

George Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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NOTE

When these notes were first written in 1966 the Authorised Version of the Bible was in general use in the church. Some of the quotations will be in NIV.

1:1-3

The title of the book in the Authorised Version refers to the revelation of St. John, but he is simply the human instrument of the Spirit of God. The Revelation was given by the Father to the Son, who in turn, by angelic messenger, conveyed the message to John in his lonely exile in Patmos. As we go through the book we shall become aware that we are being shown the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King and Head of the Church, as the great executive administrator of the perfect purposes of God. We shall then be looking for Christ in Revelation, and our understanding of the visions and wonders will be in relation to Christ. For example, in the first three chapters we see Christ in the midst of the Church, a figure of glory and confidence. In Chapter 5, it is Christ the Lamb and the Lion in relation to the throne of God. In 13:8, it is Christ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In 22:3, it is the throne of God and of the Lamb. Now, do you see why a special blessing is promised to those who *read, hear and keep* the things written in this book? Two more phrases are to be noted: "Things which must soon take place" and "The time is near." Right through Revelation one emphasis seems to be on the future, while the other is on the present. But keep in mind always that a day and a thousand years are not very different to God (2 Pet.3:8-9). His name is the everlasting "I AM" and He refuses to have His work dissected into past, present and future, as these terms are so strictly understood by *us*. God's mind and memory are ever fresh, as is the expansiveness of His holy heart, so that He can look back to the patriarchs, scan our day and generation, and look on to the final completeness of His historical purposes and see everything as one coherent whole, which it is. He is a God free from hurry or hesitation, and presently dynamic and progressive. He is at work, and will show us His workings in Revelation.

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1:1-3

The phrase, "Things which must shortly come to pass," (AV) seems to point totally to the future, and we pause today to consider briefly the various interpretations of this book. Some hold that John was speaking *only* to his own day and generation, and by vision, symbol and illustration was depicting pagan Rome's persecution of the Christians and its impending downfall. Others hold that almost everything in this book, apart from chapters 1-3, is still in the future and to be fulfilled in the time immediately preceding Christ's Second Coming. This would mean John's words had little relevance to his own generation except to confuse them, for they believed Christ's return was imminent. This view would also mean that the Book of Revelation had no strengthening message for the successive generations of Christians and its study would degenerate (as it has often done) to a mental exercise with its focus on charts and dates and programmes of events. Others again see this book as describing the sweep of history with the various visions and symbols succeeding each other in historical sequence. But, as has been held since earliest apostolic days, the seals (6:12-17; 8:1), the trumpets (11:15), and the vials or bowls (16:17) all seem to bring us to the point of the Second Coming of Christ and the culmination of the age, and we are to conceive of them as running parallel rather than in strict sequence. Hendricksen's commentary, "More than Conquerors," divides the book into seven sections, each giving a picture of the period from Christ's first coming to His second coming. In this way the complete picture is gradually built up in fullness and intensity. The seven sections are: chapters 1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-16; 17-19; and 20-22. Another main division which is helpful is given. In chapters 1-11 we have the Church and the world and their dealings with each other; in chapters 12-22 we press beyond that which is merely earthly to what lies behind the scenes, the conflict between Christ and the Dragon. On the one hand we have Christ in the midst of the Church, and the Church persecuted by Satan and his accomplices. On the other hand we have Christ and His Church not only preserved but victorious. If we can grasp these two things we shall not be without blessing.

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1:4-6

We find ourselves contemplating the glories of God as they centre on the Person and work of Christ, bringing us into a fellowship of love that is eternal. Note how the passage builds up in tremendous majesty of utterance and exposition. The *seven* churches represent the totality of the churches: the universal church of all times and places. The reference to Asia Minor is a solemn reminder of how any one territory can be a centre of spiritual life and witness and yet in time fall into almost impenetrable darkness. Think of the blanket of Islam over so much of the world, then read 2:4-5, and tremble as you think of communities in our day from which the candle of spiritual testimony has been removed! John goes on to speak of the Eternal Father, the same yesterday, today and forever, and of the sevenfold perfection of the Person and working of the Holy Spirit. What a comfort comes from a true doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He is perfect in knowledge, wisdom and power, proceeding from the throne of God to work in absolute harmony with the will of the Father, unfettered and unhindered. This is the Spirit who dwells within our hearts if we are Christian believers, and at the same time surrounds, accompanies, guides and empowers our steps.. What exciting possibilities are to be pondered here! But all this comes to us through the ministry of Christ's awe-ful death. Such thoughts should disturb us.

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1:4-6

Jesus Christ is spoken of as the "faithful witness" to the truth, who can neither be compromised nor restrained (John 8:14; 15:15), a fact testified to even by His enemies (Matt. 22:16). He is the first-born from the dead, and His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. In His resurrection His Sonship and His glorious, effective atonement, were both attested by the Father (Rom. 1:4). He is also the unchallenged and unchallengeable King of all kings (17:14; 19:16). The Kingship of the world which Satan offered on the condition of doing homage and bypassing the Cross, Christ has obtained by means of the Cross. The Spirit-given doxology which follows in verse 5 begins with a declaration of the unchanging attitude of Christ towards His people. He loves us. The tense is the continuous present. This is something which nothing can change. He loves us, and always will. What He did for us in His death was that He "loosed" (freed) us from our sins by His own blood. And the value of that precious blood is the value of a perfect human life freely given up to pay the price and penalty of our sins. The fruit of His work in respect of us is to make us "a kingdom of priests unto God" (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). The saints are to be God's royal household, and will live and work on the basis of their spiritual priesthood, ministering in holy things. They are kings in relation to men, and priests in relation to God, serving Him day and night in His temple (5:10; 7:15). Remember that in virtue of the holy sacrifice made and accepted, the priests have right of access into the near presence of God. This is what has been given to us, and our only fitting response is to give glory to God.

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1:7-8

We follow the story of Christ from His death, through His glorious resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of the Father, to His coming again in full glory. Read here Daniel 7: 9-14. The clouds, even though they be shining brightly with the glory of Christ's kingly presence, are still omens of wrath to all sinners. At the Ascension clouds concealed the risen, ascended Christ (Acts 1: 9-11), and in like manner clouds will be the vehicle of His final revelation. It is as if God was pointing out to John, to us and to all battling Christians, that Christ in all His glory has been there all the time we had been dreading the clouds. Whatever the difficulties in conceiving of a whole world of people all seeing Christ at the same critical moment, we must not whittle down the wonder expressed here. So great will be the brilliance of this event, and so dynamic will be its revelation and confirmation of the truth of God, that every single person will be stricken down with an overpowering sense of conviction of sin. Even the saints who have waited for His coming and welcome Him as their undisputed King will realise for the first time the true enormity and evil of their sin that caused the death of such a Saviour. The saints will sense more poignantly the shame of their shallow life even after this great King had engraced them. But there are different kinds of sorrow. The sorrow of the man who grieves because he has failed and dishonoured the King he believed in and trusted and loved is one thing. There is hope there. But the sorrow of the man who all his life disowned the King and counted Him as of no value, so that He was despised and

rejected, is quite another thing. There is no hope there, simply confirmation of his own choice to be without Christ. The difference is that between heaven and hell.

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1:9-11

It is good to read translations other than the Authorised Version to grasp the true meaning of the Word of God. In the RSV verse 9 reads, "I...your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance..." *In Jesus*, things acquire a unique significance, which they do not otherwise have. John speaks of the tribulation which is the necessary precursor of the kingdom and the means whereby it is established (Matt. 11:21; Acts 14:22). This tribulation and conflict must be faced and accepted with patient endurance, because Christ is in it for good. John does not speak from theory but by revelation confirmed in experience. He was in exile on the isle of Patmos, possibly a prisoner labouring at the quarries. He was bereft of all the fellowship, worship and service that mean so much to believers, and he was in the clutches of political power that was anti-Christian. The reason for his exile is given as "for the Word ... and the testimony..." No doubt this refers back to his faithful and uncompromising stand in the face of persecution that sought to deny and destroy the faith. But it also looks forward to the word God was to speak to him and through him to future generations. The explanation and interpretation of John's immediate experiences go far beyond the man's personal relationship with God. The political enemy was seeming to gain ascendancy by brutal persecution and isolation, but by the Spirit of God circumstances were being over-ruled and used to further God's mighty kingdom. On the first day of the week, though physically separated from his brethren, John was in fellowship with them by the Holy Spirit, and he heard a mighty trumpet-voice calling him to attention and commanding him to write down for the good of the whole church what was about to be shown to him. It was the voice of God, the first and the last (Alpha and Omega being the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet). "There is none before Him who can lay claim to knowledge more pristine than His, and none who can penetrate the ends of existence as He. What He reveals therefore is the last word, full and final." (Wm. Still)

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1:11

Christ is risen. He is alive for evermore. As the glorious King He is found in the midst of His Church. These seven churches are dealt with in detail in chapters 2-3. They were not the only churches in Asia but are selected for a specific purpose. "These seven embody the chief spiritual characteristics of the Church, whether as faithful or unfaithful, in all ages. On one side we have Smyrna, a Church exposed to persecutions unto death; on the other Sardis, having a high name for spiritual life and yet dead. Again, Laodicea, in its own estimate rich and having need of nothing, with ample talents, yet lukewarm in Christ's cause; on the other hand, Philadelphia, with but a little strength, yet keeping Christ's word and having an open door of usefulness set before it by Christ Himself. Again, Ephesus, intolerant of evil and of false apostles, yet having left its first love; on the other hand Thyatira, abounding in works, love, service, and faith, yet suffering the false prophetess to seduce many. In another aspect, Ephesus, in conflict with false freedom, i.e., fleshly licentiousness (Nicolaitans); so also Pergamos in conflict with Balaam-like tempters to fornication and idol-meats; and on the other side Philadelphia in conflict with the Jewish synagogue, i.e., legal bondage. Finally, Sardis and Laodicea without any active opposition to call forth their spiritual energies; a dangerous position, considering men's natural indolence." (J.F.B. Commentary). By speaking a word to seven selected church fellowships God, by His Spirit, speaks to the whole universal church in all ages and in succeeding days we shall hear often repeated, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (2:7)." It is to see the One who speaks and to hear His word that we study this book.

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1:12-16

When John turned he saw seven Golden candlesticks or lamp-stands, each stand holding a light. In Exodus 25:31-32 and Zech. 4:2, 11, the seven branches are united in one main stem or central shaft, symbolising the one light of God in all its perfection. But here, it seems the lamp-stands are separate, having no longer immediate visible unity, yet still held together in complete oneness by the presence and person of Christ in the

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midst. The gold of the candlesticks signifies the divine nature of the churches (they are not human institutions) and the light comes from the all-glorious One in the midst. If He is not there or if His regal presence is denied or shadowed the light grows dim. John recognises Jesus in the midst of the churches, not in His humiliation and rejection, and certainly not as One fleeing before the present generation of persecutors, but as a glorious person of majesty and power. The description is meant to make us bow in awe in the knowledge that this great King is always in the midst of His Church. He is the One in whose presence we bow to worship. Think of the gold, the white, and the eyes of fire. "Thou God seest me!" (Gen.16:13AV) Do the feet of brass speak of progressive righteous judgments? The mighty voice that subdues all others is the same voice that said, "Come unto Me." Out of His mouth issues a two-edged sword, His Word, the instrument by which His will is executed. Being two-edged it can cut to judge and also to heal and comfort. Cannot the same Word preached bring blessing or condemnation to those who hear it? His face was like the unclouded glory of the sun. Think of this glorious description the next time we say in church, "Let us worship God." We may find we are disposed to pray rather than sing.

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1:17-20

John is out of his depth, and feeling himself engulfed in something far too big to grasp and comprehend, he slumps down in a paralysis of fear. Then comes the wonderful gesture of gentle, kindly grace, given only to those who first fall in trembling weakness, "Fear not:" The ground of John's comfort is again the description given of Christ. He is at the beginning of all history, present and active in all its stages, and holds in His own hand the control not only of all that can be apprehended by sight and sense, but also of those realms that lie beyond our present understanding, even death and Hell. Now John is commanded to write down the things revealed to him in this chapter concerning the Person of Christ in the midst of His Church. Then he is to record the truthful description of things as they are in the present experience and condition of the churches, for many churches never aspire to live in the light of the glory here revealed. Some churches live as if God did not exist; certainly they never speak of Him. Last of all, John has to point forward to the final things of judgment and consummation. Immediately after this comes the first revelation or interpretation of the mysterious symbolism. The candlesticks are the churches; that is the churches are there to hold up light that is not their own, and therefore if they become degenerate they are no longer of use and may be disposed of. The stars are the angels of the churches, not in the sense of guardian, supernatural angels (Matt. 18:10), but the God-appointed human agents or leaders responsible unto God for the shepherding and teaching of the people. It is to these men of spiritual leadership that John is commanded to write in the following messages to the churches. This may indicate that the withdrawal to be spoken of in 2:5 is connected with the withdrawal of the appointed "angel" when the fellowship refuses to be led on into the growing grace of God. Such "judgment" may be temporary or permanent. Consider how the Bible also tells of the Spirit's withdrawal from individuals such as Saul and Samson, the latter not even being aware of it (Judges 16:20-21). Can it not happen also to fellowships?

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2:1-7

We read the whole message to Ephesus but must consider it in detail as well as generally. It is interesting to note that in the first three messages, to Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos, the whole church is called to repent, while in the last four the word of challenge is addressed to a remnant. Again in the first three messages we are shown three different conditions prevailing, each of which has become the avenue of Satanic attack. In Ephesus the church was earnestly contending for the faith, fighting for true doctrinal standards, but in the process had lapsed into that formality of attitude, possibly of arid intellectualism, in which she had left her first love for Christ. In Smyrna successive waves of persecution brought martyrdom and revealed a fifth-column of traitors. In Pergamos an infusion of worldliness into the church was mingling heresy with truth to the ultimate concealing of the Gospel. In each case Christ speaks, first describing Himself in a way that fits the immediate situation. The history of the church at Ephesus is significant. In Acts 19:6-20 you see disputation and demons, followed by the uproar about Artemis, the profitable goddess. In Acts 20:25-32 Paul warned the elders (was one of them the "angel" or superintendent, or was that office held by Timothy cf. 1 Tim. 1:3) of denial of the truth beginning within the church. In Ephesians 6:10ff we have the final picture of the situation in all its grim

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demand and battle. To such a church Christ is described as holding the stars in the right hand of His power, and walking in the midst of the church. In a sense this is no new revelation to the Ephesians; but a reminder of what they had already been taught by Paul in Eph. 1:4-5, 17-22; 3:14-21. But their eyes needed to be opened to see this mighty, predestinating God present in their actual situation, not merely watching but working. Indeed He is the only One who does the work, and the responsibility for its issue is His not ours. We are to be faithful to Him, a matter which involves the heart as well as the head.

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2:1-7

If Christ is gloriously present in His church, and if the stars (ministers, pastors, elders, teachers) are held in the right hand of His power, how can the church fall to the ground? Does the fault lie in the secret heart of the ministers? They are by no means faultless and they usually know it! A minister from whom the Holy Spirit has withdrawn His living blessing is a minister of death and desolation. But can the fault not lie with the congregation who, sitting under faithful ministry of the whole truth of God, become so preoccupied with doctrinal accuracy and so familiar with spiritual truth that they no longer receive the Word with living personal response? (Heb.2:1;4:1-2) Call it complacency, spiritual pride or boredom, the fact remains that a dullness takes possession of the soul and spiritual death seems very near. God is not prepared to let that situation go on too long. It would be wasteful. It is also a grief to His heart, for He is left loveless (4). Note how in verses 2-3 these Christians are commended as far as is possible. This was no broken-down church (yet). They were strongly active in the Lord's name and service, and were most intolerant of spiritual error, which they were very good at detecting in each other. But that is not spiritual life. Indeed an obsession with finding and dealing with people's wrongs is a disease of the spirit, for it is negative and scarcely ever constructive or healing and restoring. It seems that Ephesus became exalted in self-estimations, proud of her own spirituality. Her heart was moved away from its true centre in Christ, and as a result she was in danger of being removed from her place of witness and service. Preoccupied with the work of Christ, she had excluded Christ. Perhaps she found doctrinal statements more manageable than a Person, and more desirable.

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2:1-7

It is possible to maintain an outward appearance of spiritual activity and conviction while the heart has backslidden and departed from the Lord. But where the heart has cooled, it is only a matter of time before the warm spontaneity of life gives way to a stiff; unyielding, unattractive, complaining spirit. No doubt all charges of backsliding would be strenuously denied, but God knows. And His searching words are full of grace and comfort. It is comfort indeed to be reminded that God is aware of every fact of a situation and judges, not as people do, but on the basis of truth. His concern here is to call the church and its individual members back to Christ, and to what they once were in and with Christ. It is a word of grace to men and women who were once leaders in spiritual worship and service. But it is backed up by the warning that if the call is not responded to, God will find another instrument to carry His light. Think then how far you may have fallen, and hurry to the remedy while it is possible. Do not evade the issue! Having urged His word of challenge, Christ closes with commendation and promise. The Nicolaitans, like the followers of Balaam, seem to have been those professing Christians who indulged in an undue, unseemly, and unwise freedom in relation to the world and its ways. That this can become gross and ugly is testified to by the history of many fallen Christians. Such can show great spontaneity and kindling enthusiasm in relation to their life of pleasure, whatever cultural level it be on, but the Satanic element in it is seen in the dull sluggishness which comes upon their lives in relation to Christ. But those who turn their backs upon the allurements and seductions of the world that has so much Satanic deception in it, will eat of the tree of life. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again (Matt.7:2 AV). He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says.

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2:8-11

The previous passage spoke of Christ and His church under the illustration of two people, once in love, now having grown used to each other becoming bored and casting around for alternative attractions. Now we see the

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church in the midst of trial and persecution. This is to be expected. When we withdraw our hearts' love and loyalty from Christ, we automatically withdraw our persons from the over-shadowing safety of His near presence and are left open to the buffetings of both sin and Satan. And the enemy who is never far off seeks to make full use of his opportunity. Verse 10 here speaks of the personal activity of the Devil, not one of his minions, seeking to confirm the estrangement from Christ by ten successive waves of persecution in which many Christians were martyred. The instruments used by the Devil to wage such destructive warfare against Christ's church were religious men whose enmity towards Jesus was boundless. They were Jews by natural descent, but they had no spiritual affinity with Abraham (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-7). Remember how Jesus said of some, "Ye are of your father the Devil" (John 8:37-44). Rightly understood, their own religion was fulfilled in Christ when He came amongst them; but they had no place for Him and persecuted both Him and His followers and set themselves to hinder and destroy His work. Little wonder their gathering place was here called a "synagogue of Satan", a convocation and instrument of Hell. Wherever you find in the church someone, a professing Christian or not, who has not yielded unconditionally to the truth as it is in Christ, you find a cell of Satanic work. Sometimes those nearest to the truth but still holding back from it are the most dangerous. Think of Judas, *one of the twelve*! Think of how Jesus spoke of His betrayal by one of His own company and all the disciples said, "Lord, is it I?" It is a terrible thought, but one to be faced when we are tempted to hold back.

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2:8-11

The saintly dedication of the Christians in Smyrna is exemplified in history by the martyrdom of Polycarp, who was possibly the "angel" of the church there. It is recorded that when he was commanded to swear by Caesar he replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Later on, being threatened with burning, he replied, "Thou threatenest the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for thou knowest not of the fire of judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why delayest thou? Bring what thou wilt." History testifies how the Jews clamoured for this godly Christian's death and carried the logs for the fire. Think of the fierce hatred at the Cross as self-righteous religious men screamed for the murder of the Holy Son of God. And they won their battle, or so it seemed. It was the same in Smyrna. The blood of the martyrs stained the ground and there seemed no stopping of the carnage. We think of this tomorrow, but now we do well to read Hebrews 11:33-40 and finally there back to 11:27b. To see the invisible is to understand and be strong.

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2:8-11

If you exclude the unseen and eternal dimension of life nothing makes sense, but if you base your life upon these eternal things that cannot be denied, then all values are transformed. These believers were poor, yet they were rich; just as there are many rich in this world whose poverty is beyond measurement (Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 12:19-20; 16:19-26; Matt. 6:19-21). There is something ironic and deeply revealing in the simple obituary notice that someone *left* so many thousands of pounds. Did they expect to take it with them? But the currency of eternity is different; Evil was rampant in Smyrna and boasted in its victories over the Christians, counting their corpses as evidences of triumph. But Christ the King says; "Fear none of these things." This puny thing we call death, for all its sombre tones and real sorrow, does not speak the final word. Read the whole of 1 Cor. 15, or at least verses 54-58. Then compare it with Rev. 1:18, and 2:8, 10-11. Be faithful unto death and you gain a crown of life, not an inscription on a tombstone and a flowery eulogy in the press to be read and forgotten. On the other hand there is for those whose hearts are anti-Christ a death beyond death, which is terrible to consider. The child of God in Christ is safe, because there stands by him the permanent Christ, undefeated by death which closed over Him when men and devils had done their worst. Evil was a spent force and Christ remained victorious. This brings us back to the thought of the source of persecution, and we see it as being permitted by God for the good and the blessing of His people and the advancement of His work. What a glorious God!

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2:12-17

The name Pergamos or Pergamum is said to mean "twice-married" and speaks volumes concerning the weak, compromised worldly church. In Smyrna the Devil came as a roaring lion, but all his fury could not break the witness of the martyr church. It was so at first in Pergamos, for Antipas died (13), but Satan changed his tactics and came as an angel of light, seducing the heart of the church by worldliness, choking its life-stream with accretions of evil practice and thus paralysing its service. The word of Christ the King to Smyrna was exquisite in comfort and encouragement, but to Pergamos it was a word signifying that judgment was about to begin at the house of God. The picture in verse 16 of Christ fighting against the persons and work of the fellowship is one to make the heart tremble. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:6-12) In this church all was governed by tolerance, that spirit which in the name of Christ says so piously, "We mustn't judge. Love is what matters." But just as any one of us would rise in anger at intrusive spirits that would blight our homes, so Christ rises up angrily to deal with that which blights the fair face of His holy Church. Read John 2:13-17 (an event recorded in all four Gospels). He reacts in the same way when He sees Christians being seduced away into plausible side-tracks of worldliness, which they refuse to acknowledge as worldliness; claiming that there is no harm in them. Watch the flame die in their souls and see it being replaced by a hard, cynical attitude. If faithful men will not or cannot deal with such sources of poison within the Church, Christ Himself will come with the two-edged sword of judgment.

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2:12-17

We must make full allowance, as Christ does here, for the situation and atmosphere in which the church found itself. Pergamos is the place "where Satan's seat is." It is the centre of imperial religion, and seen as the centre or throne of the power of evil, because the God-given power of the state had been exalted to the extent that men were required to worship Caesar. This was the touchstone of civic loyalty and inevitably the Christians were branded as traitors to the state and treated accordingly. Mammon ruled, and the whole of commerce, sport, pleasure, and culture were godless. Satan's tyranny was complete. Unless a man worshipped Caesar, he was put to death. To get a job he had to be a member of a trade guild and attend their idolatrous feasts and all that went with them. The whole secular system militated against the souls of men and women and the testimony of Christ. To be faithful in such a situation is costly but not impossible, and inasmuch as Christ has placed His church there, she has to witness there. It is no use contracting out of a godless situation and finding a job in a "Christian" office, which may turn out to be very far from Christlike. If there are no witnesses where Satan's throne is, how shall Satan's captives ever be set free? No doubt some will quote 2 Cor. 6:13-7:1. The whole passage there is needed because it calls Christ's people out of unholy alliances, unsanctified romances, shady business deals and fleshly indulgences of many kinds. The failure in Pergamos was just there, and we look at it tomorrow. Just now we read John 17, especially verses 11-18. We are in the world but must see to it that we are not of the world.

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2:12-17

In Pergamos there were some, perhaps a few, who held the doctrines and followed the ways of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. But if we feel the stern words and treatment too extreme, just look on to the next church, Thyatira, and you find that only a few do not hold these wrong ways. The curse of worldliness and double-living is that it is a virus which goes through the whole body with its debilitating influence. The particular significance of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans should be studied separately from these notes, but briefly it seems to indicate those who form social alliances that lead to lives whose moral quality is an offence to God. Yet they still take their places with brash impertinence in the House of God and exercise influence in its affairs. The Nicolaitans seem to be those who hold tenaciously to their unholy activities in spite of the fact that the light of Christ has come to them. They have "reconciled" their various activities with their professed faith and still take their places in God's house. Pergamos had them and tolerated them, whereas Ephesus hated them (2:6) in agreement with God. Such persons were seducing others away after them, until true separation is virtually demolished and clear testimony to God's truth obscured. When this happens men die in darkness without a glimmer of light coming from Christ's church (2 Cor. 4:1-4. In the AV the little word 'even' is omitted). Christ speaks of worldliness

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as spiritual fornication and we must not hide the ugliness of the word. Do you say the only alternative is social ostracism? Well, Christ suffered outside the camp (Heb.13:12-14 AV), and He spoke of "meat to eat ye know not of" (John 4:32-34 AV). God is no man's debtor, and the manna, white stone and new name, all speak of secret but sure reward and blessing. They signify a place, a share and a service that are unique to us personally. That makes heaven a fascinating and desirable place, and it is for the overcomers who, no matter how often they stumble and slip back, get up and go on. But it is a sad waste to be always tramping the same familiar stretch of road.

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2:18-29

Thyatira was a commercial and trading city whose business and social life was governed by the trade guilds which operated on the "closed shop" basis so familiar in our own day. This presented a problem to the Christians, for to stand out against such a system, with its suspect practices and morals, would be to face unemployment and destitution. Little is known of the origin of the church in Thyatira but it may have been the result of the witness of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15). It was an active church with much good in spiritual and practical service (19), but a certain woman had been allowed to gain a domineering position and her influence, inspiration and nature are likened to that of Jezebel, who incited Ahab to defy the will of God (1 Kings 21: 25). How she came to this place of power we do not know, but her influence was exerted against the "angel" of the church and she was drawing many away into freer indulgence of life and into compromise with the godless world. How long this had been so we do not know. But when it speaks of Jezebel's children (23) there is a suggestion of a second generation of arrogant, worldly, idolaters growing up *inside* the church, whereby the bloodstream of the church's life would be poisoned, her witness perverted and her activity paralysed. From verse 18 it is clear that the Lord of the Church was against Jezebel and her associates, as they were against Him, and a head-on clash was imminent. The picture is frightening but realistic. The Lord of the Church will not allow men or women to blight that which is of infinite value in His sight.

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2:18-29

The evil which had arisen and become established in Thyatira is strange and sinister, having reached the proportion in which there was no longer remedy or correction. Judgment was the only issue. How had things gone so far? Had there been carelessness, or had the genuine believers been deceived by Satan and taken unawares? We cannot say. The church that is so warmly commended in verse 19 is the faithful remnant, not the formal congregation, and there is just the suggestion that these earnest souls were so busy in their earnestness that they failed to guard the essential spiritual life of the fellowship from encroaching evil. On the other hand in that same verse they are commended for their growth and continuance. Their love (inner disposition) and practical service (the word is deacon and speaks of the cup of cold water Matt.10:42-43) were greater now than earlier. But yet the church, as a church, together with its work, seemed in danger of being brought to a premature end because of a certain faction of evil inspiration within its life. It seems the faithful were to suffer in the judgment and demolishing of that work, but in fact neither they, in their spiritual character, nor their fruitful work in the Spirit, would be destroyed. How could these things fall to the ground? They are the work of God and abide even though creation be destroyed, for they are of eternal quality. In this situation the spiritual remnant are not urged to press on with new work (no other burden) but they are to stand in the evil day and hold fast what they have. The church at Thyatira was undergoing a tremendous attack of the Devil from within its own life. That had to be stood against so that if, in the mercy of God there was to be a future, there would be a spiritual remnant of holy men and women ready to begin again, possibly with a prayer meeting (Eph. 6:10-20).

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2:18-29

Two things remain to be studied here: the judgment on Jezebel and her evil impenitent brood, and the reward of the faithful. We have mentioned already the influence this Jezebel seemed to have over the "angel" of the church and some suggest she was his own wife. It would not be the first or last time that a minister had such a hindrance to the work of God in his own home. Whatever the basis of her teaching and influence, it certainly

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contaminated the professing Christian church, and seems to have so presumed on the grace of God that it made sin easy. The description of this evil in terms of love, marriage and adultery is frightening, and it is amazing how through the Bible the people of God are warned about such things on both a spiritual and physical level. They go together, and God knows (23)! The "depths of Satan" can apply to any association or activity that sets out to combine both light and darkness in an unholy union that pretends to be advanced spirituality. But it also seems to refer to Gen. 3:5 where the original temptation was to have the knowledge of evil as well as good. But we do not need to know evil in personal experience in order to witness against it in the name of Christ. It is to be avoided, and Christ accepts no excuse for tampering with evil. Indeed, if there is not immediate repentance (21-22), there will be immediate judgment and all the churches shall know (23). God is active. Vengeance belongs to Him and He does repay (Rom.12:19). He also rewards His own faithful ones, not least by reminding them that the days of battle are limited, and will end with the glorious coming of Christ. Christ is the star who heralds the coming of the morning, and when that day dawns the faithful saints shall be part of His army in the bright triumphal procession, when the final blows have been struck. Having overcome in Christ they shall rule with Christ. But more, if Christ is the star, who receives it? Christ gives Himself to the faithful overcomer. Is that not compensation enough, even now, for costly service and does it not inspire you to go on being faithful?

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3:1-6

Christ is now speaking to the remnant of faith within the church, and we must keep this clearly in mind because the remnant *is* the church and on it centre the promises and hopes of God. The remnant is the salt, the light, and the custodian of the truth of God, but it can become very small. In 2:14-15 there were *some* falling away into error of doctrine and life; in 2:24 a distinct *group remained* faithful while the main body deteriorated; and now in 3:4 we seem to have *only a few* individuals truly alive unto God in the midst of a church that had a reputation but no life. Sometimes God uses the godly remnant to be the instrument of His reviving power to quicken the whole church. Sometimes the remnant of righteousness is not sufficient in size and strength to save the *organised* church or the nation, as evidenced by the Jews' captivity in Babylon and the destruction of Sodom in spite of Abraham's intercession. Sometimes the remnant must go into the oblivion of captivity along with the greater national or ecclesiastical unit of which it is a part, and in the merciful providence of God it is resurrected and returns after many days. Sometimes the remnant is scattered and the lampstand of the church fellowship removed out of its place completely, and a whole community is left in darkness which is never again lightened. Think of the difficulty of missionary work in Islamic areas where once there was a living witness, as with these churches in Asia Minor and in North Africa. We say all of this that we may have a new grasp of the solemnity of the statement in verse 6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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3:1-6

Christ, who alone has the life-giving Spirit to bestow on men and churches, reviews the activity of Sardis, searches its inner life, and with brevity sums up His verdict. They had a name to live but were in fact dead. They may have been a church alive to men, held in regard and even envied as the epitome of all that a church should be, counted as a significant centre of spiritual work, but God *who knew them* was not impressed. In fact, God saw little or no case for the continuance of this church, except that a tiny minority still walked with God. The church of Sardis was set in a city both luxurious and licentious, and as always, prosperity encouraged indulgence, which in turn produced complacency, which seems to have been the curse of the church. It was not a dull church, but an active, "good-going" congregation with no heresy, no immorality, no persecution. It had sound doctrinal services then, as it had had for years (v.3 points back to earlier days). But they were living on spiritual capital accumulated in the past. Now it was wasting away, and unless there was a fresh infusion of life the church would give one final gasp and die. As you can imagine this church was simply ignored in the community. The worldly society saw nothing but a harmless, somewhat outdated institution that was not worth opposing, let alone persecuting. What a tragedy. The word to this church is, "Wake up!" (2); "Remember" (3) the vows, prayers and acts of consecration which were never fulfilled; and "Strengthen" (2) or come to grips again with what remains amongst you of your grasp of truth; respond to the Spirit and restore communion with God. There was just a gleam of hope *in some*. They were vessels, empty, dried out and dying for lack of the

breath of life, but in the midst was the King with the all-sufficient provision of His Spirit waiting to be poured out. What hope for awakened backsliders!

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3:1-6

There was not much time left for this church to take itself to task (3b), and therein is a warning to us who are so easygoing in our dealings with God. Again we note that there is no guarantee that the faithful few would deliver their church from extinction even by the quality of their prayers. Sometimes a godly remnant prays on and in the fullness of time, when the situation seems at last to have grown utterly hopeless, there is answer and an evangelical ministry of the Word is brought into being. But the remnant often pray and see no answer in their lifetime (Heb.11:39-40). The answer *may* come later, just as the prayer-initiated revival may in time fade and die and the spiritual desert reassert itself. Let it be engraved into our minds and hearts that God is not tied to any one area, association or congregation, and if a people, however much blessed, become careless and at ease in spirit, then God's Spirit will depart and leave behind the skeleton of a church but no life. No man may presume on the Holy Spirit; and many who do are unaware that He has departed from them (Judg.16:20). The faithful overcomers, although they may have made no impression on the actual situation, were not without their reward. In the midst of the grim situation they walked with Christ, sharing His sorrow over a desolate church. But their true reward was in the glory of eternity, where they would be owned by Christ before the Father, and where Christ would be proud of them because they had proved themselves worthy (4-5). The removing of the names from the book of life may be paralleled from the custom of the city where names of citizens were removed as they died. These Christians in Sardis are described as being dead. Does Christ raise the pen, saying there is no sign of life, and prepare to stroke out *your* name?

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3:7-13

If we cast our minds back over the first five messages to the churches we shall see the significance of our Lord's counsel to His disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," (Matt. 26:36-46). How seldom do we realise that our immediate circumstances may be fraught with tremendous issues for our persons and work. The Spirit challenged the church at Ephesus, who had left her first love and was in danger of being removed from existence as a congregation. But to Smyrna, persecuted and battling, there was comfort and assurance. In Pergamos were they turned away by the cost of persecution (Matt. 13:20-21)? There the first virus of worldliness was at work and this led on to the situation in Thyatira, where the church was riddled with established worldliness and the judgment of God was looming. In Sardis, the holy remnant was found within a church over whose life was written "Ichabod", the glory is departed. There was no assurance that there would be any remedy, although that holy work of Christ which centred on the remnant would yet blossom into full glory in eternity. If this is the Spirit's word to us, we do well to consider yet another word spoken by Jesus in the hour of significant crisis: "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). Whatever we may think about Christian life and service, it is no game, and the time for playing at Christian soldiers is far past. See to it.

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3:7-13

"History records that Philadelphia maintained her Christian witness until almost the end of the fourteenth century when, through division of the Christian powers, it succumbed to the Turks. The quality of witness necessary to establish an enduring church in one place is made plain here, along with the sovereign purpose which ordained it. No man or church can determine to establish an enduring work by mere will power. It is of God only to do so, and although we are responsible to rise to all that is set before us, it is by Him that such illustrious service is destined. He is the holy and true, who holds the keys of the kingdom and sovereignly opens and shuts, and has committed that privilege by faith to His chosen ones (Matt. 16:19). When we see the saints of God and the Saviour Himself bowed low under diabolical pressure, we are not deceived by what the Spirit calls a "little strength", for it is miracle strength. Satanic resistance in this instance, as so often, is found in blind orthodoxy and not among the heathen. There is nothing so blasphemously disastrous to the true cause of God as truth which has stopped short of the whole glorious and heroic truth ... Thus Satan uses those who are nearest to

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us to work the hardest against us. But there is an end to this ... The day is coming, and there is often a token reckoning on earth before the final "show-down" in heaven, when those who have virulently opposed will be made to see how wrong they are, and will have ashamedly to acknowledge that God was invincibly on the side of those they opposed and not with them at all... Not that the faithful should gloat over the prospect. It is not to satisfy a carnal desire for revenge that this is to be, but simply that those who are wrong may be shown it at last." (Rev. Wm. Still)

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3:7-13

Jesus made it plain to His disciples that in the world they would have tribulation, but they were not to fear it because He had overcome the world (John 16:33). That is borne out by the message here. The church felt its smallness in the rapidly growing city and yet the faithful (and Christ knew what it cost them to be faithful) are spoken of as pillars upholding the holy temple of God. The word given to them was simply, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). In v.7-8 Christ declares all power is His and His alone. The keys of executive administration are in His hand, not man's or Devils. He set before them an open door and in spite of costly trials they went through that door and became a missionary church with fruit that lasted. They may never have hit the headlines, but they never denied the name of the King (8). In the world, no weapon formed against them would prosper (Isa.54:17) ; and in the world to come they will have a threefold name of wonder and mystery (12). Now read the hymn "Glorious things of thee are spoken," and let your heart give a resounding Amen to the last verse.

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3:14-22

The saddest and most striking thing about this church is that Christ the King is standing outside a barred door. The church had gathered, perhaps quoting as we do, "Where two or three are gathered togetherthere am I" (Matt.18:20), but Christ was outside and could not get in. Nothing in the passage suggests that He expected to be received back into the organised life of this church, and he addresses Himself to some *individuals* within the structure of this formal church in the hope that they will hear, open and obey His word and thus become His servants. This was a church that had slipped beyond hope of recovery and was so nauseating to Christ that He could only cast it out. The second tragedy of this church is that it was quite unaware of its true condition, being complacently proud of all it had. It could see no faults, neither could it see any challenging targets to aim for. Everything was going fine and they were all happy in each other's company. No one noticed that Christ was absent. It never crossed their minds. They did not need Him in their church life, and after all these terribly earnest evangelically minded people, always speaking about sin and salvation, did not quite fit into *their* scheme of things. They were a *respectable* church (not necessarily respected) with no fighting and no offence to anyone. There was no immorality or open idolatry in this well established and accepted institution in Laodicea. Once a week they gathered for a service, not too long and beautifully spoken, a service they could enjoy. Afterwards they saw their friends, and perhaps one of the social elite of the city would pass the time of day with them. There would on occasion be the social gathering and the hubbub of voices would betoken the delight of the people. But no one heard the knocking of Jesus outside the door nor His voice of invitation. No one thought of Him or missed Him. How could that be a church?

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3:14-22

How did the situation in Laodicea arise? The city was rich and notable with a considerable textile industry; it was a centre of finance and banking, and had a reputation in the field of medicine, particularly for eye ointment (17-18). It was a self-sufficient city and its spirit had permeated the life of the church. They were all too well off. The church had a lot of the "best people" who, although they called themselves by the name of Christ, had accommodated their Christian lives to the spirit of the age and the world in which they lived, so that there was no real distinction in Laodicea between those making a profession of faith and those who did not. In relation to Christ and the things of the Spirit they were lukewarm. They believed all the right things but never allowed them to touch, let alone to dominate their lives. They believed in conversion but were not soul-winners. They

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would never dream of speaking to their friends about Jesus. Were they too proud to go to a prayer meeting? Were they too busy to pray at home? Jesus was not asked formally to depart, as at Gadara (Mk. 5:17), but He was gradually *edged out* by a people who had grown bored with Him. They used His name but stole His church from Him. There was no place for this embarrassing Person called Jesus. Now, read the passage; apply it to your personal life and church life; then marvel at the amazing grace and love of Christ who is prepared to come back to you and take you back to Himself.

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3:14-22

This church is addressed by the Amen, the unchanging witness to the truth of God (14). He is the only faithful witness to what God is, thinks and requires from us. He knows our hearts because He sees our works. Truth cannot be hidden. What He sees is a paralysis of hopelessness. Misguided enthusiasm can be harnessed. Cold antagonism can be challenged and converted, or used by God as a discipline of grace for His people. But apathy is hopeless (15-16) because it can see no defect in its condition (17). The only thing Christ could do was to tear down the trappings of their religion, and challenge them as to what, if anything, in their life was specifically Christian. There is a good test: what is there in your life that is not found in the life of any decent, self-respecting pagan? You say you go to church, but does that really make any difference to your life? In Laodicea they went to church without Christ and came away without Christ, and through the service they never saw, met or heard Christ, for the simple reason that their did not want Him. Why? Were they afraid His entrance would change the whole pattern of their life and activity? He will if He gets the chance. That is why people like a little plaster, lifeless, idol of Jesus rather than the real thing. They take Him out of His box on a Sunday morning as they take their Bibles out of the drawer, and a couple of hours later both are put away out of sight for another week. But their poverty, shabbiness and blindness in God's sight will yet be made absolutely manifest. But will it be too late for repentance and renewal? It is the *love* of Christ that seeks to shatter their fond illusions of spiritual safety (19), and urges them to be zealous (boiling) and to repent. This is something quite different from the clinical calculation of that kind of Christianity that is largely of the intellect. It is the warm opening of the heart which finds Jesus a willing guest who comes to stay and who brings His own fellowship with Him. Whether we speak of a congregation or an individual, all the Gospel is here. Christ knocks and waits for an answer. Will He get in?

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4:1-11

We are now at the beginning of the second of the seven sections of Revelation. We do not enter further into the arguments for the various interpretations of Revelation. We are not seeking a programme to exercise the mind but a word from God to instruct and garrison our hearts in the tribulation which Christ and the Apostles declared would be the continuing experience of the church in the world (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). In Rev. 1:17 we were told, "Fear not," and that theme runs right through the book, the ground and assurance being given in such a vision as chapter 4 describes. The anchor of our souls is God the Lord upon His throne. In ch. 2-3 the sevenfold picture of the church has shown its limitation, failure, declension and struggle. But there is hope, for Christ the King still knocks on the door. When that door is opened in answer to His grace, the believer and the church are ushered through another door opened in heaven to be shown things *as they really are* in perfect order and assured confidence of unlimited power. In this vision the throne dominates all and speaks of government and order as opposed to anarchy and chaos. This is peace in the midst of strife, and it is also worship. We do not see the occupant of the throne, for He is hidden by light, but His name is the Sovereign Lord of all (11). All things and powers that exist in the world were first created and are now in operation for the pleasure and purpose of the will of God. This God has the whole wide world in His hand, and the serenity of heaven is the antidote to the fretful conflict of earth. God says, "Come up beside Me and I will show you things that are and shall be." The vision is spiritual in nature and intention and we must not try to interpret every part separately, else we will destroy the larger picture.

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4:1-11

The opening chapter of Revelation showed us the Lord present and active in the midst of the conflict and travail of His earthly, imperfect church. This chapter, which sets the tone for what is to come, shows us the Lord, high and lifted up in the brightness of His glory and the completeness of His power and victory. Behind the earthly experience of the church, undergirding it from beginning to end, is the unquestioned rule of God. His will is done in heaven in a glorious blaze of light, but His will is also being done on earth in a hidden and mysterious way. John is being taught that although he may not understand at any given time the developments of God's purposes, being tempted to doubt and fear, the issue is never for a moment uncertain. God's sovereign will is in fact being worked out. The throne stands gloriously secure now, as it has in the past and as it will in the future. The interpretation of any scene depends on the standpoint of the viewer. There is a vision similar to this in Daniel 7, where the sea is convulsed and from it emerge strange and frightening creatures. But here all is calm and still. Think of Jesus' stilling of the storms at sea and in the man of Gadara in Mark 4:35-5:15. In one sense John is seeing the end of the whole story of history before it has happened. This will enable him to stand in the evil day. No matter the ferocity of the storm he will recall the rainbow arch around the throne. It is God's sign of covenant mercy. He will not forget His promise to His people. You need the poetry of the hymn writers here. Look up the Hymn, "O Love that wilt not let me go," "I trace the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be." (Matheson)

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4:1-11

The open door of heaven is for John to enter and see, but it also suggests the thought of the Lord rising up to come out from His throne room to cause His will to be done on earth in answer to His people's prayers. A prayer meeting is unimpressive to human eyes, but this picture tells us what we are in touch with when we pray. The twenty-four elders represent the church of all ages sharing in the administration of God's work. The elders sit on thrones, not just seats (4). The lamps speak of the living light and fire of the Spirit of God. The beasts (7 AV) are better spoken of as "living creatures" and are in the likeness of the four animals mentioned. We find the same spoken of in Ezek. 1:4-14. These four creatures encircle the throne, one on each side, and they are full of eyes, searching and scrutinising so that nothing on earth is hid from their knowledge. Possibly they are to be thought of as cherubim proceeding from the throne of God to execute His will with the strength of a lion; the enduring, tireless service of the ox; the intelligence of man, the crown of creation; and the swift, regal flight of the eagle. It is a tremendous picture of light, noise and activity, yet its essence is peace and worship, and you will note that there is not a trace of fear or doubt in this royal throne room. When the creatures of God look upon the Person of God and view His works from beginning to end, they consent with one accord that this God is worthy to be praised and worshipped. We must learn to see this.

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5:1-5

This chapter moves on from and amplifies the previous one. Chapter 4 declared, "Behold your God," and chapter 5 declares, "Behold the Lamb of God." First we have the Everlasting Father with His glorious power and purpose, then we have the Everlasting Son, who is the great executor or administrator of that plan. There is a wonderful balance in the revelation of God's word, for it balances intellectual grasp with emotional response, and mingles with the glorious assurance of God's sovereign power the awful cost of its out-working in the death of Jesus Christ. If you look on to verse 6 you see the phrase, "as it had been slain," which could better read, "with the marks of slaughter upon Him." If only your intellect is exercised, you end up with a God who is a theological proposition, accurate but lifeless; and if only your feelings are aroused, you end on a sea of surging emotions with no stability or direction. Facts fired by emotion become spiritual drive, and this is the purpose of Revelation. The best introduction to today's passage is the last two verses of chapter 4, telling of the God in whose hand our breath is and whose are all our ways (Dan. 5:23), the God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:24-28). In the right hand of the God of glory and power there was a scroll, literally a book or a Bible, the same Greek word being used in 3:5; 13:8 and 20:12. The first two references are to the book of names or the book of life; the next is the book of works or judgment; while today's reference is to the book of salvation. This scroll was covered with writing both back and front, there being no room for any additions. This

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was the blueprint of God's programme of salvation in which evil was to be finally dealt with and His Kingdom established. When John felt there was no one to unlock the secret plan he wept, but his tears were premature. Ours often are.

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5:1-5

This book in the hand of God's power concerned John and the church in coming days. It contained the ordered decrees of God, the outworking of which we shall read of in succeeding chapters. It is perfect from beginning to end and is no stop-gap emergency plan. All that John feared which might yet come upon the world and the church was already written in the scroll of God. But who is to carry out the work on the stage of history? The questioner asks for one who is worthy, that is of moral worth, for the issue is concerned not only with saving souls but with conflict with evil powers. This is one of the explanations of the hellishness of the life of our generation. The fight is entering into final stages and evil is more bold and moving out into the open, because there is only a short time left (12:12). This battle is to be fought in human life and history on this earth. Angels cannot be the instruments since they have not partaken of our life. Devils are in rebellion against God and no man has been found free from the taint of evil. A "proper Man" is needed, one who will be mighty in the power of a sinless life. John wept because it seemed so hopeless. The whole human race lay in guilt and bondage, and it seemed that fulfilment of God's salvation was to be denied. But the mighty royal lion of Judah came and prevailed, and won the right to open the seals. He became a man (He was made sin for us 2 Cor.5:21), and as a man He met the foe, overcame him and then proceeded to work a mighty deliverance for men. Evil was thwarted and judged because it could find no ground in or claim over this true man (John 14:30; Acts 2:22-24). But the Lion was the Lamb, and it was slain.

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5:6-14

In the midst of the eternal throne of God and within the circle of the worshipping elders is the Lamb with the marks of slaughter upon Him. "Rich wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified." We need the whole of Isaiah 53 to plumb the depths of this scene. The Lamb slain is now standing by the throne, ready to put into action the decrees written in the scroll of God. He has perfection of power (horns), of intelligence (eyes), and of administration (the seven-fold Spirit sent forth). He has taken the book and is beginning to open its seals. On one side of the Cross you see Jesus silent in Pilate's hall, seemingly impotent in the face of the screaming powers of evil. But on the reverse side you see Him in regal splendour opening the seals of God's glorious purpose one by one, and none can hinder Him, let alone stop Him. The initiative is with Jesus, not with evil. The Son of God stands at the centre of history, everything depending on Him, taking its significance from Him, and being ordered by Him. This is a strong word for John to believe, because in his day imperial Rome was throwing Christians to the lions for sport and pouring tar on men and women and setting them alight to be torches in the avenues of the palaces. Over against that John has to see Christ with the book in His hand and has to believe that He knows what He is doing. We shall read of the seals in coming chapters and we may well cringe at the sore tribulation and distress that comes upon people. But we must see all these things as the pangs of travail by which a new creation is born. That there is nothing unrighteous or unworthy in God's actions is signified by the praises of heaven, recorded here with such magnificence of utterance (9-10). But we are not surprised to see the reference to the prayers of the saints (8). There is an echo there of the redeeming agony of the heart of God.

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5:6-14

One last practical lesson must be taken from this chapter and it concerns the manifestation of the power of God and our capacity to recognise it. The mighty Lion is to open the seals, but John sees a "little lamb" (the word is diminutive). This speaks of power manifested in weakness, for it is a lamb with the marks of suffering and death upon it. This is something which must always be reflected in the life of the Church and individual believers. Consider Habakkuk 3:1-4; 2 Cor. 4:5-12; 11:23-33; and 1 Cor. 4:9-13, to take but a few examples of what was visible to the world when the power of Christ was at work unto salvation. We have already mentioned

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the prayers of the saints and the element of agony and longing in them, and point out now that these cries from the heart mingle with the exultant praises of heaven (8). In verses 9-10 the word "us"(AV) reads "men" in NIV and the passage links with chapter 1:5-6. The number in v.11 signifies that this host cannot be numbered, and though it be an angelic company yet it is intimately associated with the company of ransomed men and women and indeed is round about them. There is a reminder to us here of 2 Kings 6:16-17. Circumstances and the balance of power contained in them are not always as they first appear. We need to get behind the scenes. The writer remembers a prayer meeting for ministers years ago in which one man, more a philosopher than an evangelical, prayed, "Lord, teach us to remember we are not the forgotten remnant of a broken down army, but part of the mighty host of God." If we read the threefold doxology in verses 9, 12 and 13 in the right spirit, we might just catch an echo of the thrill of heaven, and go in the strength of it many days.

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6:1-8

With this vision of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" we enter the section of Revelation concerning which the interpretations are both complementary and conflicting. Such is the wealth of detail it would be all too easy to end up in a battle of words so intense that we would find no bread for our souls. That is the tragedy of much study of Revelation in our day, and we must make sure that day by day we find a word from God that will help us to make sense of our life and experience. One thing is clear. The opening of the seals is by the hand of Christ, and sets in motion a series of judgments on the earth, each stopping short of the final judgment. We shall find the last seal introducing the first trumpet and the seventh trumpet in turn introduces the vials of wrath (8:20; 10:7; 11:15; 15:1). With great consistency Revelation confirms Jesus' word to His own disciples that in the world they would have tribulation. At the time of the Ascension (Acts 1:6-8) which we have linked with Rev. 5, the disciples, thrilled by the victory of Christ over all evil powers, looked for a swift, even bloodless establishment of that victory on earth. They were right in claiming victory, but wrong as to its method of coming. It was to be a long, costly struggle. As Christ rides forth to conquer in a fallen rebellious world there is bound to be conflict, and the disciples have to learn to drink the same cup as their Master. "Jesus won the world through shame", says the hymn-writer F.W.Faber and we have to "learn to lose with God." A man is blessed indeed if in faith he can look on the convulsions of the world and see the executive power of Christ working the sovereign purposes of God. This is what we must learn to see in Revelation.

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6:1-8

John sees these visions in relation to the throne of God and of the Lamb, The imagery of the horsemen is related to Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8, and the range of judgments of which we read is to be compared with Matt. 24, especially verses 6-7 - the end is not yet. The following lines spring to mind:

"Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own." (Lowell)

When we see the hand of Christ stretched forth to vex the earth we must not be surprised, for the earth is not only fallen but in rebellion, and the wonder is not judgment but mercy. People have chosen not to retain God in their knowledge (Rom.1:28; Ps.10:4), and God has confirmed their choice and He causes them to live with its fruit. Now read all of Romans 1:18-32, liken it to our decadent generation and ask what action a righteous and holy God must take: judgment. But is not God a God of love? Yes, and He sees what men have done to men who are the objects of His love and He is angry at man's inhumanity to man. That is why, amid great thunderings, these horsemen begin to ride forth. John hears the mighty voice crying, "Come!" and out of the brilliant light surrounding the throne emerges the first horseman, and he goes forth to conquer. Everything that follows is subject to the conqueror, and from the start it is affirmed that the ultimate victory of truth and righteousness is never for a moment in doubt. We must grasp that firmly before we consider the involvements of that victory in its progressive evolution.

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6:1-8

It will be best to think of the four horsemen as principles rather than persons; movements on earth, some of them energised by Satan, yet doing the will of God. Remember, power belongs to God alone and whatever powers emerge on the human scene are ordained by God (Rom. 13:1 and Dan. 4:17). The white horse is the symbol of victory, be it Christ or His Gospel, but wherever spiritual advance is made there will be the emergence of opposition and persecution. It has always been so. Jesus told us evil men would wax worse and worse, and that both the tares and wheat would *grow* until the harvest of separation and burning. Now the red horse and its rider emerge and take peace from the earth. But there never has been peace down through history. Does the red horse indicate that strife will go on and on and increase until the end of time? Jesus said in Matt.24:6-8 and Lk.21:9-11 that this would be so. History confirms it. Little wonder that the next horse is black, speaking of famine, poverty and hardship. We are being faced in our generation with a population explosion and a world food shortage that seems to have no solution apart from the devastation of plague, wars, or natural disaster. The day's wage of a penny buys enough for mere subsistence yet there seems to be no scarcity of the luxuries of oil and wine. Think of the families that can smoke, drink, gamble and travel the country to worship football idols, but can neither feed nor clothe their children! Is there not a curse on the earth? The black horse may speak more of the privation of believers who must live for truth and righteousness in a corrupt world and will suffer for it, for conscience' sake not being prepared to sell their souls to the mammon of unrighteousness. Finally the pale horse of death shadows us and ours, for the wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23). This is the midnight of sorrows and but for the white horse of victory that goes out *first* we would be left with a picture of death sweeping all into its abode. Christ has overcome both sin and death, although it may *not yet* be clearly seen.

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6:1-8 Start hear

The view that the fourth horseman (pale rather than white) represents Christ is challenged by some who say he is in fact Antichrist. He is a deceiver, representing himself as an angel of light, and deceives even the elect, and there follows in his train the chaos and carnage that is the world's history. We shall see later in Revelation a mighty power and system of spiritual evil in the garb of religion, and we must consider this, for Satan is not crude in his designs and well-laid stratagems (wiles). At the beginning of world history Satan appeared as the "shining one", and under the promise of advanced spiritual knowledge and experience brought about the fall of man. This principle of "counterfeit" remains a device of Satan. He makes his programme so like that of Christ that many are deceived. This is the secret of the influence of resurgent false sects in our day. They are so plausible and earnest and seemingly so much "out of the Bible" that poor deluded "Christians" are taken in. Consider very carefully the various big movements of today that are being hailed as the one thing needful to revitalise the church and bring in the kingdom of God. Now read what Paul says in 2 Thess. 2:1-12. We are told in Scripture to put the spirits to the test (1 John 4:1), so that we will not be led astray. You can test them best by reference to the Person of Christ as the eternal Son of God; to His atoning, substitutionary death on the Cross for men's sins; and to the final authority of the whole Word of God. If today's reading persuades you of the reality of the spiritual battle in which every true Christian is involved it will have served its purpose. Note lastly that Death and Hades following this pale horse are *given* power, but it is strictly limited in scope. The Devil is never a free agent.

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6:9-11

Since we have spoken of a spiritual kingdom of evil in the world that is implacably opposed to the Kingdom of God and of Christ, there will inevitably be persecution of the saints, even unto death. The altar in the vision is the altar of sacrifice, and signifies amongst other things that the martyr status of these saints is marked out even in heaven. The prospect of slaughter (a more accurate term than slain, since martyrs seldom have a 'nice' death) because of loyalty to the Word of God and fearless declaration of it, is a grim one. But we must not overlook the fact made plain in earlier visions that "power was given" to these messengers of death (v.4, 8). This means that the rampaging of evil both human and Satanic is under the surveillance and control of God from beginning to end. There is never any doubt as to the final issue. The martyred saints in glory, free from the limitations of

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fallen humanity which so often warp our judgments by personal considerations, cry for vindication and indeed vengeance. This is a concept of punishment that is retributive and not concerned with either deterrent or reformation. God tells these saints to wait a little time, because in His perfect ordering of affairs there are yet more martyrs to be added to their number. This may signify that the witness (same Greek word as martyr) which some have to bear to the Gospel is not in service but in sacrifice (Phil. 1:29). But it also indicates that God delays His righteous vindication of His people, giving evil even more operating time, in order that some may yet repent (2 Pet: 3:7-10, 15). Do we think like God and prepare ourselves to suffer a little longer in the face of brash, contemptuous evil, if it means one more sinner might turn to Christ?

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6:12-17

We spoke yesterday of final judgment being delayed by the deep, longing mercy of the heart of God, but in the end it must come. In its coming it is accompanied by calamity and cataclysm which involve the disintegration of the whole universe and a deep terror in the heart of all mankind. No doubt the physical changes in creation, the darkness, the red moon, the falling stars and great convulsion of earth tremors all contribute to the general terror. Such phenomena as these are much before our eyes in a nuclear age and in the fantasies (as yet)of science fiction. But what really shakes these men on the great day of judgment is described as "the face of Him that sits on the throne" and the "wrath of the Lamb." They are confronted by a rejected God, a holy Judge and a despised Saviour, and their fears will not be quietened. Their whole life has been a trampling on holy things and on the Cross of the Son of God (Heb.10:29). And now that everything is out into the open they find no desire for repentance. They desire to escape from the imminent judgment but that is not repentance. Their attitudes adopted and lived by, when they refused the promptings of conscience by the Holy Spirit, have solidified and become permanent. Repentance is now impossible. The great gulf is already fixed. This is the gateway of Hell. (Lk. 16:19-31 - torment, but no request for transfer; Rev. 9:20-21 and 16:8-11 - agony, but no repentance). Think well, in case your careless ease in things pertaining to God indicates the almost certain terminus of your journey.

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6:12-17

These thoughts of the final day of judgment with its cosmic upheaval are not confined to the Book of Revelation, and we do well today to range through the Scriptures, not least to show us how unified and harmonious is the message. The sin of man is envisaged as having affected the whole of creation, and the outworking of God's redeeming purpose is always seen in the intertwined events of human history. The final consummation of man's redemption is linked by Paul with the release of creation from its bondage of corruption. Some of the references which provide a basis for much study are: Gen. 3:17-18; Ezek. 38:19-23; Joel 2:11, 30-31; Isa. 2:10-12; 34:1-4; Hos. 10:8; Matt. 24; Rom. 8:20-22; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 3:1-18. Well might Peter say, "Seeing all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be?" Some commentators point out that the six seals are all paralleled in sequence in Matt. 24:3, 6, 7a, 7b, 9, 29. "After the Lord has exhausted all His ordinary judgments and sinners are still impenitent, the great day of the Lord itself shall come But before He actually inflicts the blow in person, the 'elect' must be 'gathered out' " (source not known). This leads to the next chapter.

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7:1-3

We have seen six seals opened and the consequent troubling of the course of human history in a way that leads our thoughts to the verge of the final day of judgment. But the final seal does not follow immediately, for there is much yet to be learned and today we are reminded of the clear distinction in the mind and heart of God and His angelic instruments between those who are His servants and those who are not. The picture given is that of control being exercised over the four winds of trouble that blow on the world of men. We have been reminded in our own generation of the immense physical powers that can break in upon human experience so that the very fabric of creation is shaken. But there are more shattering powers than these. We live in a world that is spiritually fallen and governed by the spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2:2-3), with the result that over the centuries

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there has been built up increasingly a kingdom or establishment of evil of vast dimension. Since this is so, no simple explanation of our experience is sufficient. The mystery of iniquity is at work (2 Thess. 2:7 AV; 1 John 4:3; 5:19) and it cannot be tied down or localised. Since it is evil, it must be resisted by the servants of God, and in coming to grips with evil we realise we are living our lives in the midst of it. We can only resist in battle or submit and sell ourselves to its power. We dare not trifle, and but for the assurance here that all the powers that influence the world of men are held in strict control we would panic. Never forget, the powers of evil are held in check in the interests of the people of God.

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7:4-10

The overall picture from the beginning of the chapter is of the servants of God sealed, suffering, saved and serving. We have already made clear that the saints of God, the church, do not escape the general tribulation of this world's experience, even when it is building up in intensity to the final day of judgment. But, although the church shares the common lot of human experience, she does not do so in the same way as the godless and unbelieving, for they have no hope before them only judgment. God shall avenge His elect (Lk, 18:7) and recompense them for all the wrong they have suffered from men and devils. Justice will be done, and will be seen to be done. Until that final vindication comes, God's own are sealed. They bear the mark of God's ownership, which is the mark of their protection from the retributive workings of God's angelic messengers. Consider John 17, especially verse 15, also Luke 12:4-7; 21: 12-18. The saints may be *killed* but not *harmed*. But what is the seal? Well, only God and His angels really need to know. That guarantees safety. But did not Jesus say, "by their fruits ye shall know them"? The seal is not some attached mark or number, but the character forged in the believer by the fires of trial and persecution. This marks them out unmistakably as belonging to God. It is a mark seen and understood by the Devil as well as God. That is how Satan knows who to concentrate on in his enmity.

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7:4-10

John, by means of visions, is being shown things as they really are, and in the present passage he is shown what appears to be two companies of people. But it is best to see this as two views, from different standpoints, of the *same* company of people identified in verse 3 as "the servants of God". It would be a contradiction of the massive sweep of Revelation to restrict this company to a literal 144,000 drawn proportionately from the twelve tribes of Israel. We do not underestimate the place of the Jews in God's revelation and redemption, nor do we forget the promises made by God to His chosen people. But keep in mind what Paul said about the promises of God belonging to the *true* Jew (Rom. 2: 28-29; 4:13-16; 9:6-8). The first eight verses show us the Israel of God, the Church, each individual member sealed and numbered in the safekeeping love and power of God. This is the Church militant in the midst of the battles of tribulation in the world. Then the carefully numbered company are seen in the broad tableland of the glory of God to be a countless host. This is the Church triumphant, its battles all won, its robes of righteousness and palms of victory making a blessed unity out of infinite variety, and its song is about the Lamb. It may help to think of this in terms of one single congregation of God's people. In the eyes of the world, and in terms of even Christian calculation, the company may seem very small and insignificant. But, if you think of there being gathered into the one building *every* soul that was ever converted there, and *every* battling believer brought through to victory, and *every* servant of Christ that had gone out to service in any sphere, and all their spiritual children and grandchildren, what sort of congregation would it be? What volume of praise would rise to the throne of God and what sense of worship would prevail! "It does not yet appear what we shall be," but to think of it is to worship. If on a Sunday you feel your congregation is small and not important, read and ponder Paul's word to the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2).

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7:11-17

It is a great pity that we seldom read these verses except at a funeral service, for they are full of worship, challenge and comfort. The whole company of angels join in the sevenfold doxology. How these unfallen spirit-beings must marvel at this vast host of men and women ransomed out of a fallen, tortured world. But John is

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also amazed, primarily by the manifest holiness and purity of these people whom he recognises to have been gathered from the earth. The last great tribulation spoken of here includes all earlier and lesser ones and describes the essential experience of the saints of God on earth. The glorious company John sees are those who have come, or are coming, out of tribulation into glory. This is what is constantly happening, and what a light this would shed on John's bitter exile on Patmos. "The saints of God are continually passing into the unseen world, and taking their place among the spirits of just men made perfect." (Ellicott) When the last has entered, the perfect kingdom is ready for public display in all its glory. In verse 14 read "washed" instead of "have washed", for the washing is done on earth in, through or by, the blood of the Lamb, that is His death. This speaks of the once-for-all cleansing from sin, and also the continuing washing, and restoration that is so needful (John 13:8-10; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5). But it also points to the refining and purifying effect of trial and tribulation, whereby through our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, His righteousness is forged and fashioned in our characters. Link this with Rev. 19:8, and read "righteousnesses" or the outworking of righteousness. Consider also 22:14, where the best translation reads, "Blessed are they that wash their robes." (not "do his commandments" as in AV). You begin then to see the significance of "therefore" in today's passage (15). This life and that to come are vitally linked, and we may not expect sudden transformation from a Christ-ignoring to a Christ-blessed life.

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7:11-17

We must not fail to grasp the wonderful personal nature of the blessedness of those who are safe in the presence of God. But note still the connection between earth and heaven. It is the friendship begun on earth that is continued and fulfilled in heaven. Its first aspect is service: that is giving rather than receiving. But it is also fellowship, for He that sits on the throne dwells amongst His people, which means God's people share each other as they share Him. God dwells among them. That means He must find pleasure in His own people. The word "dwell" means literally, "shall be the tabernacle over them," or, "shall spread His tabernacle over them." It is a picture of being gathered into the privacy and love of someone's home (cf. Rev. 21:3; Lev. 26:11; Isa. 4:4-6; and also John 1:14, when the Word tabernacled amongst us). Hunger and thirst and the relentless scorching of the sun, all elements of John's actual experience in exile, and all accentuated by the intense awareness of loneliness and longing, will be done away for ever. But it is not merely satisfaction of need and release from pressure that constitute the blessedness of heaven. The Lamb shall feed them, that is, tend them like a shepherd, leading them to springs of the waters of life, and God shall for ever wipe away every single tear from their eyes. Consider Ps. 23; 36:7-9; 16:11. But to John it is not the blessings that make heaven sweet, but the Person. Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.

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8:1-6

The opening of the seventh seal introduces, as we have already pointed out, the seven trumpets, and after a pause John is given another full vision of the course of this present age of grace and salvation, leading up to the threshold of final judgment. The two visions follow a parallel course but are not mere repetitions, for the picture is always being elaborated. The seals told of the persecution of God's servants and the ultimate rest and blessedness. The trumpets will tell of the conflict in which judgment falls on the persecutors but leads God's people to victory. Some point out that the opening of the seventh seal rightly belongs to the previous chapter, for with the breaking of that last seal the scroll is finally opened for the Lamb to read to the blessed ones in heaven. This does not mean that the complete content of the scroll was read then, or ever, to John. God gives us information and understanding as we need it and as we are able to bear it (John 16:12). The silence, which is in tremendous contrast to the mighty praises John has been hearing, is no empty silence, but the precursor of judgment (cf. Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13). This makes us think of those seasons in both life and service when it seems God is far distant and significant by His *inaction*. Do not be deceived by appearances. Go to 2 Peter 3:3-4, 7-9. God's delays are for our preparation, not His. Part of the purpose of this book is to reveal the God who is at work in all times and all places, and to train us in His methods, so that we can discern His working when it appears before our eyes.

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8:1-6

We are about to read of the warning judgments of God, the speech of God that is to be heard in every generation: its urgent message is to flee from the wrath that is to come. The vision begins with this burdensome silence. Then, instead of the first blast of the trumpet, John sees a picture of the altar of prayer. Here men of the world are utterly out of their depth. To their eyes there is nothing so weak and irrelevant as prayer, and they tell us we should be up doing something to meet the deep needs of a groaning world. Even in the evangelical church prayer is given lip-service rather than practical priority. But take it to ourselves, and confess that we feel our prayers to be so feeble and limited, while here the answer to the prayers is the casting of fire on the earth. Go back to chapter 6:9-11 and you hear the prayers of the travailing saints of God. In today's verses you see the human prayers likened to smoke, mingling with the prayers of the angel with the golden censer, and the two "smokes" of prayer become one and ascend to the throne of God. It is not too much to see here a picture of Christ, our great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us. He takes our prayers which have been inspired and prompted by the Holy Spirit, and presents them in the perfection of His own merit and words in the presence of the Father Almighty (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:26-27, 34). It is this prayer that links the earth with the fire of God, and we may well be being challenged in our day to pray until the fire kindles. Did not Jesus say He came to send fire on the earth (Lk. 12:49)?

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8:7-13

We have here the first four judgments in "scorched earth," "cruel seas," "bitter waters," and "heavenly disturbances." Is this the answer to the prayers of the saints (8:2)? Well, we seldom know the full significance of even the simplest prayers we offer. It is all very well to speak of boldness in asking at the throne of grace, but remember how Israel's persistent prayer was granted, together with leanness to their soul (Ps.106:15AV). They asked for a king, were given it. and lived to regret it! What we are being taught here is that at the heart of world history, which is the history of God's mercy and judgment, there are to be found the prayers of the saints. We are not called to pray down judgment (Rom. 12:19), but rather to draw God's attention to the blatant evil that stands against the advance of His grace (Acts 4:23ff). The praying saints, scanning the events of contemporary history and recognising the hand of the Judge at work, pray all the more saying, "Oh God, make them hear Thy voice while grace remains." Do you not see from these studies that in prayer we are being brought into living; co-operation in a work that is not local or national, but cosmic in its significance? It is a work of destiny. But why are we so reluctant to accept its challenge? This is manly Christianity, because it faces the facts, however grim they seem, and lives accordingly. It is interesting to note that in v.11 the name "Wormwood" in Russian means "Chernobyl" Quite a thought!

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8:7-13

The four trumpet judgments are linked with those in Exodus at the time of Pharaoh, when the prophet of God was rejected. Here they are intensified, because we are dealing with a world that has rejected the Son of God saying, with but little grasp of the significance, "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt.27:25). God is not mocked, and to understand what is going on all over the earth we need to go back to Genesis 3:17-20 when the whole world came under the curse of God because of human sin. Do you ever wonder why life is such a struggle, with so much effort for so little fruit and with so much of the earth barren and waste? The answer is sin! We are in a world that is in rebellion against God. Man has sown the wind and is reaping the whirlwind, and he does not like it and looks around for anyone and anything to blame. But his guilt must come home to his own soul, and God speaks to emphasise that message in ordinary events. If the scorched earth speaks of the frustrations of experience (Micah 6:15-16), the cruel seas speak of the tremendous powers that have men at their mercy. But the seas can also represent humanity and mountains speak of great powers. Here, the powers burn with fire and are cast into the sea to convulse it. Read Isaiah 57:20-21. There are still the bitter waters and the darkness that can be felt, and then the most frightening of all, the pictures in 9:1-12, but these must wait some days for consideration.

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8:1-13

So far in this chapter two things have emerged as the ground of our peace, assurance, thanksgiving and rejoicing. First, it is Christ Himself, the Lion and the Lamb, who is the only executor of God's plan. Second, it is the prayers of the saints which become the operative factor, linking heaven and earth, and bringing the fire of God in judgment and mercy to be known among men. If we grasp this fully we see that in this world Christians, far from being pious passengers, are by prayer integrated into the dynamic work of God, which is not merely individual or local or national, but cosmic in its scope. It is a work of destiny, from eternity to eternity, and it is seen in these vivid pictures in its realistic development in the world. Christianity is neither "pie in the sky when you die," nor provincial, suburban piety. It is the warfare of faith in the context of the present world order, in which there is being fought out to the finish the conflict between God's kingdom of righteousness and the Satanic kingdom of evil. There is no greater realist than the Christian who has the courage to read the Bible, believe it, and then look around the strange, frightening events of the world and see the power of God at work. We do not pray for judgment, for that principle is already at work, and in Revelation we do not pray for peace, for that cannot come until evil is brought to its just retribution. As the process develops, the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed (Lk.2:35). That is a solemn thought seldom mentioned in sermons about the Christmas story..

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9:1-12

The trumpets of judgment are not final, but partial and warning judgments to the generations of men. Of the four trumpets in chapter 8 we have considered the scorched earth and the cruel seas. The wormwood may speak of the bitter waters of the wells of worldliness. Think of the hard, sour, discontented faces of those going home after "having a good time" in lives that have no place for Christ. Look at Eccles. 2:1-3,10-12,17, 22-23. Then there is the darkness that can be felt. This is linked with Ex. 10:21-23, where it is clearly stated that God's people had light (cf. John 8:12). The last two verses of Rev. 8, which have a suggestion of swift wings swooping to the prey, are suggestive of the strange confusion, uncertainty and sense of lost direction that can beset human life. Many feel that everything is against them and a strange fate is dogging them. This is one reason why it is so very difficult to get people to speak about spiritual and eternal issues. They are too uncertain. Think of the popularity of hymns with such words as, "Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom," or, "Shine through the gloom and point me to the sky." Think of the strange blanket of incomprehension that covers so many when you try to speak to them about spiritual things. Is this not a judgment of God on a world that has rejected the light? But if people choose to live in darkness their eyes become conditioned to it and light is so painful that it is to be avoided at all cost. We who take the light of God's presence and Word so much for granted may well need a season in partial darkness, feeling that God has left us alone, just to set our values right again. If we need it, God will do it!

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9:1-12

Now we are in the realm of what is both fantastic and frightening. There is first the opening of the abyss or bottomless pit with the ensuing eruption of evil upon the earth. Then comes the plague of locusts which seems to fasten upon men to torment them. The ravenous locust is always a figure of God's judgment on moral and spiritual evil. That these locusts, so gruesomely described, are not mere insects is signified by the fact that they have a king over them and their ravages are organised with military precision (in Eph. 6:11 "wiles"(AV) means literally "well laid stratagems"). The evil king's name means "Destroyer" (v.11 footnote). We are told that the description in verses 7-10 is that of a locust greatly magnified and we cannot help thinking of the fierce and grotesque creatures invented by modern science fiction. The fertile imaginations of fallen men have conceived of creatures that are a mixture of human and sub-human and super-human. This is a tacit confession that what we call human experience is not to be explained simply on the basis of the human, but must take cognisance of other powers and principles at work. We are dealing here with men's bodies and minds being taken over or possessed by intelligent spirits that have emerged from the pit of Hell itself. In the story of the maniac in Luke 8:31 the word "deep" is literally "abyss", as in Revelation, and gives the demons' own testimony as to their origin and nature. But all demons do not exercise their tormenting function in human life on a gross and wild

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level of unrestrained lust. There are cold, calculating evil spirits equally to be discerned and feared. The essence of all demon influence is to be against whatever is of Christ. If we can learn to see behind human bitterness in the face of the Gospel the personalities of hell, we will be better able to endure, preach and pray.

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9:1-12

When you consider that we are living our lives in a world beset by the demonic powers here described, fear can become very real, and we must not try to escape by denying the facts. Our generation provides ample evidence of the ferocity, blindness, and persistence of evil and we begin to see men driven along by powers they can neither understand nor control. A famous modern theologian writes: "The connection between the powers of darkness and the unconscious processes of the mind, can scarcely be denied, whatever they may be." The picture is one of a tyranny of tormenting from which men cannot escape although they try with great earnestness. The reference to "five months"(5) speaks of the full length of the season in which locusts do their ravaging, and we see that the whole history of man reveals increasingly the demonic nature of sin. This is important to all who are engaged in Christian work, because one result of the proclamation of the Gospel is to enrage the Devil, who sees his kingdom in men's hearts and lives being challenged. This, as is evidenced in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, brings the personal demons active in human lives out into the open to scream their fury, expose their loyalties and fears, and guarantee their own destruction (Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 4:13-14, 33-36; Acts 19:11-20). Two tremendous comforts are made plain in this grim vision. In verse 4 the evil powers are seen to be under strict limitation, and the saints of God are sealed in safety. They may be afflicted, even unto death, but they cannot ultimately be harmed (Lk. 21:9-19). The smoke of the pit may darken the life of humanity with gross stains, or it may diffuse into a virtually invisible cloud of poisonous air, all the more deadly because its source and nature will not be discerned. We may well be dealing here with the war of ideas, the battle for the mind, and the subtle propaganda of culture, so called, that is poisoning the blood stream of society. The pit is opened and its demons are coming into sight. But this is a trumpet of God's judgment and its sound is not uncertain.

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9:13-21

The thought of devilish influence and demonic activity must be carried over into this sixth trumpet in which we see the culminating revelation of both sin and judgment. The movement of the judgment begins at the golden altar, already associated with the prayers of the saints for vindication and vengeance. At a time fixed with infinite accuracy (15) the chains which keep back the heathen nations, pictured as beyond the natural barrier of the river Euphrates, are loosed and like a great raging torrent the marauding hosts sweep forward, not only to torment but to kill. From all quarters (typified by the four angels) new powers of misery arise to smite the world of men. For all the ferocity and destructive intent of this army, there is a strange fascination in its appearance and this seems to confirm that we are dealing with human movements that are an incarnation of the Devil's agents and his masterly stratagems. But the more we study Revelation the more we see that the emergence of these terrible scourges, which here are described as an eruption from the pit of hell, is nothing but the harvest which a God-rejecting civilisation is reaping as a consequence of its own sowing. Does not our own generation speak of the "scourge" of Communism, the "blight" of Islam, the "curse" of materialism? All these words signify judgment! This is the inevitable result when people refuse to retain God in their knowledge. They create a situation out of which emerge their own judges and executioners.

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9:13-21

"Whatever the nature of these plagues they were afflictions designed to rouse men from the lethargy of long indulged sin. Those terrible revolutions which are the growth of years, and which startle men with their apparent suddenness and violence, are the great appeals of God, asking men to see the meaning of sin; they are the trumpet blasts calling to repentance." (Ellicott) In such times as these people's hearts may fail for fear. They may be filled with apprehension as they see the evil genius which they have created becoming their master. But the test of the reality in relation to God is repentance. And repentance involves the abandoning of spiritual and

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moral wrong and a turning to God in faith and obedience. This alone is conversion, but this is what men would not do (20-21). No matter what God says, what He does, or how He does it, there are people who will not repent. Had they gone too far to change? Had they lost the capacity to change? Can this happen to nations as well as to individuals, so that nothing is left but judgment? These are serious questions to ponder.

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9:13-21

Commentators seem agreed that the sins which have called forth this terrible judgment on the world of men are spoken of in v.20-21. First the Godward commandments, then the manward ones are violated, and such sin is never to be conceived of as static. Sin is dynamic and once set in motion it increases and multiplies and only when it has finished its corruptive and destructive course does it bring forth death (Jas.1:15 AV). One of the best comments on all we are studying is Rom. 1:18-32 and we should read it carefully in conjunction with our daily newspapers, so that we shall be under no delusion as to what we are living in and what we must of necessity experience in future days. "Here is the unleashing of terrible judgment by the permission of God and under the direction of Satan." (Tatford) It is interesting to note that the word for "sorceries" (magic arts) here is literally connected with drugs. The absolute insensitivity of men in relation to the third part of mankind being killed and their blind unawareness of the voice of God in the disasters afflicting them seems to stem from a strange state of stupefaction in which reality simply does not seem to exist. This is the triumph of the Devil, for he has blinded the minds of men (2 Cor. 4:4) so that they believe his lies rather than the truth of God (2 Thess.2:3-12). Yet underlying this is their deliberate choice of resolute rebellion against God, no matter what He does or how He appeals to them. The truth about man's sin is simply that he wants to be God (Gen. 3:4-6), and from that self-consuming pride the unbelief that rejects the truth of God's judgment on evil, and the moral shame of humanity both stem. It is this monstrous "self", rabid and arrogant, that we see in these last verses which tell us that many will never be saved. But are there not brands to be plucked from the burning? Few congregations now ever sing the hymn, "Rescue the perishing". Read it, it will encourage you to pray.

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10:1-11

Chapters 10-11 consisting of two visions, form an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as chapter 7 was interposed between the sixth and seventh seals. In the opening of the seals we were dealing with the progress of God's administration of His plan through travail and war. In such a situation the Church was seen to be sealed and safe (ch. 7). Now in ch. 8-9 we have heard six of the seven trumpets speaking of six types or manifestations of God's judgments operating in the world at all times, but increasing in intensity towards the end. But the end is not yet, although it is not far off. Evil has been seen surging and spreading (9:2), leading to what someone calls, "the demonisation of our civilisation". What of the Church? We see the King and Head of the Church, crowned with the rainbow (4:3), with the open book in His hand and His voice uttering its testimony in universal pronouncement. This Word is given to John and to the Church to declare in the midst of the operative judgments of God, to bear testimony to the truth, to witness against evil and indeed to be the dynamic instrument by which God's mighty works are done amongst men. Here we have the God of the Word and the Word of God standing over against the dread machinations of evil in the world, and we are at once aware of control, and of the vast reservoirs of God's power available and operative behind the scenes. This figure of glory sets His feet on land and sea like a victor taking possession. The rainbow speaks of covenant mercy and the pillars of fire of the faithful leading of Israel in the wilderness journeys. In His hand is the open book of the word of His power. What a thrill and encouragement!

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10:1-11

The vision concerns the universal activity of the great King of the Church and the utterance of His Word. Central to it is the little book open, which is given to John to make his own and to take to the nations. This is the Word of God, which, though it be a "little book", yet stands over against all the tortuous and demonic life of the world. It may be a despised book, as indeed it is in our generation, but the God who has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty has ordained that His purposes of salvation will be accomplished

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"by the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:17-29 AV). This proclaimed Word cannot fall to the ground (Isa. 55:11) nor can it be bound or restricted by the vexatious circumstances that grieve the servants of God (2 Tim. 2:9). What immense comfort this must have been to John in exile! But another strange element is now introduced., "the seven thunders", whose seven voices reverberate through the whole cosmos in answer to the word of the King. Now, we are not told what these thunders are, and although it is quite evident that John heard their intelligent message, he was not permitted to write it down. This signifies that there are factors and powers at work in the designs of God which we are never permitted to know and which we never have explained to us, for the simple reason that God is not answerable to us. He is not required to explain everything to us. We must learn to trust Him.

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10:1-11

Bishop Ellicott gives this valuable comment on the thunders: "It was no mere thunder-like sound John heard: the thunders spoke; and he would have continued his writing (1:11) had not the voice out of heaven forbidden him. The utterances, then, are for those who hear them; they are not to be made generally known. Is the solemn, sacred, divine voice not to be known by all, but by those who have ears to hear when the God of Glory thundereth? Mankind may hear the thunder; only those whose ears God has opened can hear the utterances and the inspiring messages they bring. So was it once in our Lord's life. The people said it thundered; some thought an angel spake; but there were articulate words which He (Jesus) who came to do God's will, in whose heart was God's law, heard, and to Him that thunder-like voice promised to glorify His name (John 12:28-29). Similarly here, the Evangelist (who is in this but a type of the true witnesses for God), who is to prophesy before peoples and kings, hears words spoken by the divine voice which make him strong for his mission. It is so ever more. Dull ears there are who hear thunder, but never God's voice; dim eyes there are which see no trace of the divine craftsman in all nature..... The thunders are not to be written down. They are for those who have ears to hear."

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10:1-11

In chapter 6:9-11 the saints were told in answer to their-cry ("How long?") to wait for a little time. Now, in 10:6 the mighty angel proclaims that there should be delay (time) no longer; that the time for sounding the final trumpet judgment was near; and that with that trumpet the consummation of all God's purposes would be accomplished. The word "mystery"(7) seems to refer to the whole plan and counsel of God for the earth. The final judgment, which has been spoken of by the prophets, is about to come. Remember that this whole vision concerns the witness of the Church, and grasp the fact that all our life, work, ministry and prayer are set against the background of imminent judgment. There is no time to be wasted. It is a race against time; not least, as the next chapter tells, because of the possibility of such an uprising of evil power that organised evangelical testimony will be impossible. This is already happening in many lands abroad, and now in the twenty-first century in our own land.. But what of our own city? Areas that once had a living evangelical witness are now notorious for spiritual hardness and barrenness. Other great areas are slowly being left without a church at all. Is the writing on the wall? Are the candlesticks being removed (2:5)? Is the distant thunder already rumbling? Is the trumpet of the Lord about to sound? This is the context of our lives.

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10:8-11

John has to *take* the little book of the Word of God, *eat it* and thereby experience both its sweetness and bitterness, and in this way he must. *preach* it before men and nations. Link this passage with Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 2:9 - 3:3; and Ps. 119:103. But why is the Word, so sweet to receive, turned to bitterness in relation to its proclamation? "It can only mean that which is personally sweet is found to have grim consequences when carried with joyful eagerness to men." (Wm. Still). "The apostle must not merely understand and digest the message of the Gospel; he must experience both its sweetness and the suffering, the cross-bearing, which is ever the portion of those who truthfully proclaim it." (Hendriksen) There is no doubt that only those who have tasted the ineffable sweetness of the Gospel will be able to endure the costly bitterness of being its servant, and

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go on preaching it when all hell seems let loose against both the prophet and his message. Do not the apostles in Scripture speak of being defamed, persecuted and slain (1 Cor.4:11-13) , and did not Jesus warn His disciples that a time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues and their persecutors, religious men, would consider they were doing God a service (John 16:2)? But there is also a bitterness to be experienced at the hands of those who should know better. Think of Moses' reception in Ex. 5:20-23 from the people he was sent to deliver. Last of all, the purer and sweeter the utterance of the Word, the clearer becomes the apostasy of men, which is a bitter grief to the heart.

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11:1-2

This chapter continues the theme of the bitterness encountered in the preaching of the Word of God: the Word which exposes and enrages the personal powers of evil. But chapters 10-11 are essentially for our comfort and encouragement. In chap.10 we have the Person (1-2) and the Powers (3-4) that are with those who are faithful. Undergirding all is the resolution of God (6) moving His work forward to a glorious end. In chap.11 the first thing we are faced with is a vision of the Temple being measured and apparently divided. The Temple proper, the shrine, is measured, signifying its protection from all that would profane it. The outer court is cast off and given to the Gentiles to trample underfoot. But this court was a part of the Temple buildings and what is said signifies an invasion of the holy House of God by the godless with their carnal attitudes and activities. If the Temple represents the religious life of people, the formal, organised Church, or what we tritely call Christendom, then we see that. a great deal of the activity and people found within the confines of religious places are in fact not of God. They are marked out by God Himself and separated from the holy heart of His purposes. This is the final purging of the membership roll! But when worldly, pleasure loving people invade the Church and tyrannise its life by their demands, casting the Bible into a corner like unwanted lumber, then a witness must be raised against them, and that is the theme of the next verses.

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11:3-12

In this chapter the references to 42 months and 1,260 days are best thought of as times set strictly by God, and that is tremendous comfort. Things are never out of His control. For the same length of time as carnal worldliness tramples the courts of the Church, God will have His faithful witnesses, to whom will be given power by the Holy Spirit to speak against apostasy. That they are clothed in sackcloth speaks of the cost of their ministry and also its nature, which is to call people to repentance. In verse 3-4 the symbolism is clearly connected with Zech. 4:1-6. In verse 5 reference may be to such passages as Jer. 5:14. In verse 6 the reference is to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1, and to Moses in Ex. 7:20. All these verses declare that the Church in its faithful testimony is exercising a ministry of judgment on the impenitent persecutors, as well as a saving ministry to those that repent and believe. This is startlingly declared in 2 Cor. 2: 15-16, where we see that our testimony to the truth of the Gospel can be a savour of death from beginning to end. The N.E.B. renders verse 16, "To the latter it is a deadly fume that kills, to the former a vital fragrance that brings life." In such a witness that brings to bear on men the same judgments as God has exercised in past history, the faithful Church needs tremendous encouragement. This is given in Zechariah's visions, where the returned exiles were shown in their weakness the limitless secret supply of the oil of the Holy Spirit by whose power they could and would overcome all their enemies. The picture here is of the terrible earnestness of God who says to the wicked, "Touch not mine anointed," (1 Chron. 16:21-22) and to His own, "Fear not," (Isa. 54:17).

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11:3-12

In verses 7-12 we are faced with the other side of the picture, and it is startling, for it declares that the time of the organised missionary testimony of the Church will come to an end. The beast rising out of the pit, to be thought of as the personal power of anti-Christ inspiring the activity of the anti-christian world order, wages war against the faithful remnant and overcomes it. Not every believer is killed, but the Church, as an organisation of witness and worship, will be destroyed. Think of how this is taking place increasingly in the missionary work of the Church. Think of how in many areas at home as well as abroad the church, though left

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in formal existence, has been brainwashed into innocuous conformity to godless governments. But think of the situation in our own country with the cry coming from every quarter that, "The church is finished," that "God is dead", that we are living in "the post-Christian era," so that we can now abandon all the moral prohibitions that our fathers lived by. Think of the godless Sundays that are a feature of national life, and link that with verse 10, where the people rejoice and celebrate because those gloomy prophets that used to torment their consciences by their authoritative testimony are now gone. Look up and down the land and through the cities and towns, and see the number of closed churches testifying to a former glory that has passed away. Now face up to the fact that godless materialism may yet stamp its way into power throughout the land. If that comes, we may see with our own eyes the persecution of the church, the martyrdom of its spiritual leaders, and nothing will remain but a vast system of religion likened to an unburied corpse. It is a grim prospect. Be prepared!

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11 3-12

The time will come when to all intents and purposes the Church is finished. The men of the world will rejoice in its deadness, be relieved by its silence, and yet refuse to let the corpse be buried! Perhaps even then they will want it for such things as weddings, baptisms and burials. Perhaps they need the gaunt tombstones of dead churches to persuade them of their emancipation. "The city (8) is great, for it is all-important in the eyes of the inhabitants, as public opinion is all-important to the weak or the worldly; it is Sodom, for it is the place where through pleasure and luxuriousness the worst forms of immorality take root; it is Egypt, for it is the house of bondage, where the wages of sin become tyrannous; it is Jerusalem, for it is the apostate place where the presence of Christ is hated. The same spirit which slew their Lord is alive to persecute His servants." (Ellicott)

Is this city immoral and anti-christian Christendom? In the main street lies the decaying corpse of the church, but the rejoicing over the death of the two witnesses is premature. After a short time the mighty Spirit of God enters into them and they stand on their feet. "There is a resurrection power in even rejected truth; the strength of it is undying. If it be of God men cannot overthrow it." (Ellicott) But here the resurrection of the church brings no hope to unbelieving men, for it is called up into the presence of the glory of God. The persecuting, gloating enemy sees this, and in a moment the earthquake begins. Take as a personal word in all this, a word that makes sense of our experience: "as dying, and behold we live." (2 Cor. 6:9)

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11:13-19

In the very moment of the consummation of the Church's victory the earthquake begins to shake the whole earth and testifies that the final judgment is near. A great fear falls on the city, and as a direct result of the convulsions men experience, they give glory to God. If this is true repentance unto conversion then they are truly brands plucked from the burning. Indeed, since we know neither the day nor the hour of the coming of the Lord, every soul saved is snatched from the jaws of imminent disaster (Jude 23) and we must never lose sight of this evangelical urgency. Time is running out speedily (10:6). But verse 13 seems to speak of a majority who give glory to God, and while this may hint at a great revival immediately prior to the end of the world (as we once believed), we are mindful of other passages of Scripture and of the blindness of the human heart which is strangely indifferent to fundamental issues in a time of crisis. Most prayers in the waerime blitz were for physical safety and deliverance for families, not for reconciliation to God. When the "all clear" sounded, celebration was more often in drinking houses than houses of prayer! Think of the references Lk.18:8; Rev. 2:21; 6:15-17; 9:20-21; 16:21. Men recognised the glory of God in Christ but they still crucified Him. Men saw the undeniable power and glory of God in the apostolic church but they still persecuted it and denied its claim. Here it seems that men see and recognise the glory of God and it is to them judgment not salvation. That means Hell is not a dark place where shadows hide reality, but bright with that exposure from which there is never escape.

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11:13-19

At verse 15 the last trumpet introduces the day of final judgment, but it is the joy of the redeemed and the victory of God that is sung, not the doom of the impenitent Christ-rejecters. In verse 15 read kingdom in the

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singular. The N.E.B. reads, "The sovereignty of the world has passed to our Lord and His Christ." We are not speaking of the varying political systems, but of that world kingdom which Satan offered to Christ in the temptation on condition of His homage (Lk.4:5-8). That would have left Satan still in possession of the kingdom of the world, but now his lordship is finally overthrown and Christ's rule is made manifest. What thrilling and comforting assurance is in these verses. In verse 18 the N.E.B. reads, "The nations raged, but thy day of retribution is come." It has come, not *in spite of* but *by means of* the rage of the nations, and in the process all are revealed for what they are in relation to Christ the King. Every knee bows, but not all in willing submission! The last verse tells of the revealing of eternal things as they really are and have been right through history. At the heart of the vision is the ark of God: the word of His faithful promise, the token of His fellowship, fellowship based on atonement. It is the mercy-seat where God receives His people. But the thunders remain, for to many it is a seat of judgment.

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12:1-17

In ch. 1-11 we have read of the Church and the world and their dealings with each other. We have seen the Church persecuted but not destroyed, and have been shown that the conflict and enmity will increase in intensity and ferocity right to the end of the age. The judgments of God are already operating on the earth but in the midst, God's own are sealed and safe. In the second half of Revelation (ch. 12-22) we are shown that what is happening on earth is the outward manifestation of the war in heaven between Christ and the dragon. Satan attacks Christ (and all the purposes of God that centre on Christ) and is repulsed. He turns his fury against the Church and there emerge Satan's great helpers. But in the end all these enemies are cast down and the Kingdom is established. Some idea of the nature of this present chapter is given in the texts the expositors use by way of a title. They are Matt. 11:12; Gen. 3:15; Lk. 11:23. But the best text is v.7 of today's chapter and by it we are lifted right into the realm of reality concerning personal Christian experience. We are engaged in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-12) and we forget this at our peril. The battles of life are not simple and we must learn to see in the strange confusions and complications that beset us the twistings and scheming of Satan as he seeks to thwart the purposes of God. War is declared. But the issue is certain right from the start.

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12:1-6

Almost at once we think of the birth of Jesus Christ followed by the diabolically inspired slaying of the innocent children (Matt. 2:13-23) and the miraculous preservation of the infant Saviour by the knowledge and power of God's providence. We have the same preservation of the chosen vessel of God in the story of Moses in Ex. 1:15-2:10. It is thrilling to consider how God hid Moses for safety in the palace of Pharaoh, and caused that enemy of God to teach and train the man who was going to be his judge and executioner (Acts 7:20-23). But the picture here of the woman clothed in glorious light cannot be limited to Mary, the mother of our Lord. It must be the Bride of Christ which is His Church, pure, spotless and glorious in a way the world has not yet seen. This speaks of the people of God in all generations, including those in the Old and New Testaments, and tells how since the beginning of time Satan has been at war against this seed of the woman. If the Old Testament is the story of God's preparation for the coming of Christ, then the explanation behind all the sins and failures of Israel is the working of Satan seeking to prevent the promised Child ever being born. At the Saviour's birth the Devil tried to kill Him, and all through His earthly life Satan tried to keep Jesus from the Cross. At the temptation he tried by open confrontation to turn Him aside from obedience; at Caesarea Philippi, through His friend Peter, he tried to weaken Christ's resolve; in Gethsemane he tried to exhaust Christ and to turn Him from the way of obedience before His willing death on the Cross. But he failed. The Devil must always fail. He cannot win.

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12:1-6

The woman is the Church; the Child is Christ; the dragon is Satan; and the stars are fallen angel spirits that follow Satan to do his will. Down through history the dragon assails the royal line of God's promise. Out of the people of God comes the Son of God, and we must link this to the work of the Gospel in which we travail until Christ be formed in others (Gal.4:19). This means that wherever there is a true work of God there will be from

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its inception, and right through its every stage, the dragon waiting to attack, devour and slay. This is equally true whenever we make a significant step forward in our personal Christian lives. We court Satan's fury and it is this that makes faithfulness to God such a costly thing. But we cannot be destroyed! Nor can we be stopped. Nor are we left at the mercy of Satan's continued, uninterrupted working. Christ caught up into glory at the Ascension is the guarantee of the rule of His rod of power (v.5), and the Church left in the battlefield of the wilderness of the world (v.6) is yet in a place prepared, and she is fed by God. Is this not part at least of the message of Ps. 23:5, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." You can enjoy the meal when you know the watching enemy army is held back by the sovereign power of God. Don't concentrate on the activities of Satanic power but on the seated Christ at the right hand of God waiting for His enemies to become His footstool (Heb. 10:13).

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12:7-12

These tremendous verses are set between two passages dealing with the woman and the child and the issue of the birth of this child who is so obviously a conqueror. Verses 7-9 must be read very carefully. They declare there was war in heaven, and the issue of that war is settled decisively and forever. Whether we think of this fundamental conflict being waged and won before the beginning of the world's history, or whether we think of it being accomplished historically in the coming of Christ and His triumphant death on the Cross, the fact remains the same. Satan and all his powers are conquered and cast down. (cf. Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-19; Lk. 10:18; John 12:31). This is the glorious significance of the cry from the Cross, "It is finished." That is why we sing in the resurrection hymn, "The tempter is foiled; His legions are scattered, his strongholds are spoiled" (Plunket). Here we read in verse 10: "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren *has been* thrown down." (RSV) These are the certainties that undergird Christian experience. The victory that is our *right in Christ* is grounded in the victory that Christ has won. But it is not a victory that works automatically like some magic spell, nor by the repetitive incantation of a form of words about the efficacy of Christ's death. It is by faith that the saints stand their ground on the virtue of the atoning blood of Christ. Their testimony is to their dependence and obedience even unto death. There was no theoretical religion. It was a self-surrender from which there was no going back. The martyr spirit does not need a physical death. Indeed it dies many deaths as it lays down its life for Christ.

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12:7-12

We have spoken of the complete casting down of Satan from his place and power, and our sharing in that victory of Christ, which is ever won by dying unto self. This is the obedience of faith. Two issues follow and we must think of them on a personal, church and universal level. There is rejoicing because of Satan's impotence as regards faithful believers. Then there is woe because of the fury of Satan towards the saints of God and his mastery over the ungodly. Although he is overcome and his final end beyond question, Satan has power, stirred up by defeat and fear, for a last struggle. His time is short, and as it passes his fury will increase. His defeat has made him more obstinate in rage and opposition. Apply this to personal experience, as we have already done, and after every spiritual step forward be ready for the malicious onslaught of Satan. If you are growing up in Christ you are a greater threat to Satan's kingdom in your own life and in those who will be converted as a result of your testimony. The time will come when the very sight of you going to church, or to a prayer meeting, or to read your Bible and pray, will enrage the evil one to such an extent that he will shriek his fury against you. When this happens you must not give ground nor be deterred from your obedience and loyalty to Christ. Resist the Devil and he will flee (Jas.4:7), but not necessarily at once. Stand your ground in the victory of Christ's death, and for your comfort, recall how He spoke to the demons and they obeyed. He has not changed.

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12:7-12

We have spoken of the intensification of evil as the time of Christ's Second Coming draws near, when Satan's overthrow will be made perfectly and permanently manifest. But until then in the world we are faced with the mystery of evil and the amount of permission given to its working. We know this is linked with God's deep

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purposes of redemption for men (Job 1:2); with the refining of the saints (Lk. 22: 31-32; 1 Peter 1:6-9); and with the exposure of evil in its true light (Matt.13:24-30). But we must still seek to face the reality and nature of evil, and the following words by the Rev. Wm. Still will help us to do so. "The devil is mad. We do not know how mad, because we do not know how much he knows about the ultimate outcome of his outrageous work. But he knows his time is short, and seeks to do the greatest possible harm in the time at his disposal. Does he know that all his evil God will turn to blessed account? If he does, he must be a great fool to work so hard for a lost cause. But perhaps the very nature of evil is to do so, even if it knows it is working to its own hurt. As the devil enslaves others, perhaps his own nature enslaves himself, so that he is no longer able to resist its destructive power. How terrible!" Terrible indeed when you think of people who persist in strange resistance to all that is of Christ and His word.

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12:13-17

"The dragon, having been cast down to the earth, persecutes the woman. It is this simple symbol that explains two fundamental historical realities - the persecution of the Jews, God's ancient covenant people, and the persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ. Behind even the fact of the Jews' rejection of Christ and their consequent sufferings, there lies the sinister pressure upon them from Satan because as a nation they brought forth the Messiah. It is the dragon turning his attention upon the woman. This also explains how, in any time of monumental arrogance on the part of dictatorial world-rulers, almost inevitably, and as a matter of course, they find a scapegoat on whom to vent their passions. And it has generally been either the Jews or the Church. Just as truly, history substantiates the words of 14 and 16, both in relation to the Jews and the Church, for in spite of all manner of atrocities perpetrated upon them, both have been preserved down the ages by the sovereign hand of God. To use Paul's famous words from 2 Cor. 4, both the Jews and the Church can say, 'We are persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.' This is the theme of these verses. Help ever comes to God's beleaguered people, and the Divine protection (14) sustains them throughout the ages, till He come." (Rev. James Philip)

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12:13-17

There is war on earth, and behind the human factions lie the spiritual personalities that are utterly and irreconcilably opposed. Satan is cast down and has failed to prevent the coming of Christ, has failed to prevent His victorious atonement, and is failing now to prevent the gathering of the Church and the establishing of Christ's eternal Kingdom. In the sphere of human nature and experience, where Satan was first successful in the Garden of Eden, he is now being assailed and overcome. And all his flailing furies are being frustrated and turned to the good of Christ's people. Note that the enemy is likened to a dragon for ferocity and a serpent for subtlety. When he cannot assail the Church as a whole he tries, like a roaring lion, to single out, "which one of you he may devour," (1 Pet. 5:8) and thus get inside the Church to work his destruction. The woman is persecuted and driven into the wilderness, but her Lord gives her wings of the eagle to flee. In the wilderness her place is prepared by God. The persecution brings her secret blessing. But for the stratagems of the dragon and the serpent, neither the surmounting power of the eagle's wings nor the sweetness of heavenly sustenance would have been hers. The evil one's fury can lead us to the secret place of the Most High God (Ps.91:1), and the flood of his subtle delusions and lies, which seem bent on swallowing us up, is frustrated in miraculous fashion. Read the whole of Psalm 91! Recall the words of Jesus: "*I will* build my Church, and the gates of Hell *shall not* prevail against it."

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13:1-10

Two things should guide us as we enter into this complex chapter which has been given so many varied interpretations, many of them with profit and enlightenment for the saints of God. We must remember we are dealing with the principles of evil rather than with their outward, historical and human manifestations. The principle is constant, while the manifestation varies greatly and develops within itself. If we limit ourselves to one rigid historical interpretation of "the Beast" we may well limit our understanding of the working of the

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principle of anti-Christ in the world. Consider references such as 2 Thess. 2:7-12 and 2 Cor. 11:13-15. The other thing to remember is that we are dealing with the permissions God grants to evil, allowing evil things, persons and movements to emerge, develop and exercise power in the world. Read v. 5-10 in this light and shudder at their possible significance, yet do not lose faith for one moment. The last word is with God alone, not with the Devil. God often seems to be absent from the field of battle. There is often, if not always, the hiding of His power (Habak.3:4AV) and because we do not see the "fireworks" of His activity and the confirmation of His vindication of His people, we are apt to doubt and fear. This is especially so when the tide of the battle is running against us and there are no "signs following" the preaching of the Word. We need then "the instinct that can tell that God is on the field when He is most invisible" (Faber- Hymn 'Workman of God O lose not heart'). Now look up Luke 17:20-21. It is not with outward show and collected statistics that God brings about His victory. But there is never a single moment that He is not there and active in the midst of everything.

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13:1-10

It will help here to recall Luke 22:53 when Jesus was led away with all the appearance of having been overcome. From His own lips He consented that this was evil's day of opportunity. In today's passage we have the first of two "beasts" emerging, parading and flouting their power in the face of God and His Church. The second (11-18) is a veritable imitation of Christ, the Lamb. But God does nothing. Indeed there is an amazing absence of God right through the chapter and He is mentioned only to be blasphemed. Both these "beasts" are distinct from the "dragon", yet they are his instruments or puppets, for all they have is given them by the "dragon" (4, 11). They exist by his power to serve him against God. The frightening thing is that we see men and women like ourselves being deceived and seduced by these plausible and powerful beings. Now look again at verse 7 and think of how what we call Christendom refuses to even consider the possibility that the "crunch" will come and godlessness sweep over the whole world and engulf the organisation we call "the church". There are many reasons why the scourge of God should come. A cartoon in "Punch" portrayed a typical street of pleasure in the Vanity Fair of the Western world, and in it a man carried a placard, "Drop the Bomb". It is a refusal to face up to the inevitable crisis and confrontation between God and the Devil in the history of the world that lies behind much of the clamour for a united world church. Judgment will come, for the trumpet has sounded.

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13:1-10

There should be no gap between the end of chap.12 and the beginning of chap.13. Verse 1 should read, "And he the dragon stood upon the sand of the sea and I saw a beast rise up." This vision is closely linked with Daniel 7, where we read of successive world powers or empires rising to exercise dominion on earth. Here John speaks of a composite "beast" with emphasis on its "beastly" nature: swift as a leopard, strong as a bear, fierce as a lion. It rises up or emerges from the sea in answer to the call of the dragon. The sea represents humanity, the nations and peoples of the world (17:15), and this empire of the beast seems therefore to be essentially a secular empire whose power and authority stem directly from the Devil (2). We can think of this in terms of our own generation with the dragon standing over against humanity, calling forth all its latent evil and perversity, and uniting them in a massive kingdom of "anti-Christ". Note that the whole world wondered at (worshipped) the beast and followed after him with a fascination amounting to hypnosis. The issue is that they begin to worship the beast, regarding him and his loud, arrogant, authoritative utterances as the final arbiter in all matters of faith and life. Think how "popular opinion", the apostles of "free-thinking" and "free love", and those who demythologise God to the point of dismissing Him, have become the people who matter in the world, while the Word of God in the remnant of the Church is ignored. If you think we have erred in beginning to speak of a secular empire of anti-Christ and ending with a philosophical, religious and spiritual empire, go on to read the whole chapter. The next beast *looks* like a lamb (but not *The Lamb*) but it speaks with the voice of the dragon.

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13:1-10

This first beast speaks of a secular empire of anti-Christ which is given its head to speak and act against God, His Church and His people (5-6), which it does with significant success (4, 7). We must be careful not to try to identify this empire too strictly, because we are dealing with manifestations of conflict that mark the whole course of this age. John would certainly apply it to the circumstances of his own age and see in the references to the heads and horns (1, 3) the Roman Empire with its succession of emperors. He might be thinking of the bitter persecution of the Christians by Nero, which ended with that man's suicide, but began again in the rule of his successor. "But a similar 'death and resurrection' has been evident in our own time, when that 'maniac of ferocious genius', as Churchill called Hitler, terrorised the world and was cut down, only to give way to a still more terrible and fearsome manifestation of evil in the ascendance of Communist totalitarianism" (Rev. J. Philip). Be clear in your thinking. Secular powers and empires in their arrogant assumption of total authority for the destiny of the world, and in their blasphemous attitude in which man is made the centre of all things in place of God, must be seen to be incarnations of the spirit of anti-Christ. Although Satan was cast down and conquered at the Cross, neither he nor his workings ceased. The result is this great empire of worldliness, this-world-ness, living by and for the temporal to the exclusion of the eternal. This is the gaping beast that swallows up millions, and its jaws are wide open.

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13:1-10

While we must face up to these terrible visions and what they say about the triumph of evil, the overcoming of the organised witness of the Church of Christ and the persecution that will come (7, 10), we must never be cast down into terror. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." (Rev. 2:10; cf. Matt.10:26-31) But at the same time be ready for whatever may come. Verse 10 should be linked with Jer. 15:2. In the A.V. verse 10 testifies to the absolute righteousness of the God to whom belongs vengeance and who ordains righteous recompense with a punishment that fits the crime. The R.S.V., N.E.B. and Moffat seem to divide the verse to mean that if anyone is destined or marked out for captivity he will certainly go into captivity, for there is no evading what is ordained for us in the will of God. But if anyone (that is the captor) slays the child of God with the sword, by the sword he himself shall be slain. The whole verse on the other hand may indicate that in the will of God some of the saints are marked out beforehand for captivity (be it by personality defects, or the needling annoyances of circumstances, or by alien, atheistic government) or for martyrdom by the sword (be it in swift stroke or long wearing down by conflict). But in all this the faithful saints of God are safe. All that pertains to them is written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Their experience is not accidental or indiscriminate. God is in it, and they commit their safekeeping to Him, however He accomplishes it, by life or by death (1 Pet. 4:19). What of the unfaithful saints? Is that a contradiction in terms? Certainly those who cannot be loyal in love to Christ when the days are easy will not rise to saintly conviction in times of persecution. Their resolution will have been weakened by years of prevarication. But if they are Christ's they cannot perish. They will be saved, so as by fire. (1 Cor.3:10-15 AV).

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13:11-18

The third beast seems to be identified with the false prophet, spoken of in 16:13 and 19:20. We are dealing with a *trinity* of evil and we must note the imitative and counterfeit nature of evil. That evil trinity comprises the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, the third being subject to the second, and the second to the first, who is the organising and dynamic genius behind the whole plan of evil. The first beast was spoken of in terms of ferocious persecution, but the second is like a lamb. His voice seems to be the focal point of his influence, and in spite of all the gentle outward appearance of his person his propaganda is the speech of the dragon. We know enough about industrial, philosophical, theological and international disputes in our generation to realise the menace of soft words and fair speeches. How well men can present a case so that they appear as prophets of righteousness, having no axe to grind but interested only in martyr service for their fellows, while in fact they are motivated by deep forces of power that they themselves scarcely recognise. We see this principle of powerful deception at work in the patient subtlety of Communist philosophy and practice. We see it in the rabid devotees of ecumenism who, in the name of more powerful evangelism, are in fact departing from the historic

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Gospel into the mists of sacerdotalism. We see the same principle on T.V. with a theological professor denying the "new birth", "the substitutionary atonement of Christ" and "the resurrection of the body" and then saying to the viewers, "If you believe differently, God bless you." And the abiding impression in the mind of the non-churchgoer is that doctrine does not really matter after all. This is the work of the lamb with the voice of the dragon. It does not lead to God.

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13:11-18

Note that only the head of this third beast is seen, that is, its public image. And, like the personable young men who canvass for the Mormon Church, the image is both attractive and impressive. Like a good salesman the Devil puts his best goods in the window, and the more the Devil can appear like Christ, the more success he is likely to have (2 Cor.11:14). A cultured, gifted man with no place in his philosophy of life for Jesus Christ the Son of God is far more use to Satan than a gross character who wallows in the sins of the flesh like a beast. Satan likes best to be religious, and seems to be fascinated by evangelical religion for he is persistent in his attendance, though not for the right reasons! He is there to beguile away to false paths whoever he can influence. To this end Satan will work all manner of miracles that *seem* identical to the working of God. Think how Pharaoh's magicians copied God's miracles by the hand of Moses (Exod.7:6-13). Fire from heaven is impressive, as are visions and voices in spirit, séances. The crusading zeal of Communists with its passion for social righteousness and its support of the underdog is an impressive fact of modern life. The glorious pageantry of Roman Mass and ritualistic religion and its bland assumption of leadership in Christian things have a hypnotic effect on many. But where does it lead? An image is made to the first beast (1-10), and at the instigation of the attractive, religious lamb, worship is given to the great system or spirit of worldliness behind which stands the dragon. The system seems to be alive (15) and it becomes tyrannical to the point of persecution. Don't think only of Papal Rome but also of such possibilities as George Orwell's "Big Brother" whose all-seeing eye dominated the whole of man's life. It is but a step to the absolute economic sanctions of verses 16-17. There is no escape. Anti-Christian government and anti-Christian religion have made human slavery complete. The mark of the whole system is man, not God.

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13:11-18

Before leaving this chapter go back to verse 7 and remember as you view the arrogant upsurge of evil that "it is given power" by God's permission. Never for a moment is evil master of the situation. It is given opportunity to expand and to amass its power, but it is being driven relentlessly by God to a final exposure, confrontation and overthrow. Until then, we live in a society with the mark of the beast on its life. It is the mark of man's idolatry of man, and here are some true examples of the ruthless demand for conformity. A bank clerk refuses to "adjust" the calculation of interest on overdrafts and is told by his manager he is too honest to get on in the profession. A watchmaker refuses to pass off cheap-jack repairs because he is a Christian and he loses his job. A Christian chairman of a Trade Union committee is ousted from office because the other members insist on holding the regular meetings on a Sunday. (The meeting was later put back to a week-night and the Christian was *asked* to resume as chairman because he was good at the job). A young business executive is badgered by his superiors for refusing to join his colleagues on occasions where business was supposed to be discussed, but activity was in fact confined to drinking and bawdy jokes. The list could go on for ever, and the message is the manifest demand for conformity to the pattern of society: a society that is increasingly godless and anti-Christ. Will the issue be a political state in which no Christians will be allowed to have places of influence, even in the Church? Many an evangelical minister is literally blackmailed by his office-bearers. His leadership is limited by their desires. To be true to God is to court trouble and have unceasing warfare. Is this the mark of the beast? Where will it stop? It won't!

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14:1-5

The matters we have been studying these past days have been grim and frightening, yet it is necessary to do so, in order to dispel our sentimental ideas as to the future course of this world and the experience in it of the

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Church of Christ. The spirit of the world is mobilised under the inspired direction of Satan himself to fight against all that is of Christ and His kingdom (1John2 15-17; 5:19). We have seen the powers of evil rise to blasphemous climax, by the permission of God, and in this process of the exposure of evil the saints of God have suffered. We have even faced the extinction of the Church as an organised evangelistic agency. We have seen amongst men the trinity of evil: the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. In all this picture (ch. 12-13) we have been looking down on the earthly scene, but now we look up and see the Church triumphant. In the rest of the chapter we see the God of the Church active on behalf of His own people and purpose. Read verse 1 (AV), "I saw, and behold *the* Lamb." John saw with the perception and understanding of faith that the rise, spread, dominion and seeming victory of evil were not the last word. Do you see why we must school ourselves to pause in the midst of the mad rush of the world and look *up*? John had seen the Lamb before (ch. 5) and had learned of His lion strength as the mighty executor of God's perfect plan. Had he forgotten? Had we forgotten in all our grim thoughts about evil? Now, let the rush of thrill and reassurance fill your heart. The dragon has done his worst but failed. Not one of the mighty numbered throng has proved unfaithful. None is missing when the roll is called up yonder. God has brought them safely home.

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14:1-5

This is the first of three sections beginning (in the A.V.) with the phrase, "And I saw," (v.1, 6. 14). Each is an explanation of things as they really are and shall be; each is full of comfort, yet speaks of final and eternal issues and divisions. All is clear in black and white with no indeterminate greys, for God has used the rigours of human experience in the world to make quite plain who and what we are. The first thing John sees is the Lamb and all His people. The 144,000 are not a select number of super-spiritual people, but the "firstfruits" or representation of the whole harvest of the redeemed. This is the sealed multitude of chapter 7, now triumphantly saved to sin no more. On earth they were the persecuted, unrecognised saints, but now their identity and ownership is beyond doubt, and they sing the song of ineffable majesty and sweetness that is known only to the redeemed. These were men and women redeemed out of the earth, and they sing of the salvation which they have known. No doubt some would have more to sing about than others! Behind them lies the strange land where their songs were stifled (Ps. 137:3-4) and they come to Zion with joy (Isa. 51:11). Two more points are to be noted. John sees the Zion which cannot be moved (Ps. 125:1-2; Heb. 12:22-23; 2 Tim. 2:19). He sees that the Lamb is not alone, His people are with Him, and "where Jesus, 'tis heaven there." It is of immense practical importance to learn to look up and to see things as they really are. This will encourage and strengthen our faith, resolve and assurance. Read Heb.11:1, 26-27; 2 Cor.4:16-18.

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14:1-5

Verses 4-5 are sufficiently vital to occupy us another day. The earthly suffering of the saints has given place to heavenly glory and the singing of the new song which they learned on earth. How did they learn? It was a deep and radical school. Their virginity (cf.AV) must be thought of as purity on a vaster scale than the mere physical nature, important as that most certainly is in the sight of God. We are speaking of that which is spiritual and our relationship to Christ is one of love. These saints gave their love to Christ alone and refused to commit spiritual fornication. They did not flirt, nor prove unfaithful, nor did they prostitute the blessings of Christ by consuming them on their selfish desires. They did not presume on the tender patience of the One who loved them. They followed Him wherever He went with implicit obedience, never looking back, even when it meant humiliation, rejection, and being made a spectacle of weakness before men (Heb.11:36-40; 2 Cor.3:4-10). They were separated unto God and did not break that separation. They were utterly truthful. They were blameless, not perfect, but sincere through and through. It is a picture of devotion, and having walked with Him on earth they now walk in His near presence. It is wonderfully simple and so real. This is unselfconscious saintliness and its end is unsullied pleasure in the presence of Jesus.

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14:6-12

The three angel messengers have one common purpose, to warn mankind with respect to the coming inevitable judgment, and by that message to turn their hearts towards God. The background and context of all such preaching is the arrogance of evil that seems to be carrying all before it. The angels need not be thought of as supernatural messengers, but merely God-authenticated voices declaring truth by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. The inhabitants of all the earth are really described as "sitting", not simply "dwelling", and the emphasis is on their ease of mind and spirit with no thought of danger. Although such momentous final judgment is about to break in upon them there is not a serious thought in their heads, and certainly no thought of God. Remember Jesus' words, "In such an hour *as ye think not* the Son of Man cometh" (Lk.12:40) It will be against all predictions and expectations, when men are quite fascinated by and preoccupied with earthly things, that judgment will come to overwhelm (Lk. 17:26-30). To people of such a complacent spirit, insensitive to spiritual things, the good news of the Gospel is a call to fear in the light of judgment. This note of solemn warning is as true and necessary a part of the Gospel preaching as the note of love and mercy. Indeed, when every plea of love falls on deaf ears the note of warning is all that is left. In a godless generation when moral and spiritual authority is resented, we may need a return to "law work", the preaching of the eternal sanctions of God, before people will become aware of the need for the message of mercy and saving power.

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14:6-12

God carries out His saving work by love *and* by fear, and since the solemn facts described are *facts* and not empty imaginations, there is need for fear. But we must always guard lest the Devil cause our healthy fears to become dark broodings of terror that are destructive of our personalities, on a psychological, spiritual and even physical level. Our eyes and our thoughts must be on God, who is always in control of all evil in its every manifestation and operation, and who will bring evil to its final retribution. That is the message of the crashing fall of Babylon: a fall that is portrayed not as a gradual dispersion and disappearance from the earth, but as a mighty cataclysmic overthrow. Babylon symbolises localised and centralised powers of evil exercising influence over the whole of the world. In John's day it was Rome. But in the course of history and in the final judgment this world power which seduces people from Christ to their destruction may be found centred anywhere. We shall read much more about Babylon in ch. 17-18, and here we simply emphasise the final necessary "show-down" with unrepentant evil which, by the time of the end, has emerged as a colossal world empire, causing all nations to be guilty of the sin of fornication. She has made people wallow in the sea of gross, insatiable passion; she has made them prostitute their creation and calling; she has urged them on in their God-contradicting way, until the cup of the wine of His wrath has to be drunk. Such thoughts prepare us for the third angel.

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14:6-12

Verses 9-11 are grim, yet they are the ground of the dogged, suffering endurance of the saints of God. No sane servant of God finds any pleasure in contemplating or preaching judgment. But the facts are there. We are dealing with issues of destiny which involve a total and final separation from the blessed presence of God of all that is evil. However distasteful our generation finds the clear-cut issues of black and white in relation to the things of God and salvation, they must be declared. There is a choice to be made, which when made, will lead all men, one by one, out of the obscurity and shade of indeterminate "greys" into the clear identification of the light of God. If a man sells his soul to the spirit of this world, and for love of the world follows its broad, easy way rather than the narrow way of Christ's salvation and discipleship, he will finally pay the price of his choice. When the judgment comes there will be no mercy, no rest, no hope, no remedy. He has excluded Christ and he is now excluded. There is no sitting on the fence. You either choose Christ or you choose anti-Christ, and the issue of your choice is heaven or hell for ever. If you feel this is too much, think of the Lamb (10) and how they screamed at Him at Calvary and how His name is to many people nothing but a curse. Look at Heb. 10:29 where the Person, work and Spirit of Christ are all held to be worthless. What do you do with Christ? (Matt.27:17,22).

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14:13-14

The patient endurance of the saints in the midst of suffering and affliction at the hands of the godless has its issue of blessedness. They have lived on earth in fellowship with their Lord in His sufferings, but from now on they most assuredly rest from their toils. The immediate reference is to those martyred for their faith, but it includes all who have lived and died in the Lord. The phrase "in the Lord" seems equivalent to "saints" in verse 12, where a saint is described as one who keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. Neither empty believism nor formal consent to a religious creed or system will bring a man safely into the presence of the glory of God. Saving faith brings moral obedience, and this twofold life of spiritual trust and ethical practice is what becomes evident in the true people of God in time of persecution. But the blessedness of the faithful dead is conceived of in terms not of escape but rather of consummation, for "their works (deeds) do follow them." They are with their Lord, and they take with them into eternity not merely the "record of their works" (N.E.B.) but the characters which their works have wrought. "The life above, when this is past, is the ripe fruit of life below" (Bonar). Their works are never the ground of their acceptance in God's sight. For that salvation and acceptance they rest in the perfect righteousness of Christ's Person and Atonement. But their saving faith in Christ produced works of righteousness which become, in some real way, the garment of their glory (2 Cor. 5:10 and Rev. 19:8).

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14:15-20

The last vision describes the final judgment in terms of a twofold harvest. But it is also to be regarded as a victory, for the One spoken of in v.14 is wearing the garland of victory (crown), not the diadem of a king. If we say this person in v.14 is Christ Himself, there seems to be a clash with Matt.13:41-42, where the reapers are angels. Again in v.15 it would seem that an angel is issuing orders to the "Son of Man", who in turn sends the angel with the sickle to do the actual reaping. In v.15 the word "temple" is the specific Greek word signifying the inner shrine or the presence of God Himself. This would mean, "The angel does not command the Son of Man but is the mere messenger announcing to the Son the will of God the Father, in whose hands are kept the times and the seasons." (J.F. & B.) (Mk. 13:32). Some suggest the ripe (dry) grain harvest in v.15-16 speaks of the harvesting of the saints and the grape harvest in v.18-20 speaks of the harvest of the wicked. But it is better to take both pictures as portraying the full harvest of judgment that must come upon the earth. See Joel 3: 12-14, which seems to inspire the imagery here. The heart of the passage seems to be v.15 which envisages the judgment proceeding from the holy presence of the eternal God, and v.18 which links the whole movement with the prayers of the saints (5:9 and 8:3). The judgment is complete and universal and is wholly directed by heaven. We are dealing with the wrath and retribution of a holy God in the day when unrepentant evil is finally brought to reckoning.

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15:1-8

Chapters 15-16 form the fifth of the seven sections into which the Book of Revelation may be divided (1-3;4-7;8-11;12-14;15-16;17-19;and20-22). Each section sweeps through the course of history and the experience of the Church in the world, and each section amplifies and develops the preceding one until finally a tremendous climax is portrayed. Hendriksen summarises as follows: Through the preaching of the Word by the Holy Spirit churches are established, which, in their life and work are blessed by the presence of Christ (ch. 1-3). The triumph of the Word draws upon the people of God the persecution of the world described in the vision of the seals (ch. 4-7). Again and again the strong judgments of God are visited upon the persecuting world but fail to awaken repentance. These are the trumpet judgments (ch. 8-11). This strange and sinister impenitence, together with the constant conflict between the Church and the world, points to the deeper warfare between the `seed of the woman` and the `dragon` (ch. 12-14). When all the warnings of God are unheeded the vials of final judgment are poured out (ch.15-16). But God's 'final' judgments are not all stored up until the 'Day of Judgment'. Down through the generations His last word has to be spoken to unrepentant men and nations when they pass the point of no return. These plagues we now read about are judgments which leave no room for repentance. How terrible for men and nations to think that the time comes when God has nothing more to say. He is silent; and the calm will be broken only by the storm of judgment.

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15:1-8

One of the most valuable fruits of studying Revelation on this broad general level is that we are compelled to lift up our eyes beyond the horizons of our limited, personal, localised experience, to view the whole world and the course of its history. All its tensions, catastrophes and conflicts seem chaotic, yet Revelation testifies that all is in perfect order because God is working out His twofold purpose of mercy and judgment. All His ways are righteousness, truth and holiness, and nothing is done in a corner, for there is nothing to hide or be ashamed of. Even on the brink of the final outpourings of judgment there is the clear light of holiness. John's vision is of a sea of glass, transparent and clear, but shot through with fire. The sea of God's counsels of righteousness and love is now clear as crystal and now ruddy with the fire of righteous indignation. The victors of God walk over the waters of the sea singing their song of glory. It is the song of Moses and of the Lamb that testifies of One God and one work of redemption by which a people are redeemed to be God's own treasured possession. Note too, that these saints of God are victors over history, for the ransomed servants of the living God are never victims of circumstances. God leads them along in Christ's triumphal procession (2 Cor.2:14-17).

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15:1-8

The sea was portrayed in 4:6 as calm and untroubled. Then came the opening of the seals of God's purposes and the sounding of His trumpets of judgment until the sea is troubled. Then out of the troubled sea there heaves the manifestation of the beast (13:1). The progress of righteous triumph and righteous judgment is constant, but the sealed people of God are not engulfed. Indeed it is the surging of the waves that brings them safely to God. Compare in Daniel 3:19-25 how only the wicked servants of the king were burned by the fire. The bowls of final wrath are brought from the innermost shrine of God and the whole temple is filled with His glory. It is this glory which is the protection of the courts of heaven, for all sin and evil is shrivelled up in its light. Remember that in the Tabernacle in the Old Testament the "testimony" was in the ark of God. It was the two tables of the law by which sin is ever condemned, and the glory of God hovered over that secret place. Yet it was a place of mercy through the blood of the Passover Lamb. How wonderfully here everything focuses on the throne of God and of the Lamb. The saints, knowing the exceeding wonder of it all, give voice in song to the praise of God's being, wisdom and all His righteous acts of power. In the end all shall fear Him but only His own shall love Him.

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16:1-9

Right through this chapter we must keep in mind that these "final" judgments of God are in no sense remedial, for the simple reason that the time for remedy by repentance is past. There is not the slightest suggestion of any change of heart in these men and nations who feel the heavy hand of God. All pretence is gone, and we have a deep and devastating revelation of the human heart in its natural, unregenerate state, confirming that we are in fact, apart from the grace of God, children of wrath, not children of God (Eph. 2:1-3). In this final judgment men give expression to pain, anger, resentment, hatred and blasphemy, but not repentance. All this confirms not only the inevitability of judgment but its necessity, grounded in the absolute and unchanging righteousness of God (5-7). This chapter is bracketed by two significant statements (1, 17), which come from God Himself who occupies the great white throne. The seven angels are commanded with great solemnity to pour out the vials or bowls of wrath into the earth, then right through the chapter we have specific judgments falling upon specific objects or areas. There is nothing indiscriminate here. These are not fortuitous or accidental tragedies that men like to label as "bad luck". It is the inescapable rule of physical, mental, moral and spiritual harvest. God is not mocked, neither in the present nor the future. As men sow, they will reap. Consider Rom. 2:6; Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 22:12. If we would only remember this we would have a better understanding of the world and life as well as of Revelation.

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16:1-9

What men had become is the warrant for the terrible scourge that now afflicts them. They had accepted and collaborated with the beast and taken his mark, which is the mark of man. They had exalted man to the place of God, gloried in his human power, and in his system there was no place at all for the Christ. They neither desired Him nor felt any need of Him. But in so acting they had become servants of the spirit of Anti-Christ. They may not have set out deliberately to become active agitators against God and His Christ, but although the early stages of sin may appear innocuous, there is a sinister progression of power which eventually masters a man until there is no escape (Rom. 6:16; John 8:33-34). On these men is poured this thing that becomes a throbbing pain of distraction, erupting ulcers of corruption, perhaps more in the mind than the body, so that there is a disease from which they cannot escape. Whatever it is (and our present world situation of sick culture with its morbid art and literature seems to fit the symbolism), it is the fruit of spiritual refusal. God's Word to this restless world is still, "There is no peace for the wicked" (Isa. 57:20-21). Note how total the result of the second and third vials is. If the sea symbolises humanity we have a picture of the rising and falling tides of human powers and empires. There are death and decay because of God's judgments. But this general decay of worldliness has a more frightening aspect to follow.

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16:1-9

The rivers of life and all their tributaries are also corrupted. A multitude of small sources of corruption flow together to make the great sea of popular sentiment and desire a place of death. Since the rivers are spoken of after the sea, there may be a suggestion of the corrupted waters of the sea rising on the tide and moving up the rivers right to their source. This may speak of the wholeness of human experience which cannot be divided into separate compartments. You cannot worship the world and its ways without that spirit of worldliness affecting your family and church. Think of how many parents who refuse the call of discipleship and the life of the Cross live to be worried to death about their children and the lives they lead: What men choose as a way of life they must live with, and God will see to it that it will be so. Verses 5-7 declare these judgments to be a just retribution: "Men cannot worship worldliness or earthliness without degrading even those who contribute to their instruction, their recreations, and their joys to the same level. When the public taste grows corrupt, the literature will become so to a greater or lesser degree; the up-flowing tide will colour the down-coming stream. The morality of a nation's art always rises to the level of morality in a nation's manners. Morality takes care of itself, and always revenges any outrage which art may put on its laws by either lowering the art so that it offends, or extinguishing it." (Ellicott) Literature, art, drama, music, sport, cinema, drink, the cult of the "free offer" and "top prizes" all testify to a humanity that is sick unto death. The disease here has reached the chronic stage. There is no cure, even if men wanted it.

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16:10-11

The fourth vial or bowl (8-9) spoke of cosmic disturbances, and the sun that was a blessing to the earth became a curse to scorch it. Was there not a film made some time ago about the earth being jolted off its axis and the heat of the sun becoming a terror of destruction? Was there not a documentary film about the consequences of a nuclear explosion in our own country that the authorities refused to screen on television? Would the sight of scorched humanity and the awful agony of suffering have caused panic? Perhaps it would, but it would not have caused repentance and a turning to God. There comes a time when men are simply left with the undiluted terror of what they have created. Is that not the testimony of all the "science-fiction" that we see and read? But in the "stories" almost always a good character arrives to deliver the people. But what if the "good man" was to be scorned and laughed out of court, what then? Men are left with no escape.

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16:10-11

Then in the fifth vial, the kingdom of evil, which until now has fascinated and allured men, is assailed and enveloped in a darkness that can be felt. Compare in all this the judgments on Egypt in Exodus chapters 7-10.

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The kingdom of the Beast is now disturbed and disintegrating and its origin and nature are becoming more and more clear. But the men who have served the Beast have no thought of repentance. Indeed their blasphemy confirms their basic rebellion and their desperate refusal and hatred of God, no matter in what form He manifests Himself or in what tones He appeals (Lk. 7:30-34). This diabolical resistance to God is only now coming into the open. Hitherto it has been somewhat concealed, justified, and tolerated by public opinion that disliked radical positions in regard to religion. Absolute division between God and the Devil and the men who serve each is an unpalatable doctrine, but in the end the great gulf of antagonism cannot be hidden, nor can it be crossed. It is this fact that gives impetus to evangelistic witness while time remains. "Rescue the perishing," is no poetic exaggeration, especially when you begin to detect in men a hardening of attitude against the preaching of the Gospel.

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16:12-16

The Euphrates was the natural boundary between Israel and the great empires of her enemies, and provided a great restraint upon their evil advance and a strong measure of security to the people of God. Now the symbolism pictures the drying up of this river, and the advance of the kings of the east becomes a threat to the people of God. But the drying of the river is also the sign for the downfall of the city of Babylon which stands on the river, and for the gathering of the forces of evil to their final defeat at Armageddon. We have then the picture of the forces of evil surging forward in gloating triumph, confident and ready to take the power and reign by finally driving the people of God off the face of the earth and by burying for ever the whole concept of God. It is the brash arrogance of evil that impresses here. It seems to have no idea at all of its actual submission to the power of God nor of its limited scope. It is like Pharaoh in Exodus plunging recklessly into the Red Sea confident that this time Israel was about to be exterminated (Exod.14:15-31). But God is giving evil its head, drawing it out into the open in a way that makes any retreat or reorganisation of forces impossible so that the final blow may be struck. There are many in our own generation ready to bury the ancient God of history and redemption, and their carefully prepared funeral rites include a new god of their own creation that will be much more acceptable to modern man and his needs. In all this the Biblical God of salvation is strangely silent, but He is busy, and He is coming swiftly and secretly and there will be many surprises.

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16:12-16

We are not concerned to locate the geographical situation of the final Armageddon, nor to identify too strictly the upsurge of incarnate evil that comes from the east in this last assault upon the Church of Christ. The world situation is in such a state of flux and rapid change that it would be unwise to eliminate any possible source of enmity and persecution. We may think of various types of Communism; or an upsurge of Islam; but we would be foolish to ignore the persecution possibilities of a morally decadent Western Christendom that has no time for religion that interferes with private lives and public policies! What fascinates here is the gruesome spirits that are the operating genius behind world powers and movements, and seen here in a final mobilisation of evil to attack Christ's kingdom. We see the demonic hatred of the dragon and are reminded of the direct operation upon people of evil spirits. We see the hostility of the world-power of the Beast which would centre all man's desires and hopes on earthly things. We see the subtle, insidious influence of the false prophet, with its appearance of culture and intellectualism, and its actual denial of the spiritual salvation that is found only through the Blood of the Lamb. But note that every impediment is removed from the way of these evil spirits and they go rushing forward with eagerness and seeming omnipotence, working miracles capable of stunning people into wonder, if not worship. But where is God in all this? He is watching in the shadows, waiting to move with the swift stealth of a thief in the night (Lk.12:39-40), and when He moves it will be with the master stroke of confident genius. In a moment evil will be confounded. This is our confidence, and we must rest in it regardless of the immediate evidences. To panic, and act with premature haste, is to court shame.

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16:17-21

When the seventh vial is poured out, John hears the voice of God declaring, "It is done," or "It is over," (N.E.B.) or "The end has come," (J.B. Phillips) or "It has happened," (Hendriksen). The final overthrow of the whole kingdom of evil in the zenith of its power and opportunity has been accomplished by the power of God, as He said it would be. Right through Revelation we have been faced with the personal power of evil in all its hypnotic fascination for people and its apparently limitless opportunity for operation. We have been compelled to face the awful possibilities that may come upon the world as the climax of the last days draws near, and it is a frightening picture. But we have also been compelled to look behind the scenes of world chaos and have seen the quiet, ordered purpose of God as He moves irresistibly towards His triumph. Behind, in, through and over all the forms and developments of evil there found the glorious Christ, the mighty executor of God's perfect plan (chap. 5). The initiative is and always has been with God, and the message of this final showdown of judgment is to challenge people to make sure their sympathies and loyalties are on the right side. The God who has worked righteous judgments upon men according to their works down through history, now comes forth to seal His judgments *for ever*. The judgment day has arrived, and the wrath so long restrained is poured out (2 Pet.3:3-11a). The great hail of final judgment breaks for ever the kingdom of evil and it goes down to utter ruin. Note that even in hell, impenitent sinners blaspheme God.

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17:1-18

Read quickly through this whole chapter to grasp its sweep, and then we shall consider it in detail in successive days. Note that the tone and emphasis seem to be changing and, having been faced with all the terrible machinations of evil in the world, we are now shown with increasing affirmation the total victory of Christ over all evil. From chap 12 onwards we have been shown five enemies of Christ: the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet, Babylon, and the men who bear the mark of the Beast. Now the overthrow of these enemies is spoken of, but in reverse order. First, the judgment of God falls on impenitent men (ch. 15-16), then on Babylon (ch.17), then on the Beast and False Prophet (ch. 19), and finally the Dragon is overthrown (ch. 20). It is not necessary to think of these judgments as consecutive, although they are described one after the other. Right through the whole book we have been brought to the threshold of the final judgment, e.g. 6:12, 17; 11:18-19; 14:19; 16:17-21. Now the great day of God Almighty is come (16:14) and God has gathered all the loathsome devil-inspired persons and powers of evil to be dealt with (16:16). It is at this point that Babylon, previously spoken of in 14:8, comes to the forefront of the picture (16:19), and in chaps. 17-19 we have a further exposition of the sixth and seventh bowls of judgment which begins with the downfall of the harlot Babylon. Two texts will guide and help us in our thinking. The first is 1 John 2:16-17, verses of great realism. The second is Rev. 17:17, a verse which declares that God alone is Master and *all* powers are His servants. What a comfort!

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17:1-6

The word "admiration"(AV) or astonished in v.6 signifies horror, not approval. In v. 1 the woman is called a harlot, which signifies her business to be that of seducing men away from their rightful love. She is gorgeously arrayed to appeal to the senses and what she has to offer is in a cup of gold. So successful is she that she is said to be drunk with the blood of the saints of God whose death she has engineered. But the woman is not alone. She rides on a scarlet beast, who itself receives its power from the dragon (13:4). If the woman in 12:1 is the glorious Bride of Christ, spotless and pure, then this woman Babylon is a parody or counterfeit of the Bride: that is a false and anti-Christ religious system. This makes the picture here of the Harlot and the Beast to be a collaboration between a secular world power and a false religion. Before deciding too specifically the identity of such a pair, think of the situation in John's own day in which this revelation had its first application. Two powers, secular and religious conspired together against the Lamb and His Church: secular Rome and degenerate Judaism (Acts 4:27). They gave each other power to kill the Son of God, but soon thereafter the erstwhile friends became enemies, Jerusalem was destroyed and eventually the Roman Empire collapsed.. This is the pattern that is repeated right through history, and always the empire of evil seems to grow bigger and bigger before its eventual crash. In our own day we see everything being measured and considered on a "world"

level. It is world politics, peace, famine, population, economics, and of course, a world church. But in the end the secular-religious empire of anti-Christ shall rise to its height, burst in internal strife (17:16) and go into final perdition.

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17:7-14

The Beast and the Harlot Babylon seem to be clearly distinguished and yet seem to belong very much together. The references in v. 8 and 10 to past, present and future seem to indicate that while the visible earthly form of Babylon changes, the essence remains the same in all ages. The interpretations of this passage are many and various, and it is not our purpose to go into the mass of detailed *suggestions*. We keep rather to what we have been emphasising: we are dealing with the entire empire of anti-Christ power down through history. It manifests itself in the persecuting empire of the Beast and the seducing work of Babylon the harlot. This seems to speak of the "world" and the spirit of the world that is always against the Lamb. In John's day Rome was the pleasure-mad city that attracted all the nations, and there Christians were literally torn apart in the arena to provide sport for the worldly. The Reformers saw Papal Rome as the Harlot, for she persecuted and persecutes the saints. Modern Communism and Islam will brainwash and murder the saints of God. And who will say what empires of anti-Christ will yet arise in the world before that last coming together of one world-empire of the beast? It is interesting to note how present world-powers are strangely intermingled with religious convictions, for example, the Buddhists in Vietnam, Islam in the Middle East, Roman Catholicism everywhere, Communism, rampant militant Protestantism, and the strange watered down religious institutionalism of our own land. The Beast carries the Harlot because it suits his purpose. The world will always applaud a church that gives people what they want and does not criticise or condemn their way of life. And it will persecute a church that stands in and by the authority of Christ. The harlot passes herself off as a wife, but the golden cup she offers is not the cup of salvation.

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17:7-14

The angel is giving here the history of the beast, which we find beginning in the Bible in Gen. 10:8-11 and 11:14, and summed up in the expressed ambition, "Let us make a name," over against and independent of God. That is the beginning of Babylon. The same spirit is found in the great capital of Assyria, Nineveh (Nahum 3:1-7), and in the Babylon that carried the Jews captive out of their land. Down through history persecuting empires have risen, fallen, and have risen again, so that men have been fascinated by the apparently limitless power of evil, failing to recognise that each evil empire has in fact gone down to perdition. The seven heads symbolise the Seven Hills of Rome and *also* represent (10) seven kings or kingdoms, five of which have passed (Ancient Babylon, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece), one is now in existence (Rome) and one is to come and remain a short time. Remember that the Bible speaks of the whole Gospel age as a little time, or the last days. The beast is of the same line, essence and genius as the seven (11) and it seems to be the eighth king and final empire of anti-Christ that holds world sway at the close of history. The ten kings (12) appear as a confederation of satellites who are prepared to give up their individual liberty and sovereignty in order to war against the Lamb. Some hold there is a suggestion here of demonic powers, while others suggest the kings are the mighty ones in the realms of art, education, commerce, industry and government, in as far as they serve the central spirit of the world whose aim is self-aggrandisement in opposition to Christ. Whoever they are, they last but an hour, for in the battle the Lamb overcomes them, and with the Lamb in His triumph are His chosen, called and faithful people.

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17:15-18

"The so-called unity of the powers of evil can seem to the godly a terrible reality, but it is ultimately a grand delusion, as a glimpse into the belly of hell would reveal. For that is no kingdom, but a den of anarchy, in which everyone is trying to get away from the consequences of what he has become - an impossible aim - and where the implacable incongruity of men whom God made for love being impressed into lives of hate makes companionship and concord an utter impossibility. This is seen here in the revolt of the nations against the

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harlot power of Rome which has led them astray. Nor must we think of this revolt as an unexpected eventuality. It is their earlier agreement which is the surprise, although we see whence it is. It is of God in order that the evil alliance may fulfil His will. As soon as His purpose is fulfilled, He withdraws His power, and the strong alliance of powers which made the godly tremble becomes a ferocious mutiny While the teaching of Revelation offers a present application to our Christian life in an evil world, we must beware lest we pin down these elemental predictions to specific events and circumstances of today in such a way as to telescope the end-time events to bring them forward to our situation..... We must not make final statements about our situation, lest the balance and location of power changes radically and we miss the import of the change. It is not the 'who' and 'where' of all this which should so hugely concern us, even to the upsetting of our spiritual equilibrium; but the fact of the almighty clash, and, in this passage, the fact that as so often in ancient Israel's story, God gained the victory, partly at least, by causing His enemies to turn and destroy one another. The victory is the thing: all else pales before it. It is that we shall need to hold on to when the dark clouds of universal evil close in on the world." (Rev. Wm. Still)

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17:15-18

This thrilling passage not only declares the self-destruction of evil, but also its restlessness, impermanence, and impossibility of satisfaction. This is a word that needs to be applied personally as well as on a worldwide scale. There comes a time when worldly people, together with their great ones and their governments, lose their infatuation with the harlot whose pleasures, luxuries and enticements have been their whole life. In the heart of Judas worldly station and power were his gods, and for them he sold his soul irrevocably, only to cast away the pieces of silver in revulsion and regret at the feet of the priests. He hanged himself and went to his own place (Acts 1:18). "God finally hardens the heart of those who have hardened themselves against His repeated warnings. Rev. 17:16-17 is a lesson for every day. It reveals the course of worldly individuals: first they become infatuated with the pleasures and treasures of the world and harden themselves against God; then, they are hardened; finally, when it is too late, they experience a revulsion of feeling. They are punished by the results of their own foolishness" (Hendriksen). God is not mocked! And the principle applies to the faithful saints as they view arrogant evil smiting the holy kingdom of God and their own persons. Wait! Suffer it to be so, for their time is short and is running out. Watch! God has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Rom.12:19). "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isa. 54:17AV). The whole of history testifies to this principle. The Lamb overcomes because He is King of Kings.

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18:1-24

Read through this whole chapter quickly to sense its atmosphere before we study its details in successive days. Babylon is fallen never to rise again. The symbol is no longer a woman, but a city, and it speaks clearly of a world system marked by materialistic commerce and industry in which God is forgotten and the souls of men are sold for gold. This anti-God city is a thing of glory and attraction, built by the achievements of men and existing for men. This is the Babylon Tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-4) whose system is built by men so that together they might refuse the commands of God and yet still be safe from the judgments of God. That is the basis on which they live, and the hand of God is against them, so that their kingdom is marked by confusion and contradiction. Indeed it gets out of their control so that they can no longer manipulate it. They live in fear of what they have created, but yet they weep and mourn the passing of its material splendour. They do not weep for the absence of God from society. They have lived for Babylon, and Babylon is destroyed. They are left with nothing! Look at verses 2 - fallen; 4 - come out; 5 - remembered; 19 - alas (woe); 20 - rejoice; 21 - no more at all (never to be found); 19:1 - Halleluja. Now turn to 1 John 2:15-19 and consider very carefully the tendencies, ambitions and principles of the life you are living, and where they may yet lead you.

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18:1-8

This is solemn and strong judgment and so certain is Babylon's fall that it is announced as if it had already taken place. This is the end of the anti-God city, the empire of evil that has been present in all ages and now has

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reached its pinnacle of power, glory and arrogance. With the help of a Concordance you could trace through the Old Testament the references to Babylon and see how much of the language, symbolism and message of Revelation is drawn from the Old Testament. This picture begins with the coming of an angel of light, and as the light of God begins to shine and search, what appeared and was regarded as a glorious city begins to be seen as a sink of iniquity and an offence to God. In verse 2 human evil is seen to be intermingled with spiritual evil and the city of the world has become the dwelling place of demons and the haunt of every foul and hateful spirit. This is the inevitable terminus of those who tamper with evil (cf. Matt. 12:43-45). At the heart of such evil lies the corrupting power of indulgence and abundance (3), which has produced a spirit that excludes and forgets God. Wealth and affluence are a dread danger to individuals and nations, and many a man has lost his spiritual drive, if not his soul, by the acquisition of a house and a car, or a wife and family! God is a jealous lover and will not share our heart. with another. Jesus said, "You *cannot* serve God and Mammon," and if we try, Mammon will win, no matter how earnestly we determine to stand by Jesus. Why do you think there are so many worldly Christians who are simply not available for holy service?

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18:1-8

This God-excluding spirit advances and develops and becomes more positive and arrogant (7). This is the spirit of present day man who refuses to think of himself or his system as a poor, needy widow. When the worldly city can make satellites and dazzle mankind with the wonders of science, what need is there of God? This is why many intellectuals and aristocrats stand aloof from the Church of Jesus Christ. This too is why ordinary folk sit so lightly to the things of God and His House. This is why people are so angry and resentful when challenged to be up and doing in answer to the Word of God. When you have cars, carpets and comfort, and a television screen to while away the weary hours of leisure resulting from a minimal working week, who wants to be disturbed by thinking about God? After all, people say, we are not all that bad; we are not depraved. But do you never get frightened at the manifestations of evil in the world you have helped to create? Do you never think unchained evil might yet touch you or your families? Are you content to be schemed together with this world that is so surely coming under the righteous judgment of God? COME OUT, cries the voice of God (4-5). Remember Lot and his wife, who for house, and land and worldly favour, came to such grief. When in the crisis Lot tried to speak to his own family, they laughed in his face. Why should the worldling listen to someone whose life was no different from his? Why should the world listen to a Church that is as much a circus of pleasure as itself? But God is not mocked. It is time to settle the accounts. The next time you stretch out lazily at your own fireside remember the man whose attitude to life, and to God, was expressed thus: "Soul, take your ease, you have much goods for many years." He was wrong. God called him to judgment that very night (Lk.12:20).

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18:9-19

What an exposure of people. They have refused to heed the call to separate themselves from the godless system of worldly materialism, and they are to receive the exact counterpart in retribution. All that they have lived for is to crumple and vanish in one day (8), or one hour (17, 19), and they will be left in utter bankruptcy with no hope of ever recouping their losses (14). The kings or great ones of the earth (9), the merchants (11) and the traders (17) are united in their miserable wailing, as they were united in the dominant desires of their God-excluding lives. The men of the world live for power, pleasure and possessions (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-7), and in a very literal sense their lives consist in the abundance of the things they have (cf. Luke 12:13-21, 31-34). Then when these things, which even at their best have no permanence, are taken from them, the whole fabric of their existence collapses, as indeed does their personality. Watch the idolater of the body and its activity after a coronary has struck. Watch the man whose whole life is devoted to his career (idolatry) when health compels retirement. Watch the person whose life is shielded from reality by wealth when all his investments collapse. Watch the people whose life is a round of entertainment when their baubles are taken from them. And watch all these worldly people in the midst of their chosen activities, growing more and more brittle in personality in a process of de-humanisation which they are tragically unaware of. Now do you see the reason for the wailing of the lovers of Babylon? The whole system they have built and for which they have sold their souls (note the

emphasis on luxuries *not* necessities) is gone in a moment, and they are left with nothing. This kind of poverty is eternal.

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18:9-19

What is pictured in these verses is a complete economic, industrial, commercial, social and cultural collapse. And furthermore it is spoken of in terms of exact retribution at the hand of God. The world grinds to a halt, and its soul is lost. Consider the words of hymns, "This world's empty glory is costing me too dear," and "Fading is the worldling's pleasure, All his boasted pomp and show; Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know." But is everything in the world devoid of worth? Is it not the world God made, and are there not marks of glory in it, faded though they be? Are we to despise all that is meant by this world's culture? Certainly not! But neither are we to idolise, over-use or abuse it (1 Cor. 7:31). "There is something infinitely pathetic about their lamentation, for the glory of beautiful things is such as appeals to all who have eyes to see. Nor is there any harm in them of themselves. Indeed, the list in 12-13 reminds us of the material listed for the tabernacle in Exodus - with two exceptions, 'slaves and souls of men'. This is the sin, not of valuing precious and beautiful things, but to devalue men in comparison. As soon as the delicious delights of earth compete with the soul's welfare, one's own or another's, this is idolatry and must cease, see Rom. 1:21-23 It must be a terrible experience to see all that one has lived for, gone in an hour, until one is desolate and one has no heart or opportunity to try to build up another life. What a mistake to put so much trust in perishable things. Surely we should learn to let 'this world's gear hang slack about us,' so that at any moment we could contemplate the loss of all things and persons dear to us, save Christ alone, and yet not feel that life was empty of content We must, cultivate the apostle's spirit when he said in Phil.1:21, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Rev. Wm. Still)

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18:20-24

Here is the final, thoroughgoing, irrevocable and irreparable overthrow of the kingdom of this world. The saints, prophets, and apostles are called to rejoice in it, because God executes His final vengeance on that whole system of rebellious humanity that has refused and resisted His every overture of grace, blasphemed and rejected His Son, and persecuted and butchered His saints. The millstone is cast into the sea to symbolise the complete submersion and disappearance of this whole Babylon. It speaks of "the complete engulfment of the evil thing that has paralysed and bedeviled God's good creation from Babel's primal arrogance through all ages to the end of time." (Rev. J. Philip) This thing is not done in a corner, nor is it done precipitately, and we must never be ashamed to testify before men to the judgment of God. The long restraint of the hand of judgment and the oft-repeated calls to and opportunities for repentance eliminate all thought of vindictiveness (2 Pet.3:8-10). But just as the wood-cutter sets his mark on the trees to be felled so that none is missed, so the mark of the blood of the martyrs seals the doom of an impenitent world. Guard your sympathies lest you be more considerate of the blasphemous worldling than the Holy Son of God. If you once catch sight of the lewd and lurid face of the Christ-rejecting world you know for ever that this spirit must be dealt with or else heaven itself would be prostituted by arrogant profanity, and the throne of God defiled by the Beast. Light and peace would be eternally annihilated and gross darkness would cover the people. What a prospect! Therefore rejoice in the righteous judgment of God.

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18:20-24

The phrase "no more at all"(AV) or "never again" occurs six times and depicts the final awfulness of a world under God's judgment. There is no music, for everything is reduced to a dull, monotonous sameness. This applies also to the realm of words and all art forms. Ugliness and discord replace beauty and harmony. The finer emphases of culture are replaced by the gross. This is judgment! But men do not notice for they have lost their capacity for appreciation. There are no craftsmen, for the demand of profit has levelled all forms of work to that of sheer utility. The millstone, by which food is produced for basic sustenance, is stilled. Light gives place to darkness and men's faces grow pale and wan. Perhaps by this time the atmosphere is polluted and the whole of

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life is lived underground. Possibly the suggestion is more of a dimming or extinguishing of spiritual light in all its forms, direct and indirect, or even a literal diminishing of the natural light of the sun as at Calvary. On the spiritual level, think of the city with no churches, no Christian activity and no Christ-inspired works of charity and humanity. Is that not an appalling darkness? Little wonder the passage goes on to speak of a cessation of all blessed human love-relationships (cf. Rom. 1:21-31). This is the harvest of godlessness which leads to mammon worship, which leads to evil traffic in spirits (sorceries). Do you recognise the world you live in? Did you know God's judgment was so near?

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19:1-6

We have looked at judgment from the human and worldly side and now we see it from the Godward and heavenly side. Just as the picture of judgment has built up gradually to a frightening and final climax, so the picture of the victory and blessedness of the saints of God appears more and more glorious. This is a passage to be grasped firmly with the head and felt with the heart. Its declarations are glorious. Salvation and power belong to God alone (1) and He is *our* God. All His judgments are true and righteous and can bear total scrutiny. The representatives of the Church and of all living creatures (4) join in the chorus of praise. In v.6 we are given some idea of the vastness of the ransomed company of saints (cf. 5:11), and the inspiration of their song is the fact that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. But this is not a new fact. It has always been so, but is now fully manifest. Keep this in mind whenever you speak the Lord's Prayer. Thine *is* the kingdom, *and* the power, *and* the glory, at every stage, in every situation, at all times, and in every development. This is fact, regardless of the evidences of our senses and the appearances of natural circumstances. But remember God has brought His victory to pass by permitting evil to express itself and to be seen for what it is and deserving judgment (as He did with Pharaoh at the Exodus) until it seemed all-powerful. Then, by the breath of His mouth God sweeps the kingdom of evil to its final judgment. What a God.

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19:7-10

Now that the purposes of God have been worked out fully in terms of both judgment and salvation, the original and abiding purpose can be fulfilled and enjoyed, namely, the marriage of the Lamb to His chosen Bride. Marriage is both an end and a beginning: the end of preparation and a consummation that is the beginning of a new life, which is fuller and more far-reaching in terms of joy and responsibility. For both parties it is the fulfilment of longings and aspirations, and we have to see here not only the longings of the Bride, which is the Church, the company of ransomed saints, but also the longing of the Bridegroom, who is Christ, who has waited for His Bride to be ready to come (cf. Eph. 5:25-27). Why should there be delay when both parties are willing and already committed to each other? The pattern of Hebrew marriage gives light that leads to spiritual truth. The first step was the betrothal or engagement which was quite binding. The terms of marriage are accepted and the bonds of union are sealed. Then in the interval between this and the marriage feast the groom pays the marriage dowry to the father of the bride. When the interval of waiting time is over the bride, having prepared and adorned herself for her bridegroom, waits for him to come to take her to his home, the home of his father, where the feast is prepared. Think of the words from the hymn, "The Church's one foundation":

"From heaven He came and sought her

To be His holy bride:

With His own blood He bought her,

And for her life He died."

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19:7-10

In the interval between being "engaged" to be the Lord's and the of the actual marriage supper, the Bride (the church, the company of Christian believers) must make herself ready. Note the wonderful spiritual balance of these verses. The bride "has made herself ready." but "to her it was granted (given) that she should be arrayed in fine linen" (AV). And, "the fine linen stands for the righteousnesses (righteous acts) of the saints." All is the gift of God's grace and apart from Him we have nothing and can become nothing. Yet we have our part to play,

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working out in increasing moral sanctification what God has in fact given us in Christ (Phil. 2:12-13). We are weaving or adorning, day by day, the garment of glory which we ourselves will wear in Christ's presence. This is the time for discipline, work and preparation; the pleasure, satisfaction and fulfilment lie in the future. (Think of how many human marriages fall apart because there has been no real thought of or training in responsibility in the lives and characters of the couple). The danger lies in either trying to do what is God's alone to do or in sitting back and waiting for God to do what is ours alone to do. This is why we need to walk with God and wait upon Him in His living word and in prayer and obedience of life. The preparation time is flying past. There is a danger of being improperly dressed at the banquet. You don't want to feel out of it, do you? You would be very conspicuous, embarrassed, even ashamed that you did not read the invitation more carefully.

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19:11-16

The picture of the radiant bride prepared for the supper is about to fade and the whole scene will be dominated by one glorious Person, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Bride would be the last to object to such an exaltation of the Bridegroom:

"The Bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace;
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land." (A.R.Cousin)

As John began to see heaven opened he seems to have been overawed by the immensity of the revelations given to him. He has been told in verse 9 of the blessedness of those effectually called to the marriage feast of the Lamb. The emphasis is on electing grace rather than on Gospel invitation. The true sayings of God seem to refer back through the whole of Revelation rather than to the immediately preceding verses. Perhaps in a blinding moment John saw the perfect balance between the light of salvation and the shadow of judgment, and his instinctive reaction is to fall before the angelic messenger who has brought this supra-human revelation. But he is forbidden to do so, because to communicate the true sayings of God and to bear testimony to Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit, whether it be done through men or angels. This humbles the messenger and prevents adulation; but it also lifts him up and prevents unworthy devaluation. Both in verse 8 and verse 14 we have mention of "fine linen", and there could well be a deliberate contrast here between the gaudy extravagance of the harlot's appearance and the simplicity and purity of Christ and His Bride. In the end, what is not pure and spotless can have no place in the perfect light of God.

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19:11-16

As we began to suggest yesterday, the wonder of all Scripture, and Revelation, and heaven itself is that the focus of glory is not on man nor on any of the works of grace wrought in man, but on the Person, Character and Work of Christ. This picture is of something we shall yet see when we see the King in His beauty and the land of far distances (Isa. 33:17). Here He is called Faithful, in relation to His promises, and True, in relation to the integrity of His character. He comes for judgment, not blessing, and His cause is absolute in justice and righteousness. The flaming eyes and many crowns in verse 12 speak of the universality of His reign, and nothing can escape the searching of His sight, yet He Himself is fully known by no man. The infinite fullness of His nature transcends for ever the capacity of man, even redeemed man, to know. This means that in heaven there will be *limitless* treasures in Christ to be discovered. The blood (13) is that of His enemies and far from defiling Him, it is a badge of victory. His name, given as the Word of God (cf. John 1:1-5), is so profound that it must remain in measure a mystery (12). In verse 14 we see the order and submission of His armies as they move forward under His sovereign command. The armies may be saints or angels (cf. Jude 14-15), but the point is that even in this final crisis of victory they do not rush ahead of Christ in indiscriminate enthusiasm. They

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remain His obedient servants, for they exist to do His will, and not vice-versa. However vast the army and however extensive the field of operation, He and He alone, by the word of His mouth, exercises power and administers justice and judgment. Christ alone is the executor of God's mighty plan and we see Him here crowned with glory and honour. Every knee must bow to Him, in love or fear. It cannot be otherwise. And our acknowledgment of His Lordship is not in words but obedience.

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19:17-21

The human and demonic powers of anti-Christ have gathered themselves to make war against Christ, expecting to have the victory, but they are made a feast for the vultures of judgment. In a very real sense there is no battle here, but a swift demolition and execution of the persons and powers of evil. It all seems so easy. But that is how it really is. God is never stretched to His limits in order to defeat evil. Do not be deceived by His delays in acting. He waits His time, and while waiting, uses the threshings and threatenings of evil for His own wise purposes, not least the refining of His people and their education in faith and righteousness. When God's time comes He speaks and the powers of evil are overthrown. "It is always easy for God to defeat evil in any shape or form, but to do so prematurely would be to lose the strange service of its goads and frictions. To deal with evil too soon would fail to allow it fully to show itself, and thus fail to prove how utterly evil it is, and how ripe and right for destruction. But when the moment is come, it is polished off as with the passing swipe of an inconsequent duster. So much for the deceitful miracles of the false prophet." (Rev. Wm. Still)

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20:1-15

Read the whole chapter and we will consider its detail section by section in successive days. The conflicting views on the interpretation of Revelation come to a crux in this chapter and there seems to be no reconciliation of them. Even if it were possible to weld the different views into some coherent scheme such an exercise would be beyond the scope of these daily notes. Right through our studies we have held to the attitude that in Revelation we are given a *series* of parallel visions depicting the whole sweep of history, rather than a serial story with each chapter following on historically from the previous one. Here we begin the final section of the Book, and like the previous sections deals with the history of the whole period from Christ's first coming to His Second Coming. We are taken behind the scenes into the spiritual and eternal realm, and what we see helps us to understand the significance of what is happening around us on earth. The theme of the chapter is not primarily the Millennium but the binding of Satan and the final judgment of him and all bearing his name. We have no cause to take the thousand years as a literal span of years comparable to our years, because God's time measurement is not ours (Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8). We do not assume that the seven churches in ch. 2-3 mean that there are no more than seven. The seven-horned, ten-headed monsters we take as symbols, *not* literal beasts. So here we have pictures depicting spiritual realities and if we can grasp the *message* rather than be obsessed with the details of imagery, we will have a powerful word from God for practical life. Remember that in Revelation we are dealing with pictures (moving pictures not stills) and the different details can be understood only in relation to the whole picture.

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20:1-3

When we are told categorically that Satan is bound we are apt to be rather sceptical, because he seems to have such a free rein to carry out his nefarious designs. But we are dealing with *facts* not *appearances*. And these verses do not look forward hopefully to a day when Satan *will be* bound, but backward to the day when he *was* bound. Satan is bound now and finally is to be cast into the lake of fire (do not be too literal or lurid in interpreting this symbol; the spiritual truth is more terrible than the physical image), and in the interval he is allowed, in the mystery of God's permissive will, to operate *within limits*. He is like a dog on a long chain, completely mastered but free to roam his allotted territory, snarling his furies in all directions, but able to bite only those foolish enough to ignore the warnings and stray into his province! *Satan is bound* ! He is bound by virtue of being a creature of God's creation and can never equal to, let alone surpass, God although he desired this (Isa.: 14:12-16). He won his victory in man in the garden of Eden, and all through the Old Testament we

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see him opposing the preparation for the coming of "another man" who was to be his downfall. In the coming of Christ Satan's dominion was broken. Think of the Temptation; the casting out of demons; how the evil spirits cried out at Jesus' approach (Matt. 12:25-29; Luke 10:17-20; John 12:31; Col. 2:14-15). The great foe *has been* conquered. That is the basis of our victory.

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20:1-3

On the theme of the binding and loosing of Satan there is a tremendous parallel between this passage and chapter 12. Those with time could profit from a re-reading of the notes on chapters 11:13-19 to 12:13-17 without looking up the many references. At the end of this chapter when Satan is finally cast into the fire, there remain no more enemies to vex the church of Jesus Christ. Victory is complete and we are ushered into the blessedness of the final two chapters. The reference in verse 3 to Satan no longer deceiving the nations is puzzling in view of all we see in experience and are taught of in Scripture about the workings of evil amongst men. It seems that the "short time" in v.3 must be from the time of the Cross to the end of time. It must also refer to the sinister upsurge of Satanic power amongst the nations prior to the final show-down. There may be reference to the time prior to Christ's first coming when *all* the nations, except the Jews, were under the thralldom of Satan. Gross darkness covered the people, and God suffered them to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16). But when Christ came the light shone and darkness could not extinguish it (John 1:5). The lie of Satan was faced with the strong Truth of God, and the missionary advance of the Gospel began to penetrate *all nations*, and out of all nations Christ will draw people to Himself. But in our day we see the nations beginning again to restrict and even expel the missionaries. Are the "thousand years" running out and is Satan being loosed for the final "show-down"?

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20:4-6

The whole concept of Satan being bound (2) suggests control, and that thought is continued in the symbols of the thrones. The occupants of the thrones are those to whom judgment is committed, namely the saints of God who reign with Christ. These are not only the martyrs whose death for Christ's sake has been swift and terrible, but also all those who have lived and died in faithfulness to Christ, having refused to yield to the claims and spirit of this world. In the world the saints often *seem* to be victims, but in fact they are conquerors, and ultimately suffering is seen in its true light, which is glory (Rom. 8:18, 36-39). If we take "resurrection" here to mean the resurrection of the body, there seems to be an interval of a thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and that of the wicked. But this is excluded if we remember that the thousand years is not a literal concept. We are also kept on true lines of interpretation if we consider other plain statements of Scripture where *one* day of resurrection is spoken of (Matt. 13:30, 41-43, 49; 22; 25:31-33; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). In John 5:25 resurrection seems to signify spiritual resurrection which is conversion, and in Revelation John sees the *souls* of the saints. Both in this world and the next they reign with Christ but the full glory of the resurrection of the body is not yet theirs. That comes at the final day of resurrection and judgment when all are raised either to blessedness or condemnation. On the one hand we have those who are alive in Christ whether in this world or the next; on the other we have those who, being outside of Christ, are spiritually dead. For these last, there is a death beyond the death of the body. This is the second death. But in Christ there is nothing to fear (Rom.8:1).

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20:4-6

These words from the Westminster Confession of Faith (chap.32) and The Shorter Catechism (Q 37, 38) will help our consideration of death and resurrection.

"The bodies of men after death return to dust (Gen.3:19), and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them (Eccles.12:7). The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked

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are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day (Jude 6,7; Lk.16:23,24). Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.

"The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by His Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to His own glorious body. (Acts 24:15;John 5:28-29).

"The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection." (2 Cor.5:1,6,8;Phil.1:23; Lk.23:43).

"At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity." (Matt.25:23; 1 John 3:2: 1 Thess 4:17-18)

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20:7-10

The whole tenor of Scripture together with what we have already learned in earlier chapters of Revelation teaches that at the end-time of human history there will be a build-up of the activity of evil which will culminate in the final confrontation, in which evil is finally defeated. These verses depict the gathering of the nations to judgment, and the universal scope and dimension of the clash is easily grasped in the circumstances of our own generation. It needs only one significant flash-point for the whole world, as we know it, to be a mighty conflagration. John is told of an international empire united in its mighty strength to strike the death blow against the church of Christ. The odds against the saints are so immense that there *seems* no hope. Then, in the very moment when they are steeling themselves for the death-blow, God intervenes with fire from heaven and the final battle is over. But do not let us ignore the sinister principles already operating in our world, far less be deceived into thinking they are at heart good and beneficent movements. The spirit of anti-Christ is subtle as well as strong, and tolerance and patronage can be amongst its weapons as well as persecution and hatred. Nor let us be deceived into thinking that somehow we Christians will be spirited away secretly to avoid the stresses and conflicts that the world must endure before the end comes. Nor let us be deceived into thinking of the issue as being something of a religious war with "Christendom" in the West fighting for the faith against "Atheistic materialism" in the East. All is brought out into the open and the dominating spirit and loyalty are revealed. Now read 2 Tim. 2:15-19 and 2 Peter 3:3-14.

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20:7-10

Compare verses 3 and 8. How are we to understand Satan being forbidden to deceive and finally permitted to do so with such tremendous success? Think back over world history and recollect how in successive generations the tides of evil have seemed to creep in on the shores of humanity until flood proportions were imminent, and the walls of defence were breached. Then it seemed as if by an invisible hand or power the waters were drawn back, and respite was gained, although a residue of evil rubbish was always left behind.

Sometimes a religious awakening has purged the body politic and righteous indignation has attacked and remedied the crying injustices of life. But always the revival fires have died down and the evil tides have risen again, and God has allowed the surging motions of the waters to continue. Sometimes the tide has come very very high and society has had many "Dunkirks". Sometimes revival has been so widespread it seemed as if the Kingdom of God had come on earth. But now, in our passage, we read of the evil tide that is not restrained; its waters encroach on all that Christians count dear; and God holds his peace until on the flood tide every personal demon is drawn out into full sight. The great deception of the nations is taking place, and the end is judgment. The living church which has so often "saved" society by its influence does so no more. The nations have closed their eyes to the light and have been all too willing to believe a lie. They have made their choice. They must reap the harvest.

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20:11-15

Here is the final judgment, the final terminus of every individual, the final separation and the final confirmation of every one's life-choice. The throne is marked by great power and purity of judgment. The whole of the presently constituted universe is said to flee away, but that this is not a negative demolition is indicated by the next chapters which speak of a new heaven and earth, that is a completely new order of things without flaw or limitation, perfectly fitted for the glory of God. Verse 11 therefore speaks of renovation as well as destruction. In 2 Peter 3:10 it is dissolution; in Matt. 19:28 a regeneration or a new world; in Acts 3:21 a restitution or restoration; in Romans 8:21 a deliverance from corruption into liberty. The prelude to this new world's life is judgment of every man according to his works. The wicked are judged according to their works of unbelief whereby they have excluded Christ from their lives, and the believers are judged according to their works of faith inasmuch as they have lived for Christ. There will be no *sudden* judgments, for all have guaranteed their respective judgments by what they have become in the course of life. The last enemy, death, and its habitation of Hades, spoken of almost as persons, are cast. into the lake of fire. "Death, the separation of soul and body, and Hades, the state of separation now cease. Neither in the new heaven nor upon the new earth, nor even in hell, will there ever be a separation between body and soul after Christ's second coming unto judgment." (Hendriksen) But all those, and only those, who are Christ's are safe, for their names are in His book of life.

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20:11-15

This theme of judgment is the neglected and ignored factor in modern preaching and Christian life. We must preach judgment, not morbidly nor exclusively, but in terms of the sanctions of God's law and the ultimate reckoning. If we fail to do so many will rebuke us on the great day for having failed to warn them. In like manner we must live in the light, of judgment, for the recording angel is faithful and accurate and even though we are not required to justify our manner of life to men, we shall most certainly have to explain it to God when the books are opened. This theme of judgment also becomes part of the drive and urgency of our witness as Christians in the world. If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are perishing, and it is only a clear testimony to eternal things proceeding from a heart of human care and love that can save people by pointing them to Christ (2 Cor.4:1-4 AV). This is a very disturbing passage. "We may be excused for hurrying past this passage to the glories to come. Those who truly love the Christ have no part in these final horrors, but the degree of their love will be tested by their good works wrought in Him. In His kindness there is a limit to His expectation of us. Let us see that we do not disappoint Him." (Rev. Wm. Still)

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21:1-8

What a relief to turn to the last two chapters after the grim realities we have been reading! These chapters give a vision of the eternal Kingdom of God when all evil is finally demolished and banished. There is a profusion of detail and imagery, for John is really describing the indescribable (1 Cor. 2:9). This blessed kingdom is variously described as a new heaven and new earth, a holy city, a bride on her wedding day, and the dwelling place of God. If we look further through the chapter we see the detail of mathematical precision suggesting perfection of form and aspect. It is a city of permanence whose architect and constructor is God Himself (Heb. 11:10). It is a kingdom altogether to be desired, and in it for every child of God, blood-bought and Spirit-sanctified, there is a place prepared, an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled and never fading (John 14:1-3; 1 Peter 1:3-5). In order to make the glory of this Kingdom understandable to us in our limited, finite comprehension, John uses a series of negatives (4, 8) from our present experience. There will be no tears, no death, no grief (sorrow), no despair or dismay (crying), no weariness (pain), for all these are passed away for ever as are the circumstances that cause them. Nothing that defiles shall ever enter this city. The cowardly (fearful, i.e. man-fearers as opposed to God-fearers), the faithless or renegade (unbelieving) and the sensual (abominable), together with all their brood of evil associates go to their own place, which is in fact their choice. But the picture is not a negation (2 Cor. 5:1-4). God is there and His children with Him. They are enjoying each other. This is heaven.

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21:1-8

The characteristic word here is "new". All things are new but not in the sense of being completely and unrelatdly different. The new has come forth out of the travail of the old, and such is the blessedness of the new that all the costly struggles of the life of faith on earth are as nothing compared with the glory (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). Now we must consider the details of this picture of glory. John sees a new heaven *and* earth. Why both? It may be to emphasise that the eternal state, far from being "a state of mind" or an insubstantial and to many very unreal and undesirable "habitation of disembodied spirits", is in fact a *place* for the habitation of very real resurrection bodies. Christian doctrine stands by the fact of the resurrection of the body, not merely the immortality of the soul, and God has prepared a place, a new order of creation, for these new and spiritual bodies to dwell in. If we could but persuade people of the absolute reality of heaven, we might break some of the bondage of the desperate materialism of this world's life, which causes even some Christians to be very reluctant to speak of heaven, as if it were some sort of consolation prize to make up for losing the real thing. The new heaven and new earth could also suggest an eternal difference or distinction between the unfallen angelic and spiritual beings who have been ministering servants of God's holy purposes (Heb. 1:14), and men and women redeemed out of the earth. The angels have never known the sin of a fallen world and may only see the full glory of God's grace in the ransomed church. But the two "sections" of eternity will not be so separated as they are now. This presents limitless possibilities (cf. Gen. 28:12, 16-17).

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21:1-8

The absence of the sea, if it is to be taken literally, will be a sorrow to those who have loved its music even though it so often means separation. But in Revelation the sea has been a symbol of the nations, a troubled sea without rest, casting up mire and evil, and periodically disgorging proud anti-Christ men and movements. But no longer is it so. At the voice of its master it is at peace. Now the supreme mark is love, seen in the bride, radiant and prepared. But the bride is also a city. How wonderful. Human love can be selfish and exclusive, but not here. The city speaks of many living together in total working harmony, while the Bride speaks of a single and unique place of privilege. There is no jealousy. The nearness of one does not drive away the other. (Should there not be this relationship even on earth?) God spreads His tent over His people (Rev. 7:15-17) and His presence makes the dwelling a home. His nearness is followed by His kindness (4) expressed in exquisite terms that need no comment. This is the final compensation for all the rigours of life in Christ on earth. God goes on to say that what He begins He finishes (6), and all the unfulfilled yearnings which He has created in our hearts by His Holy Spirit He now satisfies at the fountain of life. Never be afraid of the strange wistful longings you become aware of in your Christian life. God sends many experiences as angel messengers to beckon us nearer Himself, and even the delights He gives on earth are mingled with unfulfilled longing. Read No. 441 in the Revised Church Hymnary, a hymn by A.A. Proctor which begins, "My God, I thank Thee, who hast made the earth so bright..." Happiness is found at Home with Jesus.

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21:9-21

It is one of the angels associated with the vials of judgment who is instrumental in showing John the many splendoured glories of the heavenly city. There is a message here alone. It is the one who plumbs the depths of sore experience in obedience to God who is able to speak convincingly of the glories. Again the picture is of a city, a communal unit with a specific identity, yet giving each individual within it a place and function that is unique. Heaven is not being *lost* in God but being *found*, possibly for the very first time. This city has the glory of God because it has God there. And the saints in a very real sense are partakers of His glory and in the light of it they blossom and become all they were destined to be in His gracious purpose. The vast dimensions of the city together with its light, beauty and safe protection, all speak of possibilities of experience that could never be on earth. There will be "room for blessings of mind and heart that human frailty, the exigencies of life, the claims of vocation denied them here; room for capacities which found no outlet here, for such things as friendships that life would not let us begin." But the wonderful thing about this picture is that it is all so perfectly balanced and in harmonious proportion. Everything about it is just right. All the limitations and imbalance of development that have marked the lives of even the best of saints are gone forever. This is life

indeed, and it is lived in light. By the grace of God we are finally ourselves. There are no inferiority complexes in heaven, not least because we are delivered from vain comparisons. We are ourselves, and can be so safely. What blessedness!

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21:9-21

We do not dwell on the details of the brilliance and wealth seen in the precious stones, save to mention that each has its own glory. We mention the pearl because its beauty is manufactured out of suffering; it is a vexation transformed into beauty. In spite of all the colours the overall impression is of transparency. An interesting comment on the streets of gold is found in Zech. 8:5. It will appeal to some more than others, not least to those who have lost little children. This transparency does not mean we can take in all of the glory of heaven and of God in one glance. There are depths and mysteries of light as well as darkness: "'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee." (W.C.Smith) The whole life of heaven is light and free from shadow or distortion. That is a prospect that does not appeal to people whose whole life has become one of pretence, acting, covering up or withdrawing into themselves, just as a diseased eye shrinks at light. All is light and all are in the light and the result is anything but dull uniformity. It is a harmony of beauty to which each stone contributes by reflecting the light of God Himself. This, in increasing measure, should be our witness even now, as we are made polished stones in God's building. (1 Pet.2:4-5).

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21:22-27

There is no Temple or formal worship organised in heaven, for our relationship with God and with each other has become natural and spontaneous. Here on earth we need organisation and order because of the treacherous inclination of our hearts and the subtle deceptions and distractions of the Devil. Of course, on the other hand, too formal a concept of devotional life here on earth can make it a mechanical thing that becomes an alternative to holy converse with God. If the truth be told it might amaze many to realise to what extent their whole Christian life and discipleship is propped up by services and meetings in a way that is conducive to spiritual weakness rather than strength. We do well to ponder just what part Jesus plays in our lives, for in Heaven there is nothing but God and Jesus. Of the increase of His government and peace there is no end and kings of the earth lay their crowns at His feet. It is always high noon there and never a falling of shadows which would indicate an end. There is free and open access for all who belong to the Lamb but the gates are shut against all others. What is your reaction to all this? Is your religion as personal as this so that you can with genuine simplicity say, "Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there"?

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22:1-5

These verses rightly belong to the end of chapter 21, for they complete the vision John is given of God's eternal kingdom. So far he has been viewing from a distance, but now he is led from the circumference of the city, down the long avenues, until he sees the very heart of the city and tells of a throne, a river, trees and people. As we contemplate the glories of heaven, keep in mind the darker, shadowed side of the picture spoken of in 21:8, 27 and 22:15. Their eternal exclusion is the direct consequence of the exclusion of Christ from their earthly lives in spite of all His calls and warnings of grace. John's eyes are opened to see the throne of God *and* the Lamb (5:6), which constitutes the heart of heaven. As the Father's heart fills with joy when His purposes are finally consummated in glory, and as He beholds the countless throng of His redeemed children, He will turn to look at the Son and we will begin to understand the meaning of the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Out of the throne where perfect love and perfect light mingle, there comes the river of life. It is not a tempestuous torrent that stirs mud and casts rocks in the midst of its spate. That is not life! It may be excitement, possibly thrill, but it is not life. This is a river in full flood, clear as crystal, and ever deepening and broadening in its progress. The river and tree are paralleled in Gen. 2:9-10 and 3:22. There the blessing of life was forfeited but here it is regained. The picture is of the abundance of God's provision. The curse that has been upon humanity since the beginning of its story is removed, and we are able to serve in perfect freedom. We see

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His face and He owns us His children. This is service without strain. This is fulfilment indeed. God grant us to taste the streams of such delight on earth. There is no reason why we should not.

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22:1-5

"In His own wise purposes God keeps us waiting for the final consummation. We do not as yet see Him, but only hear His voice. The paradox and mystery of this experience is expressed perfectly in 1 Peter 1:18. This is the point to which God, in the grace of the Gospel, brings us. It is almost like being led by a loving hand blindfold to the gates of the city; for it is there, so to speak, that finally we are given eyes with which to see Him. And as we stand there, we shall hear the voice that we have learned to recognise on our pilgrim journey, now no longer soft and gentle, but glorious as the sound of many waters, saying, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' And then something will happen. A Hand will touch our sin-scarred faces, and we shall receive our sight back at last and - *we shall see His face*. And we shall say, 'Lo, this is our God'. That will be the signal for the Divine rejoicing and merriment to begin, for God will then say, 'This My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' That will be glory indeed." (Rev. J. Philip) If *we* look forward to the glorious fulfilment of that day, how much more does God wait for it.

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22:6-7

The general "message" of the Book of Revelation is now finished and we are dealing with the epilogue, which is by no means an unnecessary part of the Book. There is tremendous truth in these last verses, full of practical application. The first emphasis is on the veracity of what has been communicated in this mighty revelation. John himself seems to have been staggered by the sheer amount of what had been told him, let alone by the mighty glory of its significance, and the angel addresses him to confirm the word spoken, lest the Devil come and snatch it away from his mind and heart. Recall in Genesis how the tempter said, "Yea, hath God said....?" and by such a subtle question sowed the seeds of doubt which led to fatal action. Recall in the story of the Temptation how Satan misquoted Scripture in an attempt to sidetrack the Second Man. Remember the parable of the sower, and the birds of the air that snatched away the good seed before it could find a place to take root. Remember how busy the Devil is after every sermon and Bible reading to prevent you profiting from what God has spoken to your soul. At the beginning of Revelation John was told he would be instructed in things that *must surely* come to pass. Now the angel tells his staggering mind that these things are faithful, worthy of absolute confidence. They are the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. What you have seen and heard of the absolute victory of God and of His Christ is reality, not imagination. Hold fast to the truth and live by it, rather than by the lies of passing appearances. This is the victory even our faith. (1 John 5:4)

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22:6-7

We said yesterday that John was staggered by the immensity of the angelic message and its absolute assurance. The last word of the "message" spoke of the people of God reigning for ever with all conflict decisively in the past. John probably knew the words written by Paul some thirty years earlier in Rom. 8:35-39, declaring the saints to be overwhelming conquerors through Him who loved them. Now it seems John is made to look back over all he has been shown and taught in this massive, unified vision covering twenty-one chapters, and we do the same. What have we learned? We have seen the world and the church over against each other, always in conflict, the church persecuted but never destroyed (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6-12). We have been shown, behind the scenes of the turmoil that marks Christian experience in the world, the true nature of things, which is a fundamental mustering of the powers of evil against Christ. We wrestle against principalities and powers, and the world and our lives in it constitute the battlefield. We have seen the broad principles of history from beginning, to end and been persuaded that in every development of circumstances, sometimes involving distress and persecution and death for the people of God, all things are in the control of the sovereign providence of God (cf. Rom. 8:28). It takes some believing when the wolves of hell are snarling, and even more believing when they succeed in ravaging the flock with apparent impunity. But we have seen also how God both permits and

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encourages evil, to bring it into full exposure and rightful judgment. God is not afraid of evil, nor is He bound by it. Right through we have seen Jesus, the executive director and administrator of God's perfect plan (Rev. 5:1-14). Now we are given the first of three assurances (7, 12, 20) of the nearness of the hour of final victory. "Behold, I come quickly."

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22:6-7

While we may accept in theory the fact of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with that personal appearance on the stage of history the ushering in of the day of final judgment as well as victory, we are all prone to relegate the event to some undefined date far beyond our lifetime. We speak of "that one far off divine event to which the whole creation moves," (Tennyson) and are apt to think of the world trundling on towards it at an impossibly tedious pace. So much is this the case that people tend to ignore the fact of Christ coming again completely, and therefore the word "quickly" is disturbing. Read Rom. 13:11 and ask what time it is: You do not think it is time yet for the Lord to come? Did He not say, "*In such an hour as Ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.*" (Lk.12:40). Now read Luke 21:25-28. What preparation must we make so that we will not be ashamed coming? (1John 2:28). He comes quickly. He comes soon. He comes on time. "Blessed is he who keeps the sayings of this book." It is obedience that counts, not clever theorising about the timetables of prophecy. Consider the powerful challenge of Scripture: Luke 6:46; Matt. 7:21-27; Rom. 2:13; Jas. 1:22. It is not visible success that counts (John was in exile, cut off from all active service), but faithful obedience as we are taught by God and waiting for His Son. Such a hope is a purifying dynamic in life (1 John 3:3), and the Scriptures confirm the challenge in such passages as 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 5:21 We shall see in successive days that what we are and what we are doing when Christ comes has determinative bearing on what we shall be and shall do in the kingdom of His glory. This invests daily life with tremendous significance. Do not forget it.

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22:8-9

We can understand John being overwhelmed by the vastness of the glory revealed to him, but there is something wrong or unhealthy about his intense, emotional reaction which causes him to fall down in an attitude of worship before the angelic messenger. The initiative in this prostration was with John and stemmed from the intensity of his reaction to the revelation given him. He was out of his depth, but instead of holding on to the facts of truth with his sanctified intellect, seeking to grasp their full moral significance, he gave way to a subjective reaction which had all the appearance of tremendous spirituality. But he is roundly rebuked by the angel, for any message or messenger, however honoured by God, that directs attention away from God is, by that, doing Devil's work. "Even with the most selfless servants of God the unseen Lord may become lost behind the attractive mannerisms or diverting antics of the preacher." A guard must be set by preachers and hearers alike whenever the Church gathers, to guarantee that the direction and desire of all hearts is to worship God alone. But what of extraordinary reactions such as we have read of in times of revival? Well, the angel here was not impressed with John's reaction! If the emphasis is on the Word of Truth, then the impact is directed to the mind rather than the emotions, as it was on the Day of Pentecost when the exposition of the truth and not the ecstatic manifestations was God's converting agency by the Spirit. To yield to the swift tides of emotion under the influence of "spirits" may well bring you to the edge of the province of demons, which condition is not static. Test the spirits! Those who direct attention to Jesus and what He is saying so that there may be moral obedience, are good spirits. However impressive the others may be, they are suspect.

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22:8-9

It is suggested that in 19:10 John was going to worship the angel, but here he means to worship God through the angel, that is through his visible representation of God, or through his mediation. But this is forbidden. Aids to worship, be they inanimate or human, are dangerous because what begins as a help can all too easily become an end in itself. We can examine our interests and activities in this light. Do they lead us into the holy presence of God as they are supposed to? Even the pattern of our worship must be brought constantly to this examination,

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as must our private devotional pattern. But there is light here also on the matter of human relationships and mutual respect within the framework of spiritual life and work. It is right to give all their due (1 Tim. 5:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:17; 1 Cor. 12:21-23; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Phil. 2:29-30), "but to give exaggerated homage to any is to invert God's order; and to degrade by pretending to exalt man, whose true glory is that he is God's creation." (Ellicott) It is right that John should recognise the specific honour given to the angel to communicate such revelations, but in like manner John has been given the privilege of communicating the same revelation to us. There need be no competition between those of whatever standing, who *by the grace of God* have been given the privilege of being servants of the Word to bring it to the people of Christ. Apart from the grace of God none of us would be any use at all. In fact none of us have *chosen* the particular sphere of our service. It has been *given* us by God (1 Cor. 12:4-11), and is a treasured charge to be used for the blessing of the whole Body of Christ so that all may be led Godward. There must be mutuality of respect, love and service. At our best we must all be sign-posts leading away from ourselves unto God. Worship Him.

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22:10-11

In the light of the imminent return of Christ and the final stages of world history John is commanded not to seal or shut up the proclamation of this book. Such a word coming at the end of the complete canon of Scripture may legitimately be applied to the whole of the Bible and not just Revelation. Verse 10 links closely with verses 18-19 and is a challenge to the Church in its public ministry and testimony. There is a constant temptation to hold back some of the truth of God because it is unpalatable to the generation in which we live. It is a deception of the Devil that has persuaded even the evangelical church to preach only the hope-giving, life-promising truths of the Gospel in the expectation that having received these unto life eternal, people will be more disposed to accept the doctrines of law and of judgment. That was not Jesus' way. He was honest with everyone and told them the whole truth, not least about counting the cost of discipleship. This is no brief for boorish bludgeoning of a congregation (be it a single soul or many), nor is it permission for ill-prepared sermons in which a few passages are linked together in the hope that the people will get something out of them. The prophets of God must be like their Master, full of grace as well as truth, and full of truth as well as grace, so that in the end they may claim that they have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21,27). When God speaks, He does not waste words, and all that He has spoken must be uttered to the people who need to hear it. If you shrink from such a mission, then consider the issues being decided in the souls of men. Would you keep back the word that might save them from hell and bring them to heaven?

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22:10-11

The time is at hand and the whole dispensation of grace and Gospel and hope of salvation is almost concluded. People say that we can be converted up until the eleventh hour (as with the thief on the cross). But that is true only in theory, for already we are conditioned by the long succession of choices we have made and lived out in the course of life. In terms of the gracious call of the Gospel, procrastination is the thief of time and opportunity *and* inclination. Already, in spiritual as well as human terms, we have become settled in our ways and change seems less and less desirable as well as less possible. We have moved a long way along the course that is becoming more and more permanent in condition and direction. We pass through the portals of death, or by the coming of Christ we find ourselves in the eternal world, where we continue our journey and our development in the same direction and essential condition. Neither heaven nor hell is to be thought of as a static condition. It is life; in the one case increasingly contrary to God and away from His presence, and in the other an ever increasing conformity to His heart in His Personal Presence. This is for ever. Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny. How could it be otherwise? "The punishment of sin is sin, the reward of holiness is holiness. Eternal punishment is not so much an arbitrary law, as a result necessarily following in the very nature of things, as the fruit results from the bud....Sin in the eternal world will be left to its own natural consequences; holiness in germ will there develop itself into perfect holiness, which is happiness." (J.F.B.)

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22:12-15

For the second time Christ reminds us He is coming soon, and as in verse 7, there is a message of challenge added to the statement of fact. There it was a challenge to obedience, here it is a reminder that the inevitable law of the harvest applies in every single life. The reward or recompense is to give back to each one what he has in fact done. This makes daily life a very responsible thing, for we cannot escape the consequences of the choices which govern our way of life and growth of character (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8-11; Gal, 6:7-8). But the final word does not rest with the solemn warning of the unalterable laws of righteous retribution, else there would be no hope at all for men. God is greater than His own laws. He is before all and beyond all, and though He never departs from the place of absolute righteousness, He nevertheless provides a just salvation in Jesus Christ for sinners, through His atoning, substitutionary death (Rom. 3:21-26). For those haunted by the wickedness of their own doings, God Himself provides a refuge. Verse 14 sets forth the way of safety and refuge. The blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses from all sin is the first, last and only refuge from the power of sin and law. It is within this blood bought forgiveness that sinners can begin to be obedient. But even in the conflict of obedience, the saints overcome by the blood of the Lamb (12:11). Our salvation is from, of, and in Christ from first to last.

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22:12-15

There are some who are for ever excluded from the holy city and the presence of God, and they are spoken of in verse 15. This should be linked with chapter 21:8. Nothing that is unclean can ever enter in, and therefore we have this recurring emphasis that those who would dwell with God must break off their sins by righteousness. It is sin loved and unrepented of that closes the gates of God against the sinner. We cannot wash and be made clean in the Blood of Christ and still hold on to these evil things. Specific classes of sins are here mentioned, and we may be disposed to acquit ourselves of such gross and enormous sins, but consider Eph. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; Rom. 1:21-32. When the Gospel breaks in upon godless society, such as it was in John's day and as it is in our day, men and women like those we are reading of are convicted by the power of the Holy Ghost and are brought to Christ. They will never forget what they have once been, as we must never forget. Nor must we forget what we might well have *become*, but for the grace of God that laid hold on us and delivered us from the bondage of our corrupt natures. Few of us realise fully what might happen to us if opportunity and temptation were to meet at any given moment of our lives. Never think complacently that your old sins have lost their attraction and danger. Keep close to Jesus. The air is pure and safe there.

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22:16-17

There are three parties united in this blessed invitation to come and taste of the water of life. It is a personal invitation from the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord, "I, Jesus." It is an invitation confirmed by the Spirit, and uttered by the Church which is the Bride. Those who have themselves heard and believed and tasted are best qualified to invite others to come and share this sweet life. Who is to be invited? There is but one qualification. Whoever is thirsty and of a mind to come, let him come. And when a weary soul hears the gracious invitation and says within himself, "I will arise and go to my Father," he finds an open-armed welcome. But who is this Jesus who speaks with such grace and hope? He is the Root or source of all His people. He is David's divine Lord. Yet He is also the Offspring of David, born of David's line, a man amongst men, a man like all other men. He is everlasting God standing over against us, always essentially different or "other". Yet He has become one of us, partaking of our life, touched with and understanding the feeling of our infirmities. He is also the "bright morning star" whose shining heralds the dawn of everlasting day. Come, come, come. This is how Revelation closes. All the solemn words and glorious affirmations have this end in view, that people should come to Christ, for God has no pleasure in the death of sinners (2 Pet.3:9). And the Spirit of God through all creation and in the hearts of all believers cries, "Come, Lord Jesus."

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22:18-19

We have already touched on these verses in connection with verse 10. They form a solemn and authoritative conclusion to the whole Bible, testifying to the infallibility of the Word of God. The warning applies primarily to the Book of Revelation, but we have seen that this book is in utter agreement with the whole of the rest of the Bible, speaking the same message with the same voice. We recognise that there are difficulties in the Bible in dates, numbers and cross-quotations. But all that is needful for our salvation and sanctification is found within its pages, so clearly expressed and made plain that all, learned or unlearned, may grasp and understand it. It follows that all God has given is necessary for our full growth in grace, and this gives added point to the warning concerning adding or subtracting from God's Word. Neither doctrinally nor practically must any human ideas be set on a level with the testimony of Scripture; nor must any word that God has spoken be withheld from the people. By whatever pattern of preaching or reading we adopt we must deal honestly with *all* the words God has spoken. Every prophetic utterance and every new revelation *claiming* to be of the Spirit must be taken to the touchstone of the given, completed Word of God's Revelation as it stands in the Scriptures. This is safety. It is also life. We commend the study of the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith which deals with the nature and place of the Scriptures.

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22:20-21

The final word of the Bible is the third affirmation, "Surely I come quickly." The time is near and urgent. But we have learned our lesson well concerning faith and life, and we look up into the heavens and without a blush of shame or hesitation we say, "Come, Lord Jesus." "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." (Isa.25:9 AV) At the appearing of Jesus the noise of battle will give place to the victor's song, and all those who love His appearing, that is, His personal presence (2 Tim. 4:8), will know then and only then, the full meaning of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ". Grace is free, unmerited favour, but the definition is a poor one. It signifies all Jesus has been to us and has given to us. It is the grace that sought us, found us, brought us to the fold of God, forgave us, lifted us up when we fell, was patient with us in our stubborn wilfulness and came down beside us when we were brokenhearted. But the grace is not separated from the Person, and our last word must be Jesus. He shall then see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa.53:11 AV), and we shall begin to know then just how much we owe.

"Bring near Thy great salvation,
Thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect,
Then take Thy power and reign;
Appear, Desire of nations,
Thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heaven Thy promised sign;
Thou Prince and Saviour, come." (Alford)

Better read the whole of Alford's hymn which begins, "Ten thousand times ten thousand". Then say, Even so, come Lord Jesus.

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