from the Almighty” (chap. xiii. 6); “a day of darkness and of gloominess” (Joel ii. 2); “the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light” (Amos v. 18); “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. iv. 5). We must not confound the term “day of *the Lord*” with that of “the day of *Christ*”. The day of the Lord is the day of His intervention in power—a day during which He will subdue all things to Himself, and administer the kingdom according to God's glory;

but that day will also have the character of "the day of Christ", because He will cause everything to respond to Himself in blessing and glory, and the knowledge of God.

The apostle had stated in chapter i. that these saints who were in trial *would have rest* when the Lord Jesus would be revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, but that He would then take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the same general truth in Isaiah xxiv. and xxv. Chapter xxiv. is a development of that moment when the Lord arises to shake terribly the earth: it will "reel to and fro like a drunkard"; but "in that day" there will be the godly who will say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him" (chap. xxv. 9)—it will be the day of their salvation.

The apostle then further exhorts them by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him. It could not be the day of the Lord without the Lord's presence; He had not come, nor had the saints been gathered together to Him so as to come with Him. Moreover, there must come *an apostasy first*. Mark, it does not say before our gathering together to Him, but before the day of the Lord. The word apostasy is a very strong word, and is not the same as in Revelation ii. 5, where leaving the first love is called by the Lord *a fall*: but apostasy is positive *revolt* from God and His Christ. Things in that which bears the name of the assembly may *fall* very low, but the apostle here is predicting *an*

open revolt by one called the "man of sin". He obtains a place both among the Jews and among nominal Christians, against whom the door had been shut by Christ with the words, "I know you not".

John speaks of this same personage as the Antichrist. He is a liar, for he DENIES Jesus to be the Christ. This would be his character among the Jews, while among the Gentiles he denies the revelation of God peculiar to Christianity—the Father and the Son. In the Book of Revelation (chap. xiii. 11) he is regarded as a beast (one that assumes the royalty that belongs to Christ) rising out of 'the earth'—the special sphere of God's dealings. As Christ was ever in subjection to His Father, so this beast is in professed subjection to Satan's throne, on which the Roman beast is seated. At the end (chap. xvi. 13) he is spoken of as a false prophet. A true prophet is one who speaks and acts *for God*—the false prophet wrought miracles *before the beast* (chap. xix. 20). Peter in a general way warns the saints (specially the Jewish saints) as to false prophets or teachers who would arise among them, their real object being the denial of the Lord that bought them.

The blasphemous opposition of this "man of sin" culminates in an exaltation of self above all that is called God, or that is an object of reverence, "so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God". Though the *moral elements* of this self-exaltation may have been present in Popery, yet we have to remember that prophecy relates to the course of

God's dealings *upon earth*, and there Jerusalem is always the centre round which prophetic events circle. Hence we must link this passage with that of Daniel xi. 36. There it is said of "the king", who at the end will exalt himself to the throne of Jehovah in Jerusalem, that "he shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods". We find that this self-exaltation by men began with their building the tower of Babel; their purpose was that it should reach *up to heaven*, and men would *make a name for themselves*.* God's prediction with regard to their attempt was that nothing would be restrained from them which they had imagined to do. Of the king of Babylon Isaiah thus speaks, "Thou hast said in thine heart, *I will ascend into heaven*, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds [the clouds are the seat of heavenly authority]; *I will be like the most High*". Thus we trace this spirit of self-exaltation from the moment when Satan said to Adam "Ye shall be as gods"; developed in the building of Babel—in the pride and blasphemy of the king of Babylon—until it culminates in the "man of sin"—the lawless one—whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and annul with the brightness of His coming (compare Isa. xxx. 33).

* It is to Him who humbled Himself to death that God has given a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

It has often been pointed out that the coming of this 'lawless one' is in imitation of Him who was *approved of God* by miracles and wonders and signs; but with the man of sin, his coming is according to *the working of Satan*, with all power and signs and *lying* wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness in those that perish, because they received not the truth *in the love of it*. Hence they are given over by God to the delusion of Satan—can anything be more awful?—that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. The object of the apostle here, as led of the Spirit, is not to follow the actings or the doom of this man of sin, but while showing to the saints his character, to prove to them that he had not come. On the contrary, he felt bound to give thanks as to the Thessalonians, and to exhort them to stand fast in that which they had been taught, whether by word or the apostle's Epistle.

It is beautiful to see how he carries them away from being troubled as to the character of their tribulations by exhorting them to pray that by the apostle the word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified (chap. iii. 1). It was evident that the *present action* of the Spirit in bearing witness to the fullness of the salvation in Christ, and the purpose of God in making that salvation known, was going on, and not the actings of the 'man of sin'. It is doubtless this presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, and His testimony to the name of Jesus, which hinders the revelation of this wicked one. Then the long-

suffering of God is salvation, and Christ patiently waits on the Father's throne until the day of grace is over. Hence the apostle further desires that their hearts might be directed into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

I AND 2 TIMOTHY.

LET my reader continually bear in mind that the prophetic word has greatly for its object that which has been called "a ministration of testimony" to sustain faith, when *the vessel* of the testimony with which God has been pleased to entrust it, has failed in that trust, and has departed from its original standing. Moses' song in Deuteronomy xxxii. is a sample of this departure on the part of Israel, prophetically declared by the Spirit of God before it took place; but it most beautifully begins with this announcement on the part of Moses, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew . . . Because I will publish the name of the Lord . . . He is *the Rock*, his work is perfect . . . just and right is he". There is no failure on His part. What an unspeakable comfort!

In 1 Timothy the apostle regards the assembly of the living God as still holding its position as "the pillar and ground [or support] of the truth"—the house of God in which "the mystery of godliness" was enshrined. The two cardinal points in this mystery were that *God* had been manifested *in flesh* (compare John i. 14), and that *Man* in the person of Christ had been received up into glory.

Hence we do not get exactly in this Epistle a ministration of testimony to sustain faith, but a very clear statement that the dispensation of God is *in faith* (chap. i. 4), for so it should be read. But when we come to chapter iv. there is a prophetic warning, that in the latter times "*some shall depart from the faith*, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons". These doctrines would inculcate a spurious sanctity of the flesh—God's creatures not being received from His hands *as good* (Gen. i. 31), the soul not being in free and gracious intercourse with God by means of prayer and the word. By such intercourse God's creatures are sanctified to us.

I do not touch more on the scope of the first Epistle, but pass on to the second, where the failure of the assembly to maintain its character as the pillar and support of the truth is brought before us; and hence there is a testimony in the four chapters to four stages of decline. In chapter i. 15 Paul had to say "All they which are in Asia", where he had laboured so abundantly (Acts xix. 10), "be turned away *from me*". They no longer stood on the elevation where Paul's gospel had placed them.

In chapter ii. there were "profane and vain babblings", which increased to more ungodliness (ver. 16). The form it then took was the statement that the resurrection was past already, and here again *the faith* of some was overthrown. If the resurrection was past, there could be no faith in a coming Saviour. In this chapter also the apostle likens that which was set as the vessel of

testimony to Christ gone up into glory, unto a great house in which were vessels to honour, but, alas ! also to dishonour.

In chapter iii. the prophetic testimony anticipates " the last days ", when *men* (he would not call them Christians, though they had a " form of godliness ") would have the characteristics of the ungodly Gentiles (Rom. i. 28-32), and would be " lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God ". They would deny the real power of godliness. Man was not created for sinful self-pleasing, but through grace for that glory into which Christ has entered as the Forerunner of those who by faith seek to follow where He is gone.

In chapter iv. the declension culminates in men turning away their ears from the truth, and they themselves *turned to myths*—they go back to the idolatrous imaginations of the corrupted human mind among the heathen.

In such a state of things let us now note the prophetic ministry addressed by the apostle to Timothy, for there is no intimation of the assembly (though still responsible to maintain the character of " the pillar and support of the truth ") being recovered so as to be any guarantee for the truth of God. The apostle dwells on that which is " in Christ Jesus ". These words occur seven times ; and first, in chapter i.

1. Paul speaks of himself there as an apostle " according to the *promise of life* which is *in Christ Jesus* ". He does not here speak as one who had a dispensation committed to him, but falls back on that which could only subsist in Christ

Jesus. In chapter iii. 8 the folly of the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres, was detected when it became a question of *giving life*. The believer's life is Christ (Col. iii. 4). The mere professor is lifeless, and hence fruits of life—putting off the old man and putting on the new—cannot take place. But however weak the spark of life in the believer may be, *yet it is there*.

“ The fire Thy love has kindled
 Shall never be put out ;
 The Spirit keeps it burning,
 Though dimmed by things without.”

2. (Chap. i. 9.) The believer has not only life, but he has been *saved* according to God's “ purpose and grace, given us *in Christ Jesus* before the world began”. Promise is the expression of purpose, hence all is Yea and Amen in Him.

3. (Chap. i. 13.) An outline of sound words heard of the apostle was to be held fast, not *in the letter*, but *livingly* in faith and love which is *in Christ Jesus*. He is the Spirit of all Scripture, and it is in Scripture that the outline of sound words is preserved *to us*.

4. (Chap. ii. 1, 2.) If all in Asia had turned away from Paul, Timothy is exhorted to be strong in *the grace that is in Christ Jesus*. How had Paul known its *exceeding abundance*? (1 Tim. i. 14); and how had it given energy to him in proclaiming the glad tidings entrusted to him? (Rom. xv. 19). The glad tidings, and he who preached them, were in reproach, but *the grace that is in Christ Jesus was the source of strength*. Hence Paul looks for the *continuance* of the testimony. Timothy was to commit that which he

had heard of Paul *to faithful witnesses*, who should be able to teach others also. There is thus a line of living testimony continued. Paul, his son Timothy, faithful men, and others.

Thus in the days of the declension of that which was set as the pillar and support of the truth, there is for living witnesses the outline of sound words in the Scripture, and the grace that is in Christ Jesus. My reader may also turn to Psalm lxxviii. 5, 6, for a similar line of witness in the Old Testament—"our fathers", "their children", "the generation to come", and "*their* children".

5. (Chap. ii. 10.) "*The salvation which is in Christ-Jesus, with eternal glory.*" This stands in contrast to *temporal* salvation such as Israel knew—it was a salvation which lay beyond death in the power of resurrection life. Jude speaks of the Lord "having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not". This is a warning to mere professors, but Paul, whose gospel was founded on *Jesus Christ . . . raised from the dead*, endured all things *for the elect's sake*—no trouble or bonds made him faint—that they might obtain this salvation in Christ Jesus—how sure it is there!—*with eternal glory*. How like to Christ was Paul in this!

6. (Chap. iii. 12.) Living "*godly in Christ Jesus*" when there was the form of godliness, but the power denied. This would certainly bring with it persecution in some form, for it involves refusal of the lifeless "*form of godliness*", the

Satanic imitation which beguiles the hearts of the ungodly.

7. (Chap. iii. 15.) “The *holy scriptures* which are able to make thee wise unto salvation *through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*” Here we have the value to the man of God (one who stands for God) of *the divine* testimony of Scripture. Timothy’s proficiency from a child was in the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter tells us that the prophets who wrote them inquired and searched diligently as to the salvation which the simplest believer in the Lord Jesus now knows, and that when they prophesied of such grace it was for us christians. Hence Paul adds, “through faith which is in Christ Jesus” as giving the key to those Old Testament writings. It is even so now; the understanding of divinely breathed truths depends upon unhesitating faith in Him who is the Spirit of it all.

This leads the apostle to speak of all Scripture as “given by inspiration of God”, and Paul’s writings had that character—they were *Scripture* (2 Peter iii. 15, 16). They testify of Jesus (John v. 39), and through them the man of God is made perfect—fully equipped and furnished to all good works.

The reader must not expect *an exposition* of the truth contained in this valuable Epistle, except so far as it bears the character of prophetic testimony and warning, so that faith may not give way in difficult times. It has been remarked by a well-known servant of the Lord, that everything committed to the hands of men by God has always

failed in their hands. Notwithstanding *He* does not give up His purpose as to it, but in grace *makes it good in a remnant*, called out and sustained by the prophetic testimony of the Spirit of Christ in Old Testament times, and by *Christ Himself* in Christian or church times, through His *associating that remnant with Himself* by the power of the Holy Ghost. Isaiah characterized the remnant of his day (and his book may be called the book of a remnant), as those who feared Jehovah, and obeyed the voice of His Servant—that is, Christ (Isa. 1. 10). “The Lord knoweth them that are his” denotes the remnant in this epistle; they call on the Lord out of a pure heart, as those who depart from iniquity.

We have traced the resource of the remnant in this Epistle so far as it is found in Christ Jesus, but there is also a resource to be found in Him *as Lord*. He has been “made both Lord and Christ” (Acts ii. 36). It might be thought that failure had come in, because the ministry of *the Lord* from the right hand of God had ceased. It had not ceased, for mark how it comes out in this Epistle. Nothing can be more sustaining to faith in difficult times than that everything has been put into His hands as Lord, and that He certainly holds the reins, and never gives them up. Therefore Timothy was not to be ashamed of “the testimony of our Lord”, nor, *says the apostle*, “of me HIS prisoner”—he does not regard himself as the prisoner of *men* (compare Eph. iv. 1). He speaks also of the Lord dispensing mercy, and of *faithful* Onesiphorus finding it

in that day. Again, he looks to the Lord to give to Timothy, and surely to us, *understanding* in difficult times.

“*The Lord* knows them that are his”, and every one that names that name is charged “to depart from iniquity”. To own Jesus as Lord is the confession of a Christian, but it had become necessary to speak of those who called on the Lord “*out of a pure heart*”. Jesus is Lord *to the glory of God the Father*. Further, Paul calls to Timothy’s mind the persecutions and afflictions which he had endured in that part of the world from whence Timothy came, adding that it was *the Lord* who had delivered him out of them all. He also would reward one who withstood Paul’s words according to his works; and *He* it was who had stood with the apostle and strengthened him when before Cæsar, that by him *the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear*. All was in the Lord’s hands, who would deliver him from every evil work and preserve him unto *His heavenly kingdom*. Finally he adds to Timothy, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit”, and surely that remains for the “man of God” now.

I PETER.

IN the apostle Peter’s Epistles God’s *holy government* of His people comes before us. Israel as a nation were well acquainted with it, and it is to the dispersion of Israel among the Gentiles—those born again of the incorruptible seed of the word of God—that Peter writes. Under that

holy government, Lo-ammi (not my people), and Lo-ruhamah (not mercied) had been written of *the nation itself*, and to this Peter refers in chapter ii. 10 of his first Epistle, having previously (in ver. 9) quoted Exodus xix. 5, 6 as applicable to this new-born generation. Then in verse 10, Hosea ii. 23 is alluded to, as also verse 1, "Say ye unto your *brethren*" (for so the Spirit of Christ in the prophet calls them (see Matt. xii. 49) ; "Ammi [my people] and to your sisters, Ruhamah [mercied]".

In chapter iii. 9, the apostle speaks of this remnant as "called, that ye should inherit blessing" (see Num. vi. 22-27), and then quotes Psalm xxxiv. 12-16. In that psalm it is the voice of One who could "bless the Lord at all times", who says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord". The Psalmist then declares the moral judgement of God—His eyes "are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil". There Peter stops, for the time had not come to cut off the remembrance of evil-doers from the earth.

In the end of chapter iii. it is remarkable that the apostle does not refer to the salvation out of Egypt by the passage of the Red Sea, to which Paul refers in Romans vi. and 1 Corinthians x., but to the holy government of God in the flood when *the end of all flesh* came before God and in accord with this, Peter further says in chapter iv. 7, "But *the end of all things* is at hand". John Baptist also had referred to the advent of Christ

as bringing in *complete* judgement. "The axe is laid unto *the root* of the trees"; there would no longer be pruning the branches. And again, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will *thoroughly* purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire". In the cross of Christ the end of all flesh is completely declared.

Now the antitype of this judgement of the flood was baptism—not the sweeping away of the filth of the flesh as in the flood, but the answer to the demand before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Christ. He had been *put to death in flesh*, but made alive in Spirit, so it was no longer Christ known after the flesh—(in the flesh He had suffered, and suffered for sins)—but as living in the Spirit; and it was this Spirit of Christ, before He became Man and died and rose, that went and preached in Noah, during one hundred and twenty years of longsuffering patience, to those whose spirits are now in prison.

It will be seen how all this is connected with the holy ways of God in government, Christ Himself having personally entered into these holy ways and become the Centre of them. Therefore we have in chapter iv. 5 the statement that there was One *ready to judge* the quick (the living) and the dead—all judgement having been committed to the Son. Men will be judged by a Man, One who has died and been raised from the dead, and is gone into heaven, all powers and authorities being subjected to Him. But though He is *ready* to judge the quick and the dead, yet, as in Noah's

day, the long-suffering of God is salvation (2 Pet. iii. 15). This brings me to the prophetic statement that in the ways of God the time had *already come* for judgement to begin at the house of God (chap. iv. 17). It is an allusion to Ezekiel ix. 6, "Begin at my sanctuary". What should we expect to find in the house or sanctuary of God but righteousness and His fear? Yet the wise man said, "I saw . . . the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there". We see in Ananias and Sapphira's lie the attempt of Satan to introduce iniquity into the place of righteousness. It was detected then and judged by the Holy Ghost acting in Peter, but evidently in after days iniquity unpurged had got into the house of God—a place of which it was written, "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, *for ever*" (Psa. xciii. 5). God must judge in His own house if evil is allowed, for He is the "holy, holy, holy" One. The apostle continues, "If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not *the gospel of God?*" For God is not now speaking in the way of demand from men, but *by the gospel of His grace*. "And if the righteous *scarcely* be saved", that is, with difficulty, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Peter is not here speaking of the salvation of the soul by sovereign grace, but of being saved out of the difficulties and dangers which Satan strews in the path of those confessing Christ's name. This holy dealing of God with His people is spoken of in Amos iii. 2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will punish you

for all your iniquities ". If God begins with that which bears His name, are the ungodly and sinners to go unpunished ? " Ye shall not be unpunished," said the Lord by Jeremiah, "for I will call for a sword upon *all the inhabitants of the earth*, saith the Lord of hosts " (Jer. xxv. 29). Such is the holy government of God. It is the failure of God's people in their testimony for Him which at length brings judgement on the world.

2 PETER. JUDE.

I TURN now to the second Epistle of Peter. The apostle first speaks of all things that pertain to life and godliness having been bestowed on Christians by *divine power*, for the flesh can do nothing. If they were diligent in their knowledge of Christ, an entrance would be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The apostle had made known to these Christians the power and coming of the Lord in His kingdom, having been a witness of it on the holy mount. The vision there seen confirmed the word of prophecy as to the coming glories of that kingdom. But the transfiguration of the Lord was also a vision of the *personal glory* of the Son of man. His face then shone as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. Besides that, the voice from heaven proclaimed the Father's delight in His beloved Son. It is to *Him*, therefore, that Peter directs them. He desires that their hearts should be illumined by the day-dawn (see Luke i. 78), and Christ Himself as the Morning Star arise there.

The word of prophecy showed the darkness around them, but their hearts would be lighted up by the hope of Christ.

The word of prophecy spoken *by holy men of God* leads the apostle in chapter ii. to refer to the fact of *false prophets* having been among the people of God in old times, and he prophetically warns them that false teachers would arise who would privily bring in destructive heresies. They would begin by denying Christ's rights over them, refusing subjection to Him. The careful reader of Scripture must have noticed the similarity between this chapter and the Epistle of Jude, but it has been pointed out that Peter here speaks of *wickedness*, while Jude dwells on *apostasy*. One example will show the difference. Peter speaks of the angels that *sinned*, while Jude speaks of them as *not having kept their first estate*, having abandoned their own dwelling. They are those called "sons of God" in Genesis vi. (see also Job. i. 6 as to the title "sons of God").

In Adam we see the beginnings both of sin and of apostasy. In eating of the forbidden tree *he sinned*, but he likewise left the position in which he had been placed by God, and we rightly speak of it as "*The fall*". Peter passes on from the angels that sinned to the judgement of the flood, as does Genesis vi. It was brought in on the world of *the ungodly*, for *the wickedness of man* was great upon the earth. Peter also speaks of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah being overthrown as an example to those who afterwards should *live ungodly*, while Jude links the judge-

ment of those cities with the apostasy of the angels that fell.

While Peter speaks prophetically of false teachers being among those to whom he wrote, Jude speaks of ungodly men having already "crept in *unawares*" among the saints—such as were turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, denying that a Master was over them—our Lord Jesus Christ. In both Epistles they are spoken of as despising lordship, and as having no reverence for that which God has set in dignity. I do not enter further into these details of wickedness and apostasy, as I only desire to point out the salient features of each Epistle as a help to the reading of the Epistles themselves.

I might here recall to the reader that in the Epistles of the apostle John he speaks of those *who went out* from the apostolic company into the world (1 John ii. 19; iv. 1; 2 John 7). It is a strong contrast to *abiding* in that which was from the beginning as the apostles declared it. The result is that the world has been leavened with a corrupted Christianity (so called); and on the other hand Christians have been leavened by the world creeping in among them, and this Jude speaks of.

The manner in which the false prophet Balaam is mentioned in both Epistles is striking. Balaam was one who used the knowledge he had of God to further, if he could, the work of Satan, and gain a reward for so doing. He speaks of himself as having his eyes open, and as having heard the words of God, and seen the vision of the Almighty,

and yet he forsook the right way, through loving the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity and madness by a dumb ass speaking with a man's voice. Jude couples Balaam with Cain and Core (Korah). It has been called the genealogy of apostasy. Cain represents the infidel religiousness of the flesh ; Balaam—spiritual wickedness—one who combined an outward knowledge of God with divination and enchantment in order to curse God's people and gain reward. Core represents the self-exaltation through which man endeavours to assume the rights of Christ as King and Priest. This last leads to full-blown apostasy and involves swift destruction.

The second chapter of Peter's second Epistle concludes with the prophetic warning concerning those who, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein and overcome through the corrupt teaching of these false prophets, and return to wallowing in the mire ; the latter end is worse than the beginning. I need hardly say that a sheep of Christ's is not a washed sow.

Chapter iii. speaks of "*scoffers*", those who say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" It is the infidel materialism which believes only in that which is *apparent*. Hebrews xi. 3 refutes such a notion, telling us that seen things were not made of *things which do appear* (phenomena), but that the worlds were framed by *the word of God*.

These mockers say that all things *continue* as they were from the beginning of the creation.

Why do they continue at all in spite of the fact of God having been provoked continually—the greatest provocation of all being the murder of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ? We are told in Genesis viii. 22 that after Jehovah had smelled the sweet savour of Noah's sacrifice, He said in His heart, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease". It was a figure of the sweet odour of Christ's offering of Himself to God, and hence we still have the benefit of God's covenant with this earth. Secondly, they are willingly ignorant of the great *moral fact*, before mentioned, that the heavens and earth of old were created by the *word of God*. Men may materialize, but this moral fact is fully seen by faith in Genesis i. and afterwards established in Scripture. "*He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast*" (Psa. xxxiii. 9). This is no matter of scientific knowledge, but the declaration of God.

God dwells in light unapproachable, but He puts Himself in communication with man by *His word*, and this is infinite grace. He is known through His word. It was even so with the Lord Jesus. He was only really known by His words (John viii. 25). Jesus said to the Jews, "Ye also have *seen me*, and believe not" (John vi. 36). In the well-known verse, John v. 24, He said with a double "Amen", "He that *heareth my word*, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life". How often did He say, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*". Peter also

speaks in his first Epistle of those to whom he wrote as "born again of the incorruptible seed of *the living and abiding word of God*". Believe it, my reader! The Lord Jesus is coming; and, mark, it is *a promise* and not a threat. So also with the passing away of the heavens and earth that are now, it is to make way for the new heavens and earth which we look for *according to promise*. The world of Noah's day passed away by the flood. That catastrophe is a witness to men of *the verity of the word of God*. It is *by that word*, not by the supposed imperishable character of matter, that the heavens and earth that are now are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition* of ungodly men; their passing away will bring in "the day of God"—the day of eternity—when *God shall be all in all* (1 Cor. xv. 28). It is not a question of the stability of matter, but of *the rest of God* in a world of glory recovered to Himself by His own Son.

It remains to call the reader's attention to that which might look as if the Lord were slack concerning *His promise*. He is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish,* but that all should come to repentance. A thousand years is with Him as one day, and one day as a thousand years. The ministry of this period of long-suffering was not committed to Peter but to Paul. Paul it is who was given to open out *the mysteries* connected with this present period, while Christ is hidden in the heavens. He shows us the

*The words 'perdition' and 'perish' are kindred words.

portion which belongs to the saints as united to Christ now He is there, while Peter carries us forward in *the ways of God* to the new heavens and earth, where righteousness will *dwell*. Finally, he exhorts us to diligence “*that ye may be found of him*”, for He is surely coming, “in peace, without spot and blameless”. This period of long-suffering is for us the time to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

To return to Jude: he likewise speaks of mockers *in the last time*, who walk after their own lusts; the faith once delivered *to the saints* is lost to them. But it is said of them, “These be they *who separate themselves*”. Isaiah lxxv. 5 speaks of the same class, those “which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou”. Jude describes them as sensual (natural), not having the Spirit. The sanctification of the Spirit would make them lowly instead of being those who assert themselves. They would build themselves up on their most holy faith, *praying in the Holy Ghost*. It is interesting to note the only two places in Scripture where praying in the Spirit is *directly* mentioned. Paul, in the energy of a Joshua who led Israel into the promised land, exhorts the saints to stand where grace had set them in Christ in the heavenly places, “praying with all prayer and supplication *in the Spirit*”; while Jude in the days of apostasy exhorts to prayer, also in the Holy Ghost, as those who were in the current of the Spirit’s thoughts, and also to keep themselves in the love of God—that is, abiding in the sense of His unchanging

love—looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

It is good to note Jude's closing verses. "Of some"—some of those who were led astray by those walking after their own lusts—"have compassion, making a difference"; and others, who like Lot make their home in the midst of abounding corruption, are to be saved with fear, pulling them out of the fire, as was Lot, hating the garment spotted by the flesh.

The doxology with which Jude closes is in keeping with the subject of his Epistle. "Unto him that is able *to keep you from falling* [or stumbling], and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." What a blessed contrast to the abounding apostasy of which our apostle speaks! To Him be the glory.

THE REVELATION.

It is so called because it is really *an unveiling* of the final issue of God's ways upon earth, when every testimony committed to man had failed. It discloses prophetically the failure of the assembly in its responsible position upon earth as set in the light of an opened heaven and of a glorified Christ. (The Epistle to the Hebrews opens out this light to Christians with a heavenly calling.) Christ is presented as "the *Faithful Witness*" in the salutation to the seven assemblies in Asia, as also in the special address to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea. He is "the faithful and true witness", and He is the One who in faithfulness and truth will close up the ways and dealings

of God, of which we have the beginning in Genesis. The cross was the *moral solution* of those ways, while this book gives God's *public answer* in judgement to the havoc which Satan has wrought and to the rebellion of man in slavery to Satan and sin.

Hence what is of striking interest in this entirely prophetic book is the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ comes before the reader under various titles and in various forms and attitudes. The title 'Lord' is chiefly used in the sense of the Jehovah of the Old Testament (see chap. i. 8). We also recognize in this book that the divine titles of the Old Testament are applied to the Lord Jesus, save that the title 'Most High' is not thus used. This title pertains to the supreme God as the possessor of heaven and earth; yet in the mighty angel come down *from heaven* in chapter x. we surely recognize One who claims *the earth and sea* as *His possession*, though He is not spoken of as Most High; He places His foot on both as One having a title to them.

All this connects this book with Old Testament prophecy, but the testimony of God, given by the Spirit of Christ in the prophetic Scriptures of old, reposes in this book in 'Jesus Christ' Himself, and was entrusted to a *Christian prophet* as a servant of Jesus Christ. Hence the one assembly of God united to Christ in heaven is not before the mind of the Spirit of prophecy. It is written to the seven assemblies in Asia. The one assembly of God gathered together on earth, and responsible to give light for a heavenly

Christ, is thus represented. The Lord's own words (Luke viii. 16) give the character of a light-bearer. "No man when he hath lighted a candle covereth it with a vessel . . . but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light."

Furthermore, although he wrote, as all Scripture is written, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, yet the communications of Jesus to His servant John are made by "*His* [Christ's] angel" (ver. 1). And so in the last chapter Jesus says, "I Jesus have sent *mine* angel to testify unto you these things in the assemblies". If it is permitted that we go through this book, we shall, I trust, be very conscious of being brought into contact with another world of *visions and revelations*, and consequently of angelic ministry and communication. John "bare record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ—**all things that he saw*". Visions passed before him, but they were visions that carried with them the authority and truth of "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ".

The seven stars in the right hand of Christ are said to be the *angels* of the seven assemblies: that is, the mystic representatives of heavenly *light and order*; the seven candlesticks are the seven assemblies. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "Walk as *children of light*"; to the Colossians he wrote, "joying and beholding *your order*". And again to the Thessalonians, "Ye are all the *children of light*".

* 'And' should be omitted.

If we now look at the titles of Christ in the salutation to the seven assemblies (chap. i. 4, 5), He is spoken of as "the faithful witness", "the first-begotten of the dead", and "the prince of the kings of the earth". Every testimony for God has failed in the hands of men, but it has been maintained in all its integrity by "the faithful witness". He is also the beginning of a new generation born out of death, and Ruler of all authorities on earth; the powers that be are ordained of God. But He has been set over every principality and power, therefore the path of wisdom for kings is to "Kiss the Son" (Psa. ii. 12). He is not here presented as Head of the assembly—the One from whom grace flows; but directly He is mentioned in those other characters, the saints of the assembly utter their own appreciation of Him, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever". That is how *they* regard Him.

In vision the prophet saw Him as One like to the Son of man, as in Daniel vii. 13, only that here he has not to do with Gentile power, but with the assemblies in their responsibility to give light down here for a rejected but glorified Christ. As so set they come under the judicial eyes of the Son of man, to whom all judgement has been committed (John v. 27). His clothing and aspect all bespeak that He is exercising judgement in the way of discrimination, though

the assemblies of Thyatira, Sardis, and especially Laodicea are threatened with the *execution* of judgement. The majesty and glory of His person and appearance cause the prophet to fall at His feet as dead. Flesh and blood, even in the disciple whom Jesus loved, cannot stand unsupported in the presence of His divine glory; but the right hand of this glorious Son of man, and the words, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades", speak of One who has travelled in His strength through death into resurrection life and glory. John is thus enabled to write for Christ in a book, in order to send it to the seven assemblies named. It is important for us here to bear in mind John's position—an *exile* in Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, and hence a companion of his brethren in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of *Jesus Christ*. It was not the bright gospel day, but, as we shall see, a day of decline. In Spirit he was in the blessedness of the Lord's day—the day on which Jesus went out from the lower parts of the earth in resurrection life and power; but he is *called back* by a voice *behind him* to look with Christ at things in the assemblies on earth. He is to write the things that he had seen—Christ inspecting the assemblies; the things that are, that is, the seven assemblies (chaps. ii., iii.); and the things that are after the assemblies in their history on earth (chap. iv. 1).

I do not here go into *the detail* of the addresses to the assemblies. We have to remember that the seven states described were existing in John's day. It is no church history written by man, but *as seen by Christ*. Hence we have His judgment of the state which characterized the assembly, as set to give light for Christ. The number seven shows that the defection is complete, whether as *then* being under the eye of Christ, or as consecutively developed while the assembly holds its position as light-bearer for Christ down here. That they were '*golden*' candlesticks speaks to us of their original standing in the eye of Christ.

Let us look at these various states as seen by Christ, remembering with thankfulness that He is ever mindful of the household which He left down here on His departure to His Father. It is His great interest. This should also beget in us a seriousness and watchfulness as we are consciously brought under His eyes in this prophetic book—"eyes as a flame of fire". It is with Him *we* have to do.

In Ephesus there is outwardly correct walk, but waning affection for Christ: "thou hast left thy first love"—it is called *a fall*.

In Smyrna there is tribulation and poverty, allowed by Christ in order to quicken love, when it had waned as in Ephesus.

In Pergamos the cessation of persecution had led to a settling down, so as to be at ease in the world "where Satan's throne is".

It has been remarked that '*prophecy*' recalls those to whom it is addressed to the truth of the

position in which they had been put by grace, while it also reveals the determinate purpose of God, which He will accomplish most surely in Christ, and even down here by making it good in an elect remnant. In the three first assemblies there is a call to repentance addressed to *the assembly* through its angel. There is also the summons to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, *before* the promise is made to the overcomer. Repentance would lead the overcomer (be it the assembly or the individual) to seek to revert to the original position.

In the four assemblies which we have now to consider, the call to hear the Spirit's voice comes *after* the promises made to the overcomer. This indicates that the assembly thus addressed had grown dull of hearing, and that overcomers only would listen to the voice of Christ by the Spirit. Hence the four last are directed to the coming of the Lord, and to the promises connected therewith. In Thyatira, Balaam's doctrine (*held* by some in Pergamos) had taken form in a prophetess—the form of *systematic evil*—teaching had resulted in seduction to illicit spiritual connection with the world and into idolatry, the worship of the creature. Hence there was “a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters”, born of this alliance. Consequently a remnant is now addressed: “Unto *you* I say, *the rest* [or remnant] in Thyatira”. They were not to indulge in ecclesiastical pretence, but, as becoming a remnant, to hold fast that which they had until Christ came. In our Lord's day the remnant knew the Shepherd's voice and

followed Him. It is not difficult to discern that which is conveyed by the name 'Jezebel'. Ahab sold himself to do evil, *stirred up by his wife Jezebel*. So the civil power fell under the influence of that which professed to speak for God, and murdered the saints of Christ.

We come now to Sardis. The character in which Christ speaks to the angel of the assembly there, points to there having been *a fresh work of God*. He speaks as having the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (these latter are not said to be in His right hand, as if for use by Him, but He had them). We can recognize in the Reformation this fresh work of God. Protestantism was the outcome of it, a system free from the evils of Thyatira, but dependent on kings and emperors for support, and not on the plenitude of the Spirit's energy and guidance that Christ had for Sardis. Protesting against evil is not being in the power of good. Hence Christ's word to Sardis is: "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead". A solemn word to a mere professor. The Reformation was a living work of God. Protestantism is what that work became in the hands of men. Hence it will be treated by the Lord in the same way as the world, and will have to meet Christ as a thief comes, and not in the hope of the Morning Star.

The character in which Christ presents Himself to Philadelphia has nothing *official* in it. It is what *He is* personally, and only those, I judge, who have a remnant spirit are able to apprehend and appreciate it: "He that is holy, he that is

true". Further, there is in Him that which is a contrast to the plannings of men: He has "the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth". Then He adds, "Behold, I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut". The little strength they had brought them into touch with the effectual service of the Lord in connection with the testimony committed to the assembly—His word and His name. It is an allusion to Isaiah xxii., where *the scheming and energies of men* were put forth to secure the city of God from the enemy, but they looked not to "the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago". Moreover, the one who was over the house of David was a self-seeking and self-glorifying servant, neither caring for the city because it was God's, nor for His people. He was set aside by God to make room for Eliakim (God shall establish), upon whom should be hung all the glory of his father's house (compare 2 Cor. i. 20, 21).

There is also (Rev. iii. 9) (as in the closing chapters of Isaiah) the setting aside of those professing to be God's people, regarded here by the Lord as the synagogue of Satan, and the owning by Him of those who had kept His word and had not denied His name. His word had been kept as the word of His patience, and because of it, He would keep them from the hour of temptation about to come on the whole habitable earth, to try those who were earth-dwellers, those who morally belong to the place from whence "the

holy and the true " had been rejected. Here the Lord says, " I come *quickly* ", and they are exhorted to hold fast what they had, " that no one take thy crown ". Their crown was that which betokened their special association with the Lord.

To the angel of the assembly of the Laodiceans the Lord presents Himself as " the Amen, the faithful and true witness ". Why so ? It showed that the assembly had been unfaithful as to the testimony committed to its keeping, and hence the Lord presents Himself as the verification of all the testimony and the ways of God ; and then as " the beginning of the creation of God ". He begins in resurrection everything anew for God. How, then, does this faithful Lord regard this assembly—for it still had that name ? What has He to say to it ? " I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot "—" lukewarm "—a condition which was nauseous to Him, and the assembly would be disowned, about to be spued out of His mouth. Man has used Christianity to enrich himself in this world, but it is Christianity without Christ, for He is outside standing at the door and knocking. They said they had need of nothing. The heart of Christ is always open to need, but the self-sufficiency that is indifferent to Him He will spue out of His mouth. Up to the last moment He knocks. If any will hear His voice, He will come in *to him*, and sup with him, " and he with me ". Mark how individual it is. His love to the assembly makes Him linger at the door, as well as rebuke and chasten. Happy it is for the one who listens.

It remains now to say a word as to the overcomers in each of the assemblies. The promises made to them put the soul into communion with that which the assembly *possesses in Christ*; they assure the heart of Christ's unfailing and unfaltering love. To be reminded of what the saint possesses in Him is good at any time, but specially good when the soul needs to be recovered to Himself. He is the *Tree* of life in the midst of the paradise of God. To eat of that is to find in Him divine delight, satisfaction and rest.

To Smyrna a *crown* of life is promised. The overcomer here might apparently be overcome of death for faithfulness to Christ, but there death's power stops, and then comes the joy of having Christ as the crown of life which death cannot touch.

The 'hidden manna' is promised to the overcomer in Pergamos. It refers to the golden pot of manna—"God's treasured store"—laid up in the ark. It speaks of *His appreciation* of the One who humbled Himself, in order to put Himself and His grace within the reach of His people. God delights to feed His saints with that which is so precious to Himself—a humbled Christ. Further, Christ gives a white stone, having a special name written on it unknown to others. Jacob was known to God as 'Israel'. It speaks of precious links formed with Christ as known of Him.

In Thyatira the Lord associates the overcomer with His coming power over the nations, *to shepherd* them with *a rod of iron*. It is compulsory subjec-

tion—in contrast to Psalm xxiii.—their power being shattered like the fragments of a potter's vessel; but if they are beaten small as the dust and subdued, it is that Christ *may give thanks to Jehovah in their midst* (Psa. xviii. 42, 49). That is the kingdom glory shared with Christ; but above and beyond that is the promise of the Morning Star—the knowledge of a heavenly Christ, gladly forgotten by the children of Jezebel, but the bright and blessed hope of the remnant who keep Christ's works to the end. *Shepherding* the nations with a *rod of iron* may seem to be incongruous, but if we read it in the light of the words, “as I received of my Father”, we are conscious that if there will be compulsory subjection of the Gentile powers, it will be to One who for some nineteen hundred years has been acting as Shepherd—the good and the great Shepherd—to those given to Him by His Father from among the Gentiles. David was a shepherd king who fed the people of God, after “the wilful king” had been set aside. Heavenly grace will accompany righteous rule.

Christ had said to the angel of the assembly at Sardis, ‘Remember’. He recalled the assembly there to earlier days, when the renewed sense of a spotless robe of righteousness had been their possession through faith. They had let this garment become soiled through intercourse with the world. Hence, they would be treated as the world—Christ would come on them as a thief (1 Thess. v. 2). But the overcomer should walk with Christ in white there, where no soil of evil

could ever be: his name confessed by Christ before His Father and His angels. There is no such thing as slipping into heaven unobserved. Why should such a thought enter into any mind? Grace *delights* to clothe the believer with heaven's robe of white.

Philadelphia—I have already said that the crown of this remnant-assembly is association with Christ Himself. Hence the word '*my*' is prominent in the promise to the overcomer. They had little strength. Be it so, but the one who had kept Christ's word and not denied His name in weakness here, should be a pillar in the temple of '*my God*' up there, and go no more out. The idea of a temple contains in it not only the thought of the dwelling-place of God, but also of an outflow of blessing and grace—the cherubim in Solomon's temple looked toward the house, that is, outward. In Ezekiel xlvii. living waters flowed out from the temple, as also from the throne of God and the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem—*They* are the temple of it. The name of this city of *my God*, which *cometh down* out of heaven from *my God*, is also written on the overcomer. He will be associated with the blessed ministry of heaven to earth in that day. More than that, he is distinctly owned as bearing the name of '*my God*', and also *my* new name, the name taken in connection with redemption.

A few words will suffice as to the overcomer in Laodicea. It is, so to speak, an eleventh-hour awakening to the claims of Christ; yet he overcame the utter indifference to Christ which marked

that which bore the name of an assembly. Well, he will reign with Christ, he will share the common portion of the saints; but the promise does not speak of *the intimacies of apprehension and communion* as in Philadelphia and other assemblies.

CHAPTERS IV., V.

The vision changes; a door is opened *in heaven*, and John is called up thither. It is no longer One like the Son of man walking in the midst of the assemblies on earth. But do not let us forget that such a vision *has been* shown to us, nor let us forget His words, "I know thy works". Though it is a new vision, it is *the same Person*, for the voice that spoke to the prophet was the voice *first heard* as a trumpet in chapter i. 10. The One who spoke would show him up there the things that succeeded the history of the assemblies on earth.

Immediately he was in the Spirit, and beheld a throne in heaven—that is not surprising; but it is the Sitter on it who engages John's attention. He had the appearance of a jasper and sardine stone. It is the divine glory shining, as it must do, in a medium, or no creature could see it. Jesus is Son of man, but He is God over all, blessed for ever. So in Daniel vii. the Son of man who is brought near to the Ancient of days is Himself the Ancient of days who comes. The ascription in verse 8 shows that the Old Testament names, "LORD GOD ALMIGHTY", are embodied in the Sitter on the throne. It is Jehovah Jesus. The rainbow encircling the throne shows that

God's covenant *with the earth* is remembered. The throne of grace characterizes heaven at the present time. In the vision of the future it is a throne of glory and judgement, yet the Sitter thereon (always the Faithful and True) is faithful to God's covenant.

Around the throne are four and twenty thrones (not seats), and again the sitters thereon engage the attention of the prophet. They are described as elders, so that we may describe them as the elderhood of the heavenly saints, for saints they are, those who are able to sing the song of redemption (chap. v. 9). There is another witness to their identity. The saints of the present period utter their praise to Jesus in chapter i. as the One who loves them, and they add, "and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father". Here in chapter iv. the elders are seen on thrones, crowned as kings, and worshipping as priests (verses 10, 11). The number twenty-four refers to the twenty-four courses of priests appointed by David for the kingdom service of the temple (1 Chron. xxiv.). How these elders were translated to heaven is not told to John, the point being that *they are there* and no longer on earth. "They that are Christ's at his coming" have this special place, they have been withdrawn from the scene about to be judged. It is not the peaceful rest of the Father's house which is here presented, but a throne of holy government, and the elders are associated with Him who sits on it (1 Cor. vi. 2).

Out of the throne go forth the symbols of

judgement, but the elders are unmoved by them, nor is *John* affected by the vision. The right hand of the living One out of death had been laid upon him, and, whatever glories are before him it is Jesus who went into death and lives for evermore who upholds him. The elders also, I judge, are *above* these symbols of judgement in association with Christ. Before the throne are seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God. It is the sevenfold action of the Holy Ghost as a "Spirit of judgement and burning" (Isa. iv. 4). In Revelation v. they are said to be seven eyes in the Lamb sent forth into all the earth. The imagery of the temple is continued; before the throne is seen a sea of glass like crystal—fixed and solid purity—water for priests to wash in is not needed in heaven.

Intimately connected with the throne were four *living creatures*. The throne is thus instinct with *living powers*; they combine the characteristics of both cherubim and seraphim. The cherubim are connected with the government of God, while the seraphim celebrate *His very Being*. Mark, in Isaiah vi., how these burning ones are aglow with the glory of Jehovah of Hosts. In this chapter our attention is engaged with the fact that they are *living* creatures. The cherubim on the mercy seat, whatever they might symbolize, were not *living*. The lions on Solomon's throne were symbolical, but not *living*. Here the throne and its supporters are instinct with *life*. It has been said that in the lion, royal conquering power is symbolized; in the calf, power in patience; in

the *face* (not the form) of a man, power in intelligence ; and in the flying eagle, power in rapidity of execution. They are thus linked with the lower creation of God, but subserve His throne in living power ; for the question to be solved by judgement is the claims of the Creator over that which He has created. Not only is the omniscience of the throne symbolized by the living creatures having eyes before and behind—they are also full of eyes within. It is intuitive perception. “ They cease not day and night ” in their celebration of the holy, holy, holy Being, who had revealed Himself as the Lord God Almighty. The living creatures do not worship, *they ascribe glory, honour, and thanks to Him that liveth for ever and ever*, and hence their ceaseless celebration ; but the elders *fall down and worship*, and here, mark, it is not ascription inherent to the heads of creation, but *intelligent worship*, intelligence formed by known and divinely communicated truth. They know the truth of Genesis i., and can say, “ Thou hast created all things, and for thy will [or pleasure] they were and they have been created ”.

Chapter v. is another vision. The prophet saw a book or roll in the hand of Him who sat on the throne, written within and on the back, and sealed with seven seals. It therefore cannot contain any of the prophetic details which had been communicated previous to the setting up of the throne seen in chapter iv. It was sealed, and the question is asked by one of the ministers of God’s providential government (a strong angel), “ Who

is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" and to the prophet's sorrow no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was found worthy. Yet the ways and dealings of God contained in that book were not to burst forth without previous communication to the Christian prophet (see Amos iii. 7). It is one of the priestly elders who knows who alone is worthy, as having overcome, to take the book and open its seals. It is Christ—the Lion of the tribe of Judah—the Root of David; but in vision John saw a Lamb as slain. Mark how beautifully the all-conquering power of the Lion of Judah and the suffering Lamb are found together in the same blessed Person. The seven horns denote the completeness of the elements of His power about to be put forth, and the seven eyes are said to be the seven Spirits of God—not seen now as lamps of fire, but as sent forth into all the earth; they may be concentrated on one object as in Zechariah iii. 9, iv. 10, or diffused through all the earth as in 2 Chronicles xvi. 9. *He* came and took the book. Is it not blessed to see that book in the hand of the Lamb in the midst of the throne? What anticipations are produced! And mark what an important dispensational change takes place. In chapter iv., where *the Creator* is celebrated, there are elders (redeemed saints) and the living creatures, but no angels *are mentioned*, though they may be the agents in using the powers of the throne symbolized by the living creatures. But in chapter v. the living creatures are seen as closely associated with the elders in their

ascription to the Lamb. "Unto *the angels* hath he not put in subjection the world to come", but all things are made subject to the Son of *man*. In redemption the redeemed saints take the place of angels in the actings of the throne, and the angels form a separate class around the throne, and the living creatures and elders; angels have no part in redemption (but *now* they desire to look into its wonders as made known in us), but in chapter v. its glories are before them, and they own the worthiness of the Lamb, and ascribe wisdom and honour and glory to Him, while the elders *sing the new song* of redemption. The Lamb has *secured for God*—having purchased them by His blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation—those who as kings and priests are to reign over the earth; all this is seen *in vision*.

Each *elder* had a harp, and beside this they had golden bowls full of odours, which we are told are the prayers of the saints. It is not here as in chapter viii. 3, where the Angel-Priest (Christ) gives efficacy with much incense to the prayers of all saints at the golden altar before the throne; but here the prayers themselves are the incense or odours. They are not praying, but in their bowls they have the prayers of the saints. My strong impression is, that these prayers are those which have gone up to God from this sin-defiled earth from saints, who cried to God from under its woes and sorrows, but apparently deliverance had not come: but their cries had not been lost or forgotten, but had been treasured up in heaven

as incense, and now are about to get their answer—the Lamb having taken the book—and the priestly elders are aware of their character as known in heaven.

The whole creation made subject to vanity is about to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. This is assured by the Lamb that was slain being in the midst of the throne of God with the book of the inheritance in His hand. That which has been purchased by blood is about to be redeemed by power. Hence, instead of groans, creation utters its voice to Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb, ascribing blessing and honour and glory for ever and ever. The four living creatures say Amen, but the four and twenty elders worship.

These two chapters are a prelude to the development of the action of the throne about to take place. It is well to remember that in chapter i. 2 we read that “all things that he saw”—a series of visions (as they have been called)—formed the testimony which the prophet wrote; but, if the prophet bore witness, yet it had the character of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The reader should note the constant recurrence of the words, “And I saw”.

CHAPTERS VI., VII.

Chapter vi. discloses to us the opening of the seals by the Lamb, and the effects which follow this action. Bear in mind that while *the imagery* used may have the character of Old Testament

prophecy, yet the special objects of judgement, and the state in which the judgement finds them, did not then exist. Prophecy in Old Testament times had for its special subject the nation of Israel—set in the midst of other nations as a witness for the one only true and eternal God. But the establishment of the assembly in various localities upon earth, in testimony to Christ raised from the dead by the Father and glorified, did not then exist.

We have seen the failure of the assembly (in its sevenfold form) to maintain the light for Christ on the earth, and consequently heaven assumes a fresh character. Instead of a throne of grace being there, a throne of judgement with its accessories is before us. In the former days of Israel's history, that people mixed themselves with the heathen nations, according to the desire expressed to Samuel (1 Sam. viii. 5, 19, 20), "*Make us a king . . . like all the nations*", and this unhallowed association formed one chief cause of their judgement. So also the assembly, having accepted the friendship of the world and become a worldly system, becomes the occasion for *new* dealings of the throne with such a state of things—the Lord having previously withdrawn all those that were true, and associated them on thrones with Himself as kings and priests. The opening of the seals by an earth-rejected and once-suffering Lamb has in view, I think, this state of things.

The executors of these dealings come forth in the first four seals. In them "the beginning of sorrows" is before the mind of the Spirit. Some

great conqueror is called forth under the first seal—he goes forth with all the flush of far-reaching conquest. That which follows is a state of war, so that peace is taken from the earth. Instead of living in peace with each other, men slay one another; this takes place in the sphere where the gospel of peace had been preached. A further result is that the necessities of life are at famine prices, while luxuries are unaffected. At the opening of the fourth seal a rider on a pale horse is summoned, his name 'Death', and 'Hades', the power to hold in death, is with him. The first three seals had dealt with living men, but 'Death' was now using the four sore judgements of God (Ezek. xiv. 21).

I here make two remarks: *it is not the Lamb who calls* forth the instruments of judgement, but the living creatures, the judicial agents of the power of the throne of God. The symbol of horses conveys to us careering power going forth in judgement. In Zechariah's prophecy horses are called "the spirits of the heavens". Things are borne along by a mighty influence, and men are carried with it; they might prefer quietness and peace, but they cannot have it.

The fifth seal unfolds the blessed fact that during the time of the careering power of the instruments of God's judicial dealings with the earth, there had been those who were slain for the word of God and for the testimony they held. I presume the testimony coincides with the subjects of chapters iv. and v., God's title to the earth as Creator, and the Lamb's title by redemption. Let my reader

now mark the difference between a church martyr as was Stephen, who departs *to be with Christ*, praying for his murderers, and these apocalyptic martyrs, who are seen in vision *under the altar*, as having yielded themselves as an offering; they call for the avenging of their blood on the dwellers upon earth. White robes were given them, tokens of their saintship (see chap. xix. 8), though for full deliverance by resurrection they would have to wait for others to be martyred. Both of these martyred companies are seen enthroned in chapter xx. 4.

At the opening of the sixth seal, there is the convulsion of the whole system of things which had grown up on the earth through men having the light of Christianity without its power; there is the subversion of the ruling powers of the heavens with the benefits consequent thereon. Men would not own that power and authority on earth had been *ordained of God*, hence finally, when Satan gives his throne to the Beast, power will come up from the bottomless pit, for I presume that it is at this time that Satan is cast out of the heavenly places, though the historical account of it will be found in chapter xii. Everything that seemed to be stable is convulsed, and though men seek to hide themselves, they find no hiding-place (the Rock of Ages had been refused) from the wrath of the Lamb, as they think—the once despised and rejected Nazarene they now regard with guilty consciences. But all that takes place is not the direct action of the Lamb. He it is who has opened the seals, but it is not until we

reach chapter xix. that *He* comes forth as the Faithful and True One to execute judgement on the earth.

In chapter vii. we are conducted into *angelic* scenes. In the vision the prophet sees the tempests of judgement, about to break upon the earth, held back by four angels standing on the four corners of the earth. Another angel is also seen ascending from the east (or sun-rising, 2 Sam. xxiii. 4), having the seal of the living God. Here again we recognize our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. He it is that stays the winds until "*We*", He says, "have sealed *the servants of our God* in their foreheads". The description "*servants of God*" is the term used in Isaiah lxx. 13, 14, to denote the godly remnant in Israel as contrasted with the ungodly nation. The elect remnant out of every tribe of Israel are manifestly sealed as "*servants of God*", and secured by Christ before the judgments come. "An hundred and forty-four thousand" are sealed, a symbolical number (12×12), denoting a *complete and known* remnant. This numbering belongs specially to Israel. When God brought His people out of Egypt He numbered them and gathered them around Himself. Each one is thus known of Him, each is brought directly under His eye. The tribe of Dan is omitted, the two sons of Joseph complete the symbolic number 12. The fact that the tribe of Dan is foreseen to be linked with Satanic powers, in Genesis xlix. 17, may be the reason for the omission of that tribe. Typically Dan represents Israel in covenant with death and hades (Isa. xxviii, 15).

The next vision discloses to the prophet a great multitude "*that no one could number*". They are Gentiles "of all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues". They are not seen as sealed *in view of* the impending great tribulation, but as having *come out of it*. This fact speaks of their having been sustained in the faith of a testimony from God preached to them. Hence they have a special position before the throne and before the Lamb. They are clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, as if celebrating the feast of tabernacles. They ascribe with loud voice, "Salvation to *our* God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb". Now mark! It is the *angelic hosts* who surround the throne, the elders, and living creatures (as in chap. v. 11), who worship and ascribe "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom . . . and power, and strength to our God to the ages of ages". I suggest as a reason for this *angelic ascription*, that this great multitude has been gathered by the "everlasting gospel" (chap. xiv. 6, 7) having been preached to the nations through angelic agency, that is, by the providential ordering of God, of which angels are the ministers (compare Psalms xcv., xcvi.). In the former psalm the Spirit of Christ speaks to Israel, while in the latter we read, "Declare his glory among *the nations*, his wondrous works among all the peoples . . . Say among the *nations* Jehovah reigneth!" But the elders are not silent. They belong indeed to another and interior circle of worship and knowledge, and they are intelligent as to this saved crowd. One of

the elders it is who tells John who they are, for they are not church saints, nor are they Gentiles brought in after the Lord has come in glory, but a special company who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. They have received the testimony of the earth-rejected Sufferer. Hence they have a peculiar place before the throne (it is not in heaven, but a moral position) and serve God, who tabernacles *over them*, day and night in His temple. The Lamb feeds and shepherds, and leads them to living fountains of waters. It is a very blessed, though not a heavenly position. Tears there had been in the days of tribulation, but every tear is now wiped away by God Himself: sweet and blessed tenderness of the heart of God.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Lamb opens the seventh seal, and we do not find Him any more in the action of the book until chapter xiv. This is very noteworthy, and reveals, I judge, the secret of the sympathy of the earth-rejected Lamb, who suffered, with those who will be in like case of suffering as He was in the last day. The first Book of Psalms unfolds much of the Spirit of Christ as being in association with those who in the days of David were attached to him as God's anointed king. But Psalm ii. speaks of the rulers of this world, Jew as well as Gentile, standing up against Jehovah's Christ. Hence we do not find *the Lamb* in the sealing of the twelve thousand from each of the tribes of

*Israel.** They are "outcasts" (Isa. xi. 12), and will be dealt with by Adonai Jehovah in "the wilderness of the peoples" (Ezek. xx. 35), and gathered "one by one" (Isa. xxvii. 12). The Lord is seen as the Angel of the covenant.

On the opening of the seventh seal there is silence in heaven for half an hour. There was a pause in the unfoldings of *the ways* of God, and the vision is occupied with *the presence of God*. The prophet saw the seven angels *who stand before God*—that was their characteristic position—to them were given seven trumpets. But first, another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and much incense was given to him that he might give efficacy to the prayers of all saints—those prayers went up with the incense *before God*. The angel—no one but the Lord Jesus could fill this priestly place—fills the censer with fire from the altar and casts it to the earth (compare Psal. xviii. 6-13). The cry of those under the altar (chap. vi.) doubtless formed part of those prayers, though I think that all down the history of this world cries have been going up to God, and they have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and now there is to be no more silence, they are about to be answered.

The seven angels thereupon prepare to sound. The first four trumpets *proclaim direct dealings of God* with the third part of the earth—the ordered scene of God's culture; with the tumultuous sea;

* The Lamb is in sympathy with the faithful who suffer for His sake (Psal. xlv. 22), but God is faithful to His covenant with Israel (Exod. xxxiv. 11).

with the rivers and fountains of water, the springs and sources of man's life and prosperity; and lastly the powers that rule in the heavens are smitten, so that heavenly light and order is obscured. The "third part" seems to refer to that territory which will form the empire of the beast. Compare chapter xii. 4, where the dragon *in the characteristics of the beast* draws *the third part* of the stars of heaven, and casts them to the earth. There was a moment when the magicians of Egypt had to say, "This is the finger of God", and these judgements on the circumstances of the beast's empire will carry with them the sense that they *come immediately from the presence of God*. Everything contributory to the well-being of the Roman Empire is smitten—the earth with its produce, the sea with its commerce, the springs and sources of national prosperity; and chiefest of all, the rule of the heavens.

CHAPTERS IX., X.

The last verse of chapter viii. introduces the subject of the three last trumpets. An *eagle*—for so it should be read—a bird that hastes to the prey, flies in mid-heaven uttering, "Woe, woe, woe" to the *dwellers upon earth*. We have seen these to be a moral class upon whom will come the hour of temptation or trial (chap. iii. 10). The circumstances of men are not affected by these woe trumpets, but there is something far more terrible. This we shall see.

The fifth angel sounds, and in vision the prophet sees an authority that belonged to heaven in an

apostate state, it had fallen to the earth. And now, instead of the beneficent rule that comes from heaven, this apostate power is given the key of the pit of the abyss. It opened the pit, and the moral light and atmosphere—the healthful influence that heaven, where Jesus is, had shed on this poor world—were darkened by the smoke of the pit. It is an awful state of things where all moral perceptions are darkened by that which comes from beneath. What is said now, “The voice of the people is the voice of God”, is on a line which is preparatory to this first woe trumpet. The Spirit of Christ laments as to Jerusalem, that “she had none *to guide her* of all her sons” (Isa. li. 18). So in the day of this woe, the blessing of heavenly guidance is entirely gone, an overruling providence for good is gone. Out of this darkening influence a host of marauders issue symbolized by locusts, who “go forth in bands”, but unlike to actual locusts, they were not to injure the grass of the earth nor any green thing; material prosperity was not touched, only those that had not the seal of God on their foreheads (chap. vii. 3). Evidently we are here in Jewish circumstances. The poison of lying prophets (“the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail”, Isa. ix. 15) tormented men. Israel constantly gave heed to them—so said Micah. “If a man walking in vanity and falsehood do lie . . . he shall even be the prophet of this people” (Micah ii. 11). The torment of this lying poison is that men desire to die, but death flees from them. I judge that they would like to believe that death means annihilation, but death

in that sense flees from them. But these marauders had another likeness, as of horses prepared for war—a careering power carrying them onward. Then we have their appearance: on their heads crowns (not diadems) like to gold, and *faces* as of men; they had but *the appearance* of intelligence such as had been bestowed on men; their hair was as the hair of women, for after all they were in subjection; cruelty marked them. They had teeth as of lions; and obduracy of heart. The sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to war. Furthermore, behind them was venom in their tails, and unlike to locusts who have no king over them, these had a king, the angel of the abyss—his name “The destroyer”. An awful description. Men had refused Him who came from above, and in whom God approached them with the gospel of peace. Now the powers of evil get the mastery over them, and they succumb to the delusions of the devil, and they are borne along swiftly to destruction, the powers of hell tormenting them. This woe is evidently connected with the apostasy of Anti-christ

The first woe is past, two others were to follow. The sixth angel sounds, and a voice comes from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. This is where the angel-priest offered up the incense with the prayers of all saints. We may regard this woe as an answer to these prayers. The gracious intercession of Christ had brought bounteous grace from heaven in the time gone by, but now it is woe! The voice from the altar

requires the angel to loose the four angels bound *at* the great river Euphrates. The Euphrates was the boundary between the east and west. From that which follows, I judge that forms of devilry hitherto confined to the eastern nations were now about to break forth over the west. The four messengers of woe had been held back until the prepared time. They affect *the third part* of men. The third part we have seen to be descriptive of the Roman earth. *Historically* the little horn of Daniel viii. 9-23 may be connected with this, but symbolically we learn *the character* of the woe. It is not necessary to interpret the symbol as an army of cavalry. There are horses and sitters on them, but *the horses* give character to the action of this great host. Those who sat on them were borne along by the horses. From the mouths of the horses went forth fire, and smoke, and brimstone; they belch forth the very atmosphere and torment of hell. Not only are hellish doctrines belched forth with violence, but the character of the serpent is behind the roaring lion. I presume here that death may be actual death, but it is also the closing up of the soul in death-like apostasy from God in any form—the true God or idols. Those not in this state of absolute moral incapacity do not repent of their idolatry, nor of their iniquity and wickedness. The second woe is not declared to be past until chapter xi. 14.* The description here leaves us with this unrepentant remnant of men. Chapter x. breaks in parenthetically before its close.

In the parenthesis there is another vision. A

strong angel is seen coming down from heaven. His description assures us that the angel represents the same glorious Person, our Lord Jesus, in another attitude—His countenance as the sun, and His feet as pillars of fire, clothed with a cloud, and the rainbow upon His head. But in this attitude He has in His hand *a little opened book*, not a sealed one as in chapter v. The ways of God as they had been made known in prophecy (see ver. 7) are here in view. Setting His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the earth would be the assertion of His title to possess both the ordered sphere of God's dealings, as well as the tumultuous extern nations. I presume the cry as of a lion is the cry of royal and victorious power, but the response of seven thunders—the voice of the God of glory (Ps. xxix. 3)—is sealed up.

This mighty angel lifts His hand to heaven, and swears by the Creator who lives for ever—who but Christ, could do this?—that there shall be no more delay, but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God—His hidden ways, though made known to His servants the prophets (Amos iii. 7)—should be accomplished. The mystery of God would give place to open manifest dealing. John has to take the opened book and eat it. It was sweet in his mouth, for the thought that the long tale of woe upon this earth was about to cease is sweet; but when taken into the inward parts it was bitter, for the closing up of the history of evil is by final judgement. Consequently John has to prophesy again as to peoples and nations and tongues and

many kings. Of old the various nations, among whom Israel was set as a testimony for the one true and only God, became the subjects of prophetic testimony as well as Israel (see Jer. xxv. 15-26), but here the description seems to refer to Genesis ix. and x. Not only peoples and nations, but *tongues* also come into the field of prophecy; for let it be remembered that the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost enabled the gospel of the grace of God to be addressed to every nation under heaven in their own *tongue*. Still in the mind of God Jerusalem has the foremost place, and hence comes into view in chapter xi.

CHAPTER XI.

Jerusalem is seen as *taken into account* by the Lord because of that which His eye saw to be there. Hence the prophet is given a rod to measure the temple (the inner holy place) and the altar (of incense), and those that worship therein. The court without the temple is not taken into account. It is where the altar of burnt-offering stood, and where God had said that He would meet with Israel (Exodus xxix. 43). That outer public worship had been set aside, and the court given to be trodden down by the Gentiles. The holy city also is to be trodden under foot for forty-two months, or three and a half years, but the inner worshipping remnant who had a *priestly character* are known of the Lord.

But not only is this hidden and priestly remnant taken into account, but there is also in Jerusalem a *prophetic* testimony raised up—rendered in

clothing of sackcloth—but maintained for twelve hundred and sixty days—the same period of three and a half years, but noted in days, as *day by day* they continued their witness. The olive trees and lamps standing before the Lord of the earth are an allusion to Zechariah iv. 14, but we must go back to Joshua iii. 11 for the intelligence of the term “Lord of the earth”. There the ark of the covenant of *the Lord of all the earth* passed over Jordan. Jehovah was then taking possession of the land of promise. The ark borne around Jericho, preceded by priests blowing rams’-horn trumpets, was the proclamation of His title to the land, and at the seventh blast of the trumpets Jericho, the fortress of the enemy, fell. That taking possession of the land—a small territory compared with Gentile dominion—was the pledge of *the Lord’s possession of the whole earth*; it takes place when *the seventh trumpet* of our chapter is sounded. Then a voice from heaven proclaims, “The world-kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ is come”. The testimony of the two witnesses was to the Lord’s title to the whole earth. The power given to them to maintain their testimony has the character of that given to Moses and Elijah. When they have finished their testimony—a testimony continued during the time of the blasphemous actings of the Beast (chap. xiii. 5)—they then share in the rejection of their Lord, and like to Him they suffer at the hands of the Beast,* resuscitated in its last form,

* The Roman Beast of that day was represented in Pilate.

but unlike their Lord their bodies are not put in a sepulchre. Their unburied bodies are a witness to the varied families of men of the rejection of their testimony; the *dwellers on earth* rejoice over them. They are not raised as Jesus was, for they were not buried, but a spirit of life from God reanimates them, after lying unburied for three days and a half. They stand on their feet, and are summoned to heaven and go up in a cloud, but unlike their Lord, in the sight of their enemies. Heaven was on the side of these witnesses, though they were cast out by the earth. Consequently the earth was convulsed, and the tenth part of the city fell. Spiritually the city was called Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified. Seven thousand names of men were slain in the earthquake, and the remnant in abject fear give glory *to the God of heaven*—a title used in the prophecy of Daniel, because the glory in which Jehovah had dwelt between the cherubim had gone up from the earth to heaven. But God was now making good His title to the earth, which He was about to give to His Son (Psa. ii. 8).

The second *woe* has now passed, and the third comes quickly. Hence the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, and heaven at once responds. Great voices there proclaim that the *world-kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ [not merely the inheritance of “the kingdom of our father David,” (Mark xi. 10) but the wide dominion over the world] had come to pass, and He shall reign to the ages of ages. Thereupon the twenty-four elders whose characteristic position is on their

thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God. Note also, that they have intelligence of all that is involved in the sounding of the seventh trumpet. They give thanks to the Lord God Almighty, who is and was. (He is not now spoken of as the coming One, for He has taken His great power and has reigned.) The nations are full of anger (see Psa. ii. 1, 2), partially fulfilled when the Lord was rejected on earth (Acts iv. 25-28). The fact of their anger is stated here, the futile outcome is seen in chapter xix. 20, but God's anger is come. I presume this is seen in chapters xv., xvi. Then we have a remarkably forcible expression, "the time of the dead to be judged". The elders do not say, "the time to judge the dead", there is more in it than that. In Ecclesiastes iii. we read of a season and time for everything under heaven, "a time to be born, and a time to *die*", but there is no time or season *for the dead* mentioned there; but in our chapter there is a season under this seventh trumpet *for the dead*—it is, to be judged—it actually takes place in chapter xx. 12. It is also the time of recompense to prophets and saints, and those "*that fear thy name*, small and great"—a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ has its reward—the time also to destroy those that have destroyed (or corrupted) the earth (compare 1 Cor. iii. 17, also Gen. vi. 12). The completion of God's ways is thus made known to us through the elders.

That which follows is more the description of the various actors in these scenes than of the

scenes themselves. But first of all we are shown the temple of God in heaven laid open, so that the ark of His covenant was seen. It had not been seen since Nebuchadnezzar's day. I do not mean that the ark made by Bezaleel was seen, but that which was figured by that ark, and has been embodied in Christ, abides treasured up in heaven where He is, nor was it seen in a material temple. The thought brought before us is conveyed by the words, "His covenant", that is, the covenant made with Israel, but verified in Him who said, "I delight to do thy will . . . thy law is within my heart". Could Israel be forgotten? No! The remembrance had been treasured in heaven (Isa. lxii. 6, 7), marginal reading, "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers". All the tokens of judgement accompany this vision.

CHAPTER XII.

A great sign is *seen in heaven*. A woman clothed with the sun; she is seen as invested with supreme authority, for such was the mind of heaven. Derived and reflected light was under her feet; it was subservient to her. On her head a crown of twelve stars—perfection in administration was her crown. Israel will yet be "a crown of glory in the hand of Jehovah". But she was in travail. She could not yet say, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder".

Another sign is seen in heaven. A great red dragon bearing the characteristics of the fourth bestial empire, having seven heads and ten horns

(chap. xiii. 1), with this difference, the heads are crowned in chapter xii., and in xiii. the horns. I presume there is a moral force in the heads having diadems, it marks the assumption by Satan of *complete* royalty. His enmity was against the woman who was about to bring forth the man-child, that he might destroy the One who was to rule (or shepherd) all the nations with a rod of iron. We see this enmity in Pharaoh as Satan's tool attempting to kill all *the male children* (Exod. i.), and, again, in Athaliah seeking to destroy all *the seed royal* of the house of David (2 Chron. xxii. 10); and again when Herod slew all the children in Bethlehem (Matt. ii. 16). Every attempt failed and, finally, the child was caught up *to God and to His throne*. It does not say when. It is a vision in which the ways of God are seen in their accomplishment. The vision goes beyond Psalm ii. 6, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion". For this Christ will have to leave *the right hand of the throne of God*, where He is seen in the vision, and come to earth to reign. If chapter ii. 27 is compared with verse 5 of this chapter, the association of the church with Christ is apparent. Hence, in the vision, the catching up of the Man-Child involves the rapture of those who are to reign with Him. Accordingly they are seen in chapter iv. in the circle of the throne in heaven.

In verse 6 a definite time comes before us—the flight of the woman—that spoken of by the Lord in Matthew xxiv. 15–22. She flees into the wilderness. She is in desolation for one thousand

two hundred and sixty days, but fed in a place prepared by God day by day, as of old Israel had been fed with manna for forty years. In Matthew xiv. 13, the murder of John Baptist, Christ's witness, was the cause of our Lord going into a desert place apart, and there He fed the multitude. He has thus known the sorrows of Israel, and will sympathize with them in the coming days of their tribulation and desert life.

The casting out of the dragon from heaven is not consecutive to the flight of the woman. Verses 13 and 14 shew that the woman's flight is after that. It is *descriptive* of an important occurrence in the patient ways of God, and synchronises with the convulsions on earth, and the subversion of the powers of heaven, which take place under the sixth seal, where it is brought in with regard to Israel, and the time of the "great tribulation" which will come upon them. Passages in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament reveal the fact that Satan's *present seat of operations* is in the heavenly places (Job i. 6; 1 Kings xxii. 19-22; Eph. ii. 2, vi. 12). It is true that our Lord pronounced His judgement in John xii. 31; and in Luke x. 18, speaking anticipatively of that which is described here, He said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven". It is after having assumed the form of the dragon that the war in heaven takes place. He has assumed the character of open revolt against Christ. Michael, the great prince who held with the mysterious but glorious Man who appeared to Daniel in chapter x. 13 of his prophecy, in chapter xii. "stands for the

children of thy people" at the time of the great tribulation. Michael it is, and his angels, who make war with this antagonist of Christ, and he is cast out unto the earth. In the dragon is recognized the one great arch-enemy of God—the serpent of Genesis iii.—the devil and Satan the deceiver of the whole world.

His ejection with his angels from heaven is followed by a great voice in heaven, saying, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ [His Anointed]: for the accuser of *our brethren* is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night". The great voice is evidently that of saints who have their place in heaven, and speak of the saints in temptation and trial below as "our brethren", saints whose hopes were in heaven though they were still upon earth. These saints on earth "*overcome him*" (it does not say his accusations) "by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony". We see in the case of Job accused before God by Satan that it involved him in special though needed trials, even as these saints on earth will have been. The apostle said to the Hebrews, "Ye have not yet resisted *unto blood*"—this is what Christ did. I presume they will have the knowledge of Christ in *this martyr character*, and the sense of *this*, and their testimony to Jesus as Christ, as against the Antichrist, will be victory over Satan, though perhaps at the cost of their lives. In enmity Jew and Gentile had put Jesus to death (it was *their hour and the power*

of darkness), and in that martyr-death He overcame the world and its prince. There is joy in heaven ; it has been cleared of the power of evil and darkness, and the dwellers there rejoice, but “ woe to the *earth* and the *sea* ”—the special sphere of God’s dealings—and the sea of nations from whence the beast emerges—“ for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time ”.

Here let me say a word as to the salvation that has come in verse 10. Salvation is presented in two ways in Scripture : one, as with Israel on the shore of the Red Sea. It was said, “ Stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah ”. Jehovah *delivered them* from the power of the enemy (see also Luke i. 71). *Our* final and complete salvation will be by being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The whole power of evil and of the enemy *is left behind* ; and even now, as the saint realizes his place in Christ, he is above the evil and knows it judged in the cross of Christ. Secondly, as in verse 10 in our chapter, it is the putting down of the enemy and of the power of evil. The casting down of Satan left the heavenly places in peace from his accusations : and on earth the last conflict with evil is described by Isaiah as with burning and fuel of fire, in order that the Child born to Israel—the Son given to them, may reign as the “ prince of peace ”. This battle is given in Revelation xix.

But before that we have to pursue the dragon’s acting during the short time he has upon earth.

His first act is to persecute the woman *who brought forth the Man-Child*. It is in *Israel* that the *royalty of Christ* will be established on the earth. This brings out the malice of the dragon. Some power symbolized by the wings of a great eagle bore her to the wilderness, and there she is nourished *from the face of the serpent* for time, times, and half a time (three-and-a-half years). I presume this *serpent character* of the dragon being introduced denotes an alteration in his ways. The character of the dragon is that of a devourer, an open persecutor, but that of the serpent is beguiling or deceiving. It is from *the mouth of the serpent* that a flood (or river) comes forth, that she might be carried away by the river. I presume that through the artifices of "that old serpent" a popular movement will be set in motion, which has for its object the cutting off of Israel from being a nation (see Psa. lxxxiii. 3, 4). The attempt is frustrated, for the earth opened *its mouth* and swallowed the river. Some other movement is promulgated which nullifies the serpent's malice, and he resumes his old dragon character, and makes war with the remnant of the seed of the woman—those who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of *Jesus*. They will have the fear of God before them, and discern that the spirit of prophecy has Jesus for its subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

"And I stood *upon the sand of the sea*", away from the prophetic earth. It is a verse intro-

ductory to chapter xiii., when another vision comes before the prophet. *I saw* a beast *rising out of the sea*. That was its origin morally at the time of the vision. It was lifted up out of the mass of tumultuous nations. We will consider the heads and horns more fully when we come to chapter xvii.; only we may note in passing that on its heads were names of blasphemy. A beast is symbolic of a kingdom or power that rules by *its own will* apart from all reference to the living God. "Is not this great Babylon that *I have built . . . for the honour of my majesty?*" said Nebuchadnezzar, but at the same moment *a beast's heart* was given to him. This bestial kingdom united with itself the characteristics of the three former kingdoms—the beasts of Daniel vii.—the Grecian, the Persian, and the Babylonian; but that which characterized it chiefly was the awful fact that the dragon (cast out of heaven), the great enemy of Christ, gave to it his power, his throne, as prince of this world, and great authority. One of its heads (we find from chapter xvii. that it was the seventh) had been slain to death, but its wound of death had been healed. It is an imitation of resurrection, and consequently this resuscitated beast, or kingdom, becomes an object of wonder to the whole world, and they did homage to the power (the dragon) that gave authority to the beast. It is an awful scene of diabolical apostasy whereby the world gave its homage (that which should be given to God) to the beast. They regard it as invincible. A mouth was given to it speaking blasphemies,

but its time was measured, it was allowed to pursue its career for forty-two months.

There cannot be any doubt that this beast is to be identified with the fourth beast of Daniel vii., after the little horn has arisen ; but as it is seen in the vision of John, many details are given which are not given in Daniel. The fact of *the Man-Child having been caught up to the throne of God*, and the dragon cast out into the earth, adds to what Daniel said (that the little horn should speak words against the Most High) this, that it blasphemed God and His name, and His tabernacle, and those who have their tabernacle in heaven—that is Christ (the Man-Child) and the assembly. The beast cannot reach them, but it blasphemes all that is heavenly. But there are saints with whom it makes war and prevails (Dan. vii. 21) ; they are there called saints of the most high places. They are not in heaven, but they have no place on earth where the beast reigns. Abraham had no place in Canaan while the Canaanite was there. He sought a country—a heavenly one, and these saints were evidently of the number of those written from the beginning of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb. It is the earth-dwellers who worship this beast, for he has universal dominion.

Though all this belongs to the last days, yet the constant utterance of our Lord, “ If any one has an ear, let him hear”, is repeated. No doubt the exhortation has specially in view the time of the beast’s career ; but when we consider that *the mystery* of lawlessness—and the beast

was lawless, with "a mouth speaking great things" (Psa. xii. 3)—is already at work, it becomes us to take account of what is said of this lawless one. Other ways of God are abstractly stated, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that kills with the sword must be killed with the sword". Here is the patience and faith of the saints. They must not retaliate, but commit themselves to Him that judges righteously (see Psa. xl. 1; 1 Peter ii. 23; Isaiah xxv. 9).

It has been said that in these chapters we find a "trinity of evil", the dragon, the beast and the second beast, which we have now to consider; he loses his character as beast at the close, and is regarded then as a false prophet. It is seen by the prophet as rising out of *the earth*, the circumscribed sphere of God's dealings, and the centre of these dealings on the earth is Jerusalem and the land of promise; for power was not given to it over kindreds and tongues and nations, as with the first beast. It had two horns like a lamb, having thus not only the form of a kingdom, but the kingdom of the Messiah—its voice betrayed it, it spake as a dragon. The two horns were, I presume, royal and religious—that is, idolatrous—power. No doubt it is a vassal kingdom, but in its sphere of action it exercises all the authority of the first beast. Its authority is exercised *upon earth-dwellers*, and without *confining* this to Jews they are those who do not go beyond the earth in their hopes. Moreover, the miracles it does are those which would accredit its power in Israel,

making fire come down from heaven on the earth as Elijah did. Israel always wanted something "to see to". When Moses was in the mount they likened Jehovah to a calf that eateth hay. In the last days the unclean spirit of idolatry will have returned to his house, and idolatrous worship of the image of the beast will affect them. This religio-idolatrous power will cause all to worship the image of the beast whose deadly wound was healed. The *world* wondered at it, but in the sphere of this second beast's influence all are compelled to worship it. Now Christ is the image of the invisible God, One who never sought His own glory. His glory was always to glorify His Father even to the death of the cross, but the lamb-like beast seeks to make the self-exalted and dragon-promoted man the object of worship. Let the number of the beast be what it may (666), it is the number of *man*. What is of *God* cannot be numbered. I presume this is the power that causes the abomination which makes desolate to stand in the holy place at Jerusalem. The Jews would very specially have the character of "dwellers upon earth", though others in the beast's kingdom may morally answer to that term, the sphere of this second beast's activity is "the earth".

CHAPTER XIV.

If the beast and his coadjutor seem to be sweeping everything before them, another vision discloses the fact that a remnant of Jews (in rejection and suffering as the Lamb, the holy Sufferer,

had been) had refused the allurements of both idolatrous Babylon and idolatrous Jerusalem, and were seen by the prophet standing with the Lamb on mount Sion. The time had come for the Redeemer to "come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (Isa. lix. 20). Israel is beloved for the fathers' sake, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The *Lamb has reverted* to the election of God in *choosing* Zion as the place of His sovereign actings in grace—He takes His stand on mount Zion. Not only did Jehovah choose it, but He also *founded it* (Isa. xiv. 32), and here we see "the poor of his people" trusting in it—that is, in the grace that chose both Zion and the One who was reckoned as born to Zion (Psa. lxxxvii.). But these are not the one hundred and forty-four thousand of chapter vii., who were *sealed* in their foreheads for preservation through trial: these have the name of the suffering Lamb and of His Father's name *written* on their foreheads. It does not say "their Father", for they had not the Spirit of adoption as we have, linking us with a glorified Christ *in heaven*, for the Lamb is seen here *in earthly associations*, but as of old, in the days of His flesh, always in communion with His Father; and this fact brings them into a place very near to heaven, though they are not there. They had laid hold of the relation of the Lamb to God as His Father. Consequently they are able to learn the song of heaven. The prophet heard a voice *from heaven* as the voice of many waters and the deep roll of thunder, and of harpers harping

with their harps, and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and *the living creatures and elders* ; so that it was not those who sang in chapter v. who are the harp-singers here. I think we may safely say that heaven was expressing its joy in that this remnant had found their way to Sion—the *firstfruits from the earth* where the beasts were practising. But who are the singers that had a place in heaven, and had such an interest in what was taking place in Sion ? Possibly those associated with the two witnesses in chapter xi. At all events they are saints who have been translated subsequent to the rapture of the church. As we have said, this company on mount Sion are near enough to heaven to learn its song—they have a very blessed place as followers of the Lamb wheresoever He goes—Israelites indeed without guile—the firstfruits from the earth to God and the Lamb. They stand at the-head of those about to be introduced into millennial blessing. They had chosen the path of the suffering Lamb on earth, when men were being carried away by the glitter of the beast or the allurements of Babylon—they were redeemed from among men.

There are seven details or statements in this chapter : they are connected with the work and testimony of God in the midst of the evil we have considered. As the Lord when on earth secured for Himself the sheep His Father gave Him, so in this chapter : first those redeemed from the earth are in association with the Lamb ; secondly, by angelic instrumentality during this time of

evil, the everlasting gospel is sent to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, as well as to those who dwell on the earth. The everlasting gospel *is for all ages*. The gospel of the grace of God and of the glory of Christ belongs to this parenthetical period between the resurrection of our Lord and His coming again to claim His own. As we have before seen, there are two ways in which deliverance from evil is wrought : those gathered by the gospel of the grace of God while Jesus is in heaven He will come and receive to Himself, that they may be with Him and like Him ; the other is in the removal of evil by judgement, so that the righteous may flourish. The first intimation of this judgement of evil was addressed to the serpent, that the Seed of the woman should bruise his head. The special character of " this everlasting gospel " here is, " Fear God, and give glory to him ; for *the hour of his judgement is come*". God will not execute the judgement until this gospel has been preached among all nations for a witness.

The two *first objects of judgement* are next mentioned. A *second angel* announces *the fall* of Babylon from the pretentious place in which and from which she made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her fornication ; this is prior to her total extinction by fire. It is a system which appeals to the heart of fallen man by offering to him every allurement of the flesh—both lusts of the flesh and of the spirit.

A third angel follows. These *angelic* announcements give a very marked character to that which they proclaim. If any one worships the beast—

giving to man that which belongs alone to God—he will incur the wrath of God in the most terrible way. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a God neglected and refused. *The holy angels and the Lamb* witness their torment. But this called for the patience (or endurance) of the saints. What characterized them was in direct contrast to those who acknowledged and did homage to the beast—they kept the commandments of God and faith of Jesus, the lowly and rejected Nazarene, but God's elect King.

The next statement is not by an angel, but a voice out of heaven—sweet and precious to hear it—and *John is to write it*, place it on record, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth”. Why “from henceforth”? Death had already been swallowed up in victory for all saints from Adam down to the time of the Rapture. They were already blessed in heaven. The time had come when those who had passed away from the earth and its millennial blessing by death should be blessed. As in 1 Thessalonians iv. 13, the saints there were sorrowing over those fallen asleep, in the thought that they would not participate in the joy of Christ's coming, so when the judgement of evil was about to bring in the millennial kingdom and blessing, were those who had died in the Lord to be outside it? Not so. It would be the time of their blessing, and the Spirit adds His “Yea” to it; their labours are over but their works follow them, but we do not get *in these* the triumphant words put by the Holy Spirit *into our* mouths: “Thanks be to God,

which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ " (1 Cor. xv. 57).

Another vision reveals One like *the Son of man* (not now the Lamb) with a sharp sickle as well as wearing a golden crown. An angel came out of the temple, the place where the mind of God is made known, saying, "Thrust in thy sickle, and reap . . . for the *harvest of the earth* is ripe"; the earth is where the seed has been sown—the sea is dragged with a net—the sphere of God's dealings. We may suppose that Matthew xiii. is fulfilled—that is, there is discrimination, if not between wheat and tares, it is between wheat and chaff.

But there is no discrimination with the vintage. It is entire vengeance. The vine had been planted that it might bring forth fruit (Isa. v.). Without entirely excluding apostate Christendom, it refers chiefly to apostate Judaism; on *that*, unsparing judgement is meted out. This time it is an angel from the altar where the fire was ever burning, the testing-place of good and evil, who says, Thrust in thy sickle and gather the clusters of *the vine of the earth*. It was trodden without the city, an allusion to our Lord suffering without the gate. Details of this judgement are given in Isaiah lxxv. and lxxvi. See also Isaiah lxxiii.

CHAPTER XV.

Chapter xv. is the vision of another sign *in heaven*, great and marvellous. It must have been marvellous to John, who had seen heaven receive Jesus, and had known the Holy Ghost descending

from Him there. It was now clothing itself with the instruments of wrath and judgement, long delayed, but ready to be poured forth, not as heretofore in the way of providential dealings, but of direct infliction of plagues from the temple, filled with smoke from the glory of God.

But first the prophet sees the sea of glass, but mingled with fire—purification had come from fire, not from water. Those on the sea are evidently that other martyred company, spoken of in chapter vi. 11, who had gained the victory over the Beast, his image, and his name and number. Here, though evidently they have been raised, they are not in the same blessed position that belongs to the saints of the assembly through grace. Their blessedness is to be “for ever *with the Lord*”, whilst those who stand on the sea of glass are seen *on thrones* in chapter xx. 4. Their song is the song of Moses, *the servant of God*, and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of nations”. To Moses He made known *His ways* (Psa. ciii. 7). “King of nations” is an allusion to Jeremiah x. 7: “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy”. This is what the Lamb has done, glorified His God and Father’s name. “*All nations* shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous dealings are made manifest” (see Isa. xxvi. 9). “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” The song of Moses celebrated the overthrow of the great

world-power of that day (Exod. xv.). The song of the Lamb, I judge, is in accord with Psalm xl. There Messiah waited patiently for the Lord, and by Him was brought up out of a horrible pit and miry clay . . . and *a new song* put in His mouth, even praise to our God. How well could the harps of God re-echo this new song !

After this vision the prophet saw the temple, the inner shrine of the tabernacle of witness in heaven *opened*, not now to see the ark of the covenant, but for the coming out of the messengers of judgement, clad in pure lustrous linen, and girded with divine righteousness. The tabernacle of old was the depository of the testimony of righteousness—it was secured there. One of the living creatures, the living agents of the throne of the living God, gave to them seven golden vials (or bowls) full of the wrath of the eternal God. It is this which is so terrible ; and there is no more a door of mercy held open, neither priest nor intercession was there, for no one was able to enter in—it was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power. “ Our God is a consuming fire.” No inviting voice is heard from thence. How awful ! But a great voice says, “ Go and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon *the earth* ”. Earth here stands in contrast with heaven, from whence the wrath comes.

The vials or bowls are poured out on the same objects of judgement as were affected by the sounding of the trumpets. If it be allowed me here to refer to Psalm xxii., where the sevenfold

sufferings of our Lord on the cross are recorded, that which made them so unutterably deep and sorrowful beyond all that ever was before, is that the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" hung like a dark pall over all the rest. Thus with the vials, the sting of the misery in each was that no ray of light from God was there, but only the smoke of His wrath.

The first bowl is poured out on the earth, the ordered scene of God's special dealings. The second is on the sea, the masses of mankind out of which the Beast arose. The tumultuous heavings of the peoples may be quiet, but it is the silence of death—that is what has fallen on it, no soul of life is there. The third is on the rivers and fountains of water. If we conceive of these, which in Scripture are used to denote sources of life and blessing, becoming sources of death, where shall men look for relief when the springs of life convey to men the sentence of death, made awful by the wrath of God? Saints and prophets, who had spoken to men the living word of God, they had put to death; and the altar—the witness of the cry of those under it in chapter vi.—utters its voice, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgements". The little while those saints had to wait is over; their brethren had been slain, and their blood avenged.

The fourth bowl is poured out on the sun, the very centre of the heavenly powers set to rule the earth. Authority which should order the earth

for blessing becomes intolerable. The fifth necessarily follows the fourth. It is poured out on the throne of the Beast, his kingdom is filled with darkness, and the pæans of wonder and homage (chap. xiii. 3, 4) are changed into the groans of distress and blasphemy, but there is no repentance ; remorse there may be.

The sixth is poured out on the great boundary river which has separated the east from the west ; the demarcation is obliterated, so that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared. And now from the mouths of the trinity of evil and apostasy go out unclean spirits of demons, working miracles, to gather together the kings of the whole habitable world to the battle of that great day of God, the Almighty. Then comes another parenthetical statement, " Behold, I come as a thief ". All this book is the testimony of Jesus, and it is He who speaks. We have also great contrasts. The true church saint has on the wedding garment, and thus awaits the translation which will conform him to the likeness of Christ's body of glory ; but the saints who will be in the midst of such a scene as is before us are those who are *following after righteousness* (Isa. li. 1), not knowing *Christ* as their righteousness. They are blessed in waiting for the coming One, and have to keep their garments, so that their shame is not seen. Still the principle is valuable at all times. It is the Lord God Almighty who gathers these kings to Armageddon—the mountain of Megiddo (Judges v. 19).

The seventh angel poured out his vial on the air. This seems to mark the universality of the plague, just as the air encircles this world ; indeed, all these plagues have a wider scope than the trumpets affected—that was “ *the third part* ”, but there is no reservation here. A great voice out of the temple in heaven proclaims, “ It is done ”, or, “ has come to pass ”, that is, the pouring out of the wrath of God on the objects of His judgment. Heaven is convulsed with lightnings, voices, and thunders : and the earth quaked, such as had not been since men were upon it. “ The great city ”—there is no name given by which to recognize it ; we may take the term as representing the organized system of political and commercial confederation—became divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. The political centres which each nation had built up collapsed. Great Babylon came into remembrance before God to give her the cup of His wrath. Compare Jeremiah xxv. 15–33—the contents of this cup we get in chapters xvii., xviii. I presume the prophecy of Haggai ii. 21, 22 is being fulfilled. The shaking of everything is accompanied by a storm of hail poured out from heaven. Yet men only blasphemed God because of it—resist or avert it they could not. It is sad and sorrowful to write of that which lies before this Christ-rejecting world. The shelter of the Rock of Ages they know not, nor can they have it. What is before the Christian, dear reader, is that shelter every day of his life, the blessings of heaven ministered to him, and heaven itself at the close.

, CHAPTERS XVII., XVIII.

Here one of the seven angels * spake with the prophet, saying, "Come hither, I will show thee the sentence of the great harlot who sits upon the many waters". She is the great incitress to corruption and wickedness of the inhabitants and kings of the earth. The answer to come *hither* is found in a desert land. Thither the prophet was carried in spirit—a place of utter spiritual destitution, with neither wells of water, nor rain from heaven. Her meretricious ways were scattered everywhere. She is seen at first seated on the scarlet coloured Beast of Rome, apparently directing and controlling it. Her clothing is that of assumed royalty, and a golden cup in her hand was full of abominations (that is, *idolatries*) as well as uncleanness. Man is conscious, however infidel he may be, of the spiritual powers of another world, though they may be evil. Balak in his fear sought to the soothsayer Balaam; Saul in his misery turned to the witch of Endor. With Babylon there was not the mere evil of nature, but a spiritual domination over those she intoxicated. Moreover, she was drunk with the blood of the saints, and of the martyrs of Jesus. Her name was plainly written on her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth". We have only to read Isaiah xlvii. 7-10, in order to see that the mystic Babylon of Revelation is a

* A vial or bowl was not poured on Babylon, but *one of the angels* shows to the prophet the full details of her judgement.

counterpart of the heathen Babylon of old. The prophet wondered to see that which had grown up in the sphere of the testimony of the gospel, bearing the marks of an idolatrous and heathen city. We may ask with the angel, "Wherefore dost thou wonder?" How did this horrible system come into being? Let us trace it. In 1 Corinthians the apostle had to say to that assembly, "Flee fornication"; and also, "Flee from idolatry". The second Epistle shows us that his apostolic care stayed the two evils which resulted from unhallowed worldly associations. Yet in his earnest desire for their enlargement, he asks them, "What agreement hath *the temple of God with idols?*" Turning now to the churches of Asia, to whom the apostle John wrote, we find that those who held the doctrine of Balaam were allowed to be in the assembly at Pergamos. "To eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" was the stumbling-block which Balaam put before the children of Israel. In Thyatira these doctrines were not merely held but *taught* by one called Jezebel, and a generation was produced of such evil. It is no imagination to connect Jezebel with the woman on the scarlet coloured beast—the mother of harlots and abominations (idolatries) of the earth. The downward road is easy, nor need we wonder, when the true saints have been translated to heaven, if the empty shell is possessed by a seven-fold power of evil (Luke xi. 26).

Before considering the angel's explanation of the mystery of the woman and of the beast that

carried her, I desire to call the reader's attention to the early verses of this chapter. They give a *characteristic description* of the woman, without pointing out any *definite time* of her corrupting activities. Hence we may consider that the hierarchical system of papal Rome assuming imperial power, and corrupting the kingdoms of the earth, took up the character of Jezebel and answered for the time being to the woman on the scarlet coloured beast.

I must not pass by the apostle Paul's inspired word, that in the latter times some would depart from the faith "giving heed, to *seducing spirits* and *doctrines of demons speaking lies*". And further that the time would come when "they shall turn away their ears *from the truth*, and shall be turned to *fables* [myths, heathen legends]" (2 Tim. iv. 4). These prophetic utterances foreshadowed this mystic woman.

There is a *very definite time* before the mind of the Spirit when the angel speaks of the beast that carried the woman. It is the beast in its last apostate and blasphemous form, subsequent to the casting out of Satan or the Dragon from the heavenly places. "It was, and is not, and ascends out of the abyss, and goes into perdition." It is the same beast that we considered in chapter xiii., only that here prominence is given to its seven heads. It is also the fourth beast of Daniel vii. but in resurrection form, the Latin part of the old Roman empire. All the earth-dwellers wonder when they see the beast that was, and is not (at the time of the vision), and shall be present. The

names of these wondering earth-dwellers were not written from the founding of the world in the book of life.

It needed understanding to count *the number* of the beast ; here the mind of wisdom is needed to interpret *the seven heads*. They are seven mountains on which the woman sits. This refers, it is said, to the seven hills on which the city of Rome is built ; he that has the mind of wisdom must judge. Verse 18 would confirm this. But the mountains also in Scripture represent forms of power, and it is therefore added, " There are seven kings ", but five of those forms of power had then fallen ; one (the sixth) *is*—the imperial—and the seventh had not come at the time of the vision. When he comes he would continue but a little while. It is, I presume, the imperial form revived for a short space of time ; it then runs into an eighth or resurrection form, and as such goes into perdition.

The ten horns are then explained. They are not successive forms of power as with the heads, but ten kings that **had not** *then* received a kingdom, but would receive authority as kings one hour with the beast. There are three special things to be noted with regard to them. They give their power and authority to the beast ; they make war with the Lamb ; and together with the beast they hate the harlot, make her desolate, and burn her with fire. Babylon, as a harlot, is burned with fire, while as a city it sinks in the waters of judgment. For as the holy Jerusalem above is regarded as a *city*, and as the Lamb's *wife*, so Babylon

had the character of a harlot and a city. Her description as a city is similar to that of Tyre in Ezekiel xxvii. ; chapter xxviii. shews how Satan was the leading spirit of the city which said, " I am of perfect beauty ". Man under Satan's leading has used Christianity to embellish *the world* ; the birds of the air have found shelter in the mustard tree with its astounding growth. The word is, " Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues ". This summons is, I doubt not, specially for Irsael in the last days (compare Isaiah xlviii. 20), but it has a voice for saints at all times, who would quit the world with its lusts and adornments, whereby souls are beguiled and kept away from Christ.

CHAPTER XIX. I.

If we needed evidence of the character of Babylon, the hallelujahs in heaven when she has been judged are witnesses of the mind of heaven as to the awful corruption, and worship of the creature, which was found in her, and of the violence wherewith she had shed the blood of prophets and saints, and of all the slain upon the earth. The hallelujahs break forth a second time (now refreshing to our spirits to hear them, after having followed the history of evil and abomination). The first thing celebrated is the salvation and glory and power of God, whose judgements are true and righteous ; and secondly there is praise because evil has been judged ; the smoke of Babylon's torment rising up for ever calls forth fresh hallelujahs.

And now for the last time we see the "elders" associated with the living creatures as they fall down and worship God, the sitter on the throne (as in chap. iv.), saying, "Amen, Hallelujah". Then a voice comes out from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him". It is doubtless the voice of Christ (as in the last five hallelujah psalms), the earth-rejected Lamb, who gives the keynote which is taken up by the heavenly multitudes, as the voice of many waters and mighty thunders, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth". There is also a cause of rejoicing, and of praise and exultation, because the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. The elders, who have been so linked with the throne and its attributes in vindication of the title of the Lamb, now take the place of closest association with Him as His wife,* and are formally owned and invested with bridal attire—fine linen, bright and pure; "for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints". These saints have been manifested before the judgement seat of Christ, and that which grace had wrought in them of Christ, as approved by the judgement seat, is now granted to them to appear in. John's view of the bride in Revelation is that she expresses the

* I do not forget that the elders embrace assuredly the Old Testament saints, who do not actually form part of the bride herself; but the Spirit here gives prominence to *the bride*, and the saints of the Old Testament who looked for Christ, will form part of the bridal party, and like John will rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice (John iii. 29).

graces and activities of the Beloved, what *He is* is now shewn forth in her. She had learned much of Him in suffering and trial, and hence can the better bear Him company in the glory. Paul speaks of *presenting her to himself*, a glorious church without spot or wrinkle.

It is all such a blessed scene that John fell at the feet of the angel to do homage to him. The angel disallows it at once, speaking of himself as a fellow-servant of John and of his brethren who have the testimony of Jesus, adding, for *the spirit* of prophecy, not *the letter*, is the testimony of Jesus. John had seen in vision *the joys* of heaven, as before in chapter v. *the satisfaction* of heaven, when the sealed book was given into the hands of the Lamb.

CHAPTER XIX. II.

Now heaven opens ; it had opened on Jesus at His baptism—it had opened to let Stephen see Him as Son of man at the right hand of God ; *a door* had been opened in heaven in chapter iv., but now heaven itself is opened to let Jesus come forth. He comes forth sitting on a white horse—the sign of victorious power, but personally He is the “ Faithful and True One ”, judging and making war in righteousness to establish *in power* the righteousness He loved, and to judge the evil which He hated ; it had been morally judged in His cross, and righteousness then made good and glorified. He who suffered then had patiently waited while the effects of that moral judgement were made good in the hearts of men by the gospel

and by the Holy Ghost's witness. Now it is about to be made good in power.

He comes forth also in the truth of a name which none knew but Himself. We may say that it could not be the subject of revelation, for what mere creature could possibly know the intrinsic glory of His Person? I presume "a garment dipped in blood" is an allusion to Isaiah lxiii. and refers to the fact stated at the close of verse 15. Moreover, His name is the "Word of God", but He is not now revealing God in grace to men, a sharp sword goes out of His mouth to smite the nations (compare Isaiah xi. 4). The armies of heaven, also on white horses, the saints in robes of white, follow Him as being associated with Him in His righteous judgement. The nations are subjected to His Shepherd-rule. Psalm ii. 9 is about to be fulfilled. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus bears the same dignities that the Spirit attaches to God, "the blessed and only Potentate" in 1 Timothy vi. 15. If God and Christ were One in grace they are now one in judgement.

There are two more visions in the chapter. In one, an angel in the place of supreme authority—the sun, whose going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it—summons all the birds that fly in mid-heaven to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of all that were gathered together to make war with the Lamb; but in reality they are gathered together as sheaves to the floor (Micah iv. 12), for it is the great day of God the Almighty (chap. xvi. 14).

In the second vision of that great day, the prophet saw the Beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against the Sitter on the white horse and His army. There is in reality no war, for the Beast, the embodiment of man's violence and self-exaltation, and the false prophet ("the king" in the land of Israel) who played into His hands, are taken and sent alive into the lake of fire (compare Isa. xxx. 33: "for *the King* it is prepared"), and the rest were slain with the sword of His mouth. It has often been noted that two men, Enoch and Elijah, were translated *alive* to heaven, and these two men go down quick (alive) into hell.

CHAPTER XX.

Brings us to the millennium, but let us follow the details. We have seen the setting aside in judgement of the powers of evil on the earth, Babylon—the Beast—and the false prophet, but the *nations* must be freed also from *the deceits of Satan*. Hence, in vision, John saw an angel descending from heaven having the key of the abyss. The dragon—that old serpent, the devil and Satan—is bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years, and shut up and sealed there. After the thousand years he is to be loosed for a little season. This millennium will be the blissful time on earth of Christ's reign. It will be a reign of righteousness administered by Christ and the saints, with no tempter to suggest evil to the inhabitants of a redeemed and delivered earth.

The link between heaven and earth will be

formed and maintained by the mediatorial kingdom of Christ. Jacob's ladder foreshadowed such a link, as also did the porch in Solomon's temple of old; the porch was not part of the *temple itself*—which set forth, in figure, “heaven thy dwelling place”—but was attached to it with its two pillars, “Jachin” (He shall establish), and “Boaz” (in Him is strength); nor did it belong to the court—a holy yet *earthly* place in figure. It set forth the administration of heavenly blessing to earth. Thus an earth on which has been written “vanity and vexation of spirit” will be upheld in blessing by Christ reigning in righteousness with the heavenly saints. Isaiah xlv. 18 will be fulfilled.

Verse 4. “I saw thrones, and *they sat upon them*”. Daniel (chap. vii. 9) saw that thrones were set (not “cast down”) but they were unoccupied. *Here* judgement was given to those who sat on the thrones—specially mentioned are those spoken of in chapter vi. 9–11 as martyred, and also their fellow martyrs of chapter xv. 2. Having been *raised* they share in the *heavenly part of the kingdom*—they lived and reigned *with Christ* a thousand years. Of the saints of the holy city Jerusalem above it is said, “They shall reign *for ever and ever*”. The first resurrection is complete, they are blessed and holy, and on them death has no right or title, but they are priests of God, and of Christ, and reign *with Him* for the thousand years.

Verse 7. “When the thousand years have been completed”—we learn from other Scriptures that

Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, because every enemy has been subdued. Here is detailed to us this final subjugation. Satan will be loosed in order that the last test of the nations of the earth may take place. Man, after a thousand years of Christ's beneficent reign, will again lend his ear to Satan—his malice is directed against the camp of the saints and the holy city. "A short work" is made on the earth—instead of the beneficence of heaven, fire comes thence from God and devours the adversaries. There is an analogy between the "Gog and Magog" of Ezekiel and those mentioned here; both are immense hosts, but there is the thousand years between the two *attacks—they represent *the*

* A question having been asked as to the statement that a thousand years elapse between two attacks of Gog and Magog, and even if there be two attacks mentioned in Scripture. The answer is given here:—

"I judge that a symbolical meaning attaches to the name 'GOG', used by Ezekiel to convey the idea of an 'immense host'. Let it be noted that the coming up of Gog, of the land of Magog (Gen. x. 2), is *after* the bringing back of Israel by Jehovah from among the nations, the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel becoming one in Jehovah's hand, and His everlasting covenant having been established with them (Ezek. xxxvii.). The object is 'to take a spoil and a prey' (compare Judges vi. 3, 4). Isaiah xxxiii. refers doubtless to the same event—'Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled'. This chapter *follows* the vision of the king reigning in righteousness of chapter xxxii. Psalm cvii. also alludes to this inroad of Gog. In verse 2 we read that *Jehovah had gathered* them (Israel) out of the lands from the east and west and north and south. He then blesses them so that they are multiplied greatly; but again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow (verses 38–39).

"We may say that the constant refrain of Ezekiel's prophecy is—'And they shall know that I am Jehovah', and one of the effects of the coming up of Gog will be that the mass of extern heathen nations will know that Jehovah,

extern nations of the earth, outside the rule of the throne of David.

And now Satan, whose moral judgement was pronounced by Christ (John xii. 31), finds his eternal doom in the lake of fire, where the Beast and false prophet had already found their portion. The trinity of evil is for ever in helpless misery. Then comes the vision of the great white throne, and the fulfilment of Psalm cii. 26—the passing away of the created earth and heaven—they have served their purpose, for in them has been wrought out *and solved* the question of good and evil. Good eternally fills the universe of God, and in bringing it to pass, all His glory and gracious purposes of love have been displayed. Evil is

Israel's God, is the great I AM, and that His ways with Israel will end in a millennium of blessing for the whole world. 'God shall bless *us* ; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.'

"The Spirit of God by John in the Apocalypse uses the symbolical names of 'Gog and Magog' to describe a multitude 'whose number is as the sand of the sea'. The loosing of Satan from the abyss, after having been bound there during the millennium of blessing for this earth, is the cause of this multitude coming up against 'the camp of the saints . . . and the beloved city'—the earthly Jerusalem. When loosed he goes out 'to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle' ! We have to remember as to those who will be born during the millennium of blessing, that the Lord's words to Nicodemus remain true, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh', whatever privileges *mere flesh* may possess. There will have been the privilege of Christ's blessed reign of righteousness and peace, and also the written testimony of His sufferings according to Psalm xxii. 31. Yet the loosing of Satan will test whether this testimony has through the power of the Spirit wrought a divine work in their souls. If not, they will listen to the tempter, and meet their doom by God's judgement of devouring fire from heaven."

for ever in the lake of fire. Evil has been proved to be evil, and its judgement is an eternal witness of the holiness of God, and of the righteousness of His ways, exercised in longsuffering goodness and patience.

Note well, the dead are judged after the earth and heaven have fled away—*they stand before God*—small and great—all are judged in righteousness, according to what is written in the books—*their works stand recorded*, all is brought home to them—they had no registration in the book of life. The first resurrection is the great separation between the saved and the lost. Christ will raise His own in the power and virtue of *His own resurrection*, they are of His order. “The dead” neither know Him nor were known of Him. To be outside of all that is good and holy and blessed, and to be in misery for ever is too awful to think of.

Oh! the joy of salvation. Blessings for ever be to God and Christ!

CHAPTER XXI.

The visions of judgement are over, and the prophet saw a new heaven and a new earth, and no more sea. There is nothing troubled or restless. All exists now in resurrection life and power. It is still heaven *and* earth—the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another, but they are brought close together—“the *tabernacle of God is with men*”. We recognize in this “tabernacle” the assembly coming down out of heaven *as a bride adorned for her husband*. There is no more one favoured nation

where the tabernacle of God rests, it is “ *with men* ”. There is one blessed family of men, and Christ the Head of it (1 Cor. xv. 28). He retains His place as Man for ever. God Himself shall be with them, *their God*, and they His people. It might be asked, “ Why is the figure of a tabernacle used, and not that of a temple ? ” I judge that it is because the great thought in the tabernacle of old was God’s approach to man in Christ. There is nothing now to hinder this approach. Evil there is not, and every trace of sorrow and death has passed away. How infinitely blessed and yet how tender the love when it is the blessed God Himself who wipes away every tear—the former things have passed away : and “ He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new ”. The old things are not renovated, they have passed away. John is to write—it is to be put on record, for the *words* are just what Christ is, “ Faithful and True ”. Again, as was said of the old creation : “ He spake and it was ”. So with the new creation. He said, “ It is done ”. All has come into being that God has purposed in Christ. He who was the Alpha and Beginning in Genesis, is the Omega and End in the Revelation. Christ is the Beginning and End of the thoughts and ways of God. Here again we find that which is characteristic of John’s writings, that God and Christ, the Father and the Son, *are one*. The loud voice out of heaven is, I judge, that of Christ (ver. 3) ; while in verse 7 it is said, “ I will be *his God*, and he shall be my son ”—this is said to the overcomer. All down the history of this world,

the saints, men of faith, have been overcomers. Abel did not follow in Cain's steps, he overcame the "way of Cain", though he suffered and died for refusing it. That which was made known to a poor sinner by One sitting "as he was" at Sychar's well is now uttered by the same blessed lips when He has taken the place of the Beginning and End of the creation of God. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Sweet it is to listen to Jesus at the well-side—sweet to hear the same words sounding from the eternal shore. But, oh! what a contrast to see those consigned to eternal judgement who never had the heart or courage to confess Jesus, but went on in sin.

We have reached, in our meditation, the passing of time-scenes into the ocean of eternity. The bride, the Lamb's wife, has her place in that eternity as the tabernacle of God, but the prophet is now shown (ver. 9) her proportions and beauty, as she descends out of heaven from God into millennial scenes. That it is her millennial character which is before us is clear from several details. It is an angel—one of the seven who had the seven last plagues, who carries John away in the spirit to *a great and high mountain*—that is not needed in the vision of verse 2. No wall is needed there, nor can there be east and north, and south and west; nor are there 'nations' to bring glory and honour to the city. In the millenium it is the *Lamb who suffered on earth* who will be glorified in the saints. He has given to them the glory which has been given to Him. The

Lamb is not seen in the eternal state. The city is seen *as a whole*. The saints compose its structure, but *they* are not seen. It is radiant *with the glory of God*, and the Lamb is the *Lamp* of it (ver. 23) ; it is a poor word, but verse 11 expresses very beautifully the irradiation of the Lamp. "*Her shining*" (or, she as a Light-bearer) "was like unto *a stone most precious*, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal". He that sat on the throne (in chap. iv.) was like a jasper stone, was *the medium* for the shining of divine glory. The false woman and city "*glorified herself*" (chap. xviii. 7). The glory of God, and the bright beams of the Lamb's effulgence illumine the holy city. Is it not wonderful to see that which began as a day of small things upon earth brought into such glorious display? Jesus, as the Lamb of God, attracted to Himself, and to His dwelling, just *two disciples*. He began with them, and others were added. In Matthew xvi. we see the Lord about to build them upon earth into a new structure—His assembly. In John xx. they are gathered to Him in resurrection life and power. In Acts ii. they are gathered together, and into unity, by the Holy Ghost. In 1 Thessalonians iv. this same company, then composed of changed and risen saints, are gathered up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and *here* they form the structure of the holy city ; and whose workmanship is all this? "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes"! And surely we can say that *He* will be satisfied with the work of His own hands

With what patience of grace has all this been accomplished !

The fact that there is a wall shows that there is still evil to be excluded, as it is said, "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth". Evil cannot lift its head because of the righteous rule of Christ. Truthful righteousness and holiness are secured. We have said that the jasper wall is expressive of the divine nature, *that which cannot be soiled* because it is divine. It has twelve gates. The gate was the place of administration as well as of ingress and egress. Hence the ministration of providential care and order committed to angels is linked with the holy city. Twelve angels were at the gates ; also the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the ministers of the testimony of God on earth. Both angels and the sons of Israel are linked with the outgoings of the city. Angels adore the Lamb, but redeemed saints have been brought into the intimacy of His sufferings and glories.

The wall had twelve foundations, and on them the names of the twelve apostles *of the Lamb*. They had been *witnesses* of His life down here and of His sufferings. Paul had not, though he could say, "if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together". The sufferings of Christ laid the foundation for the glories to follow. It was to the twelve that He showed His hands and feet after His resurrection ; and to the two going to Emmaus He said, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ?"

The city is *measured* with a golden reed—it is found to be perfect according to the measure of a man—that is, the angel measures it according to human measurement. That which is divine cannot be measured. The city lies foursquare and presents to us that which is finite—a system of glory overshadowing the lower creation, and founded on the sufferings of the Lamb. In the eternal state there is no measure to the holy city, for it is the tabernacle *of God*, not of His glory, but *of Himself*. In the millennial aspect it is the vessel of His glory, and the Lamb lightens the city, and in its light the nations will walk.

The structure of the wall was of jasper, the medium for the display of the glory which is divine; and the city was pure gold like pure glass. No one ever saw such a thing in nature, but the figure beautifully sets forth the character of “the new map”—“which according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness” (Eph. iv. 24). The foundations *were adorned* with all manner of precious stones. They received and reflected the various colours of the Light. We see a varied difference between the ministry of Matthew and John, or that of Peter, James, and Jude, yet each ministered Christ according to the grace given to them and as taught by the Spirit of His beauties and perfections.

The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each several gate was one pearl. In Matthew xiii. 45, under the figure of the pearl of great price, is set forth the beauty and preciousness of the assembly to Christ, it was that which He gave up all to

possess. He saw in it that which livingly answered to Himself, and therefore could be expressive of Himself. In the heavenly city all who approach its gates from every side see this beauty of Christ in it. HE will be admired by all who come to its entrance.

The street, or Broadway of the city, was pure gold, as transparent glass. "No soil of nature's evil" can leave a stain on the radiancy of its righteous, holy glory. Hence there is no temple where God has to dwell apart in order to secure His own glory. The city itself is filled with the presence of the Lord God Almighty and of the Lamb. Nor had it need of created light, for—

"Glory supreme is there,
Glory *that shines through all.*"

It is the metropolis of glory in whose light the nations will walk. The Lamb once *walked* in this world (John i. 36), but only a few sought His company. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and *we hid as it were our faces from him.*" What will it be when *He* is displayed in the saints, not only in those who clung to Him in rejection down here, but in those also who have believed through their word now that He is in glory? The glory of God will shine in Him and them, and through Him and them to the nations. The glory and honour of *kings* are given to *the Lamb*, who was once in reproach and shame, but is now the light of the holy city. There is no night there, hence the gates are never shut:—

"Unfailing praise each heart doth fill,
And love eternal reigns."

Nothing enters there, save those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

CHAPTER XXII.

Chapter xxii. continues the description of the city, giving that *which flows from it*. We have seen that if glorious righteousness characterizes it, yet it shines *in the Lamb*. The river of the water of life—the Spirit revealing all the fullness of the glory of grace, as known in the Lamb, goes out from *the throne* of God and the Lamb (compare John vii. 38, 39). *The reign* of righteous grace secures this outpouring of the Spirit from on high (Isa. xxxii. 1, 15). It has the character of the “latter rain” of Joel ii. 23; the former rain came at Pentecost. The tree of life grows on its banks, and here there is another evidence of the millennial aspect of the city, for it yielded its fruit *every month*. No flaming sword of cherubim guards it, for the promise to the overcomer in Ephesus is fulfilled in all the freshness of never-fading affections, whilst the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. The sad tale of human woe by nation rising against nation is hushed through the ministry of the healing virtues of the tree of life. No curse is there (contrast Gen. iii. 17); no fading leaves, for everything exists in the power of the life of Christ. Sweet it is now to us while down here to be given this view of Jerusalem above, and to know that Jesus lives!

Again it is said that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and that *His* servants shall serve *Him*. Mark how God and the Lamb

are identified. These servants are in *His* direct presence, with *His* name on their foreheads; they are manifestly *His*, and are consciously under His shining, and they reign for ever and ever. They reign to serve according to the glory of the grace which shines upon them.

John is assured that all that had been communicated to him was *faithful and true*. These communications by His angel were according to Himself, "Faithful and True". (chap. xix. 11). The Spirit of God who spoke in the prophets of old was now shewing to His servant things which must shortly come to pass. In Daniel's prophecy the words were closed up and sealed till the time of the end (chap. xii. 9). Not so now, there is a present blessing on those who keep the words of the prophecy of *this book*; they are not to be sealed, for the time is at hand. Hence we have three times over, "I come quickly". It has been noted, that when it is a question of responsibility and reward, as in verses 7 and 12, there is no answer of the Spirit on the lips of the saints. But when the words "I Jesus" are spoken, and *what He is* both for earth and heaven—then the Spirit and the bride say to Him, "Come!" There is an answer also to His reply to the Spirit and the bride: "Yea, I come quickly". At once the answer is given, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus".

In verse 9 the angel again refuses the homage of the prophet. I do not think John had the mind of those spoken of in Colossians ii. 18—with them it was *intrusion*; not so with John, the

Spirit had carried him up into heavenly scenes, and the place of angelic services, and he felt the reverence that belonged to that which surrounded him. But the angel was only "a fellow-servant"—an exalted one, no doubt, but all worship belongs to God alone.

Verse 11 must be read in the light both of the preceding and succeeding verses—"The time is at hand", and "I come quickly". The great and eternal distinction is made between those who have washed their robes, and go in by the gates into the city, and those who are without, and without for ever.

Let me again draw attention to the testimony of Christ by His angel, and then the utterance of Christ Himself. The youngest believer can respond to the words "I Jesus", that sweet and well-known name! Even if "Come" be not said in the intelligence of the bride, yet it is added: "Let him that heareth", both the voice of Jesus, and of the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Then, as knowing what Jesus has given to us, we can say to any thirsty soul, "Come!" Come to Jesus, and "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". How the door of everlasting blessing through grace is held open to the last moment of its reign!

The Revelation closes with a solemn warning as to adding to or taking from, by any one who hears, the words of the prophecy of this book. And till He comes, we are assured that *the grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with all His saints.

"*Surely I come quickly. Amen, Even so, Come, Lord Jesus.*"—CHAP. xxii. 21.

Again I'll come !

Safe to my Father's home
To gather, with myself to rest
My ransomed ones—for ever blest,
Again I'll come !

Soon will I come !
Deepens the dark night's gloom ;
Yet I am not as one afar,
Dawns in your heart the Morning Star ?
Soon will I come !

Quickly I come !
Count not that I delay ;
Life's fountain opened in my side,
For thirsty ones doth still abide,
The while I stay.

Surely I come !
Watch for your absent Lord !
Be ye as those who patient wait,
To open to their Lord the gate,
When He shall come.

Yes, I will come :
The Bridegroom for the bride ;
Amen, I'll set to all my love,
Amen ! our lips responsive move,
LORD JESUS, COME !

CONCLUSION.

I WOULD now give some *concluding remarks*. I have already pointed out that there is a difference between promise and prophecy. Prophecy had to do with the course of God's dispensational ways upon earth, whether in regard of Israel, or the assembly of God in its present responsible position, as set to give light down here for the Lord Jesus Christ ; now that He is glorified as Son of Man in heaven, but the proper hope of the assembly is dependent on *promise*. It is Christ Himself in whom all the promises of God are

Yea and Amen. Christ, in whom is all the fullness of grace for the saints forming the assembly during its sojourn on earth, is the Christ who is coming for those saints according to His *promise*. He is now *separated from earth* by His death and resurrection.

The prophetic part of the Revelation closes with this—"I Jesus have *sent mine angel* to testify these things in the assembly". Thence onward to the end, it is *Christ Himself* in the fullness of His grace who speaks to the Assembly. He speaks to the affections of His saints in saying, "I am the Bright and Morning Star". He is also "the root and offspring of David", and as such He is the Yea and Amen of all the promises connected with David, and the saints of the Assembly can rejoice in that, but the answer of the Spirit and the bride saying, "Come!" is to *Himself* as "the Bright and Morning Star". The Morning Star belongs to the heavens (though it forms no part of heavenly rule as in Gen. i. 16; Psa. cxxxvi. 8, 9) as also to the Assembly in its remnant character (chap. ii. 28).

- It is very precious to realize in the prophetic part of this book that the Lord is speaking to "His servants" (chap. i. 1) as friends. It was in this manner He spoke to Abraham of old, when He said: "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?" (Gen. xviii. 17). What holy intimacy it is, to be the depository of the thoughts of God, though those thoughts may not have reference to ourselves. It is this which we see in the twenty-four elders: they are in the intimacy

of the actings of the throne. This leads me to make another remark which connects itself very directly with our readiness to join in the Spirit's cry, and to say, Come!

It is one thing to know the forgiveness of sins through Christ's finished work, but it is more to know that we have been *taken into favour in the Beloved* (Ephes. i. 6), to the praise of the glory of God's grace. The *work done* was done for us, but we read that "Christ has loved us, and given Himself *for* us, an offering and sacrifice *to* God for a sweet smelling savour". It is Jesus who has done this, the very "I, Jesus", who looks for us to say to Him, "Come!" and whom we know as having met *our* deepest need at Calvary; but in doing it He was so precious to God, that as Man He has gone back into the same glory that He had before the world was. Beloved reader, I ask you, as I ask myself, Is that the favour into which Jesus brings us as accepted in the Beloved?—the Father's beloved Son who introduces us in His own acceptance and worth into the Father's presence and house. The love that does it, and the love into which He brings us, He has made known to us in saying, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them".

This leads me to dwell on another important truth—that prophecy, with which we have been occupied in the foregoing pages, far from being a mere revelation *of events* about to happen, is as much *the living and abiding word of God* as any other communication. The Spirit of Christ

breathes in the word of God, prophetic or otherwise. If we look at the prophetic word in the Gospels spoken by Himself, we have to remember not only that He was the living "Word", but also that "He whom God hath sent speaketh *the words of God*, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure". It was living and operative, it could not be anything else, and consequently does not pass away, but prospers in the thing whereto He has sent it. Let the reader then remember in reading these "Reflections" that the prophetic word is a living and abiding record of God's ways in the accomplishment of which His purpose, as to the glory of Christ as Head of the creation of God, will come to pass. His purpose is that the earth shall be filled with both the glory and the knowledge of God, and this will be brought to pass by its glorious Head. God's original plan that the heaven should be the vessel of light and order to the earth will be carried out. Already Christ has gone into heaven as the Glorious Man and Son of God. God's glory shining in the person of a glorious Man was never there before. It is represented by the Jasper and Sardine stone of Rev. iv. 3. But this medium of the glory of God shines also in the heavenly city of Rev. xxi.—its effulgence is like to a stone most precious—like a Jasper stone, clear as crystal. The city represents the congregated glory of the heavenly saints—the bride of the Lamb shining in His beauty and glory. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him *as he is*"—that is, in heavenly glory—the

saints are to be conformed to His image. Will it not be blessed when this earth in its wide extent basks in the light of such a heaven? The world will then know that Christ, the rejected One of the world, was the Sent One of the Father, for He will appear in the glory given to Him of the Father, and that the saints made perfect in one have been loved as the Son has been loved.

The groans of this creation will then be hushed. It will then be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, and will utter its tribute of praise in the wake of saints and angels, ascribing blessing and honour and glory and power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.