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THE WONDER BOOK OF THE BIBLE

A Commentary On The Book Of Revelation

Lee G. Tomlinson

A Servant Of The Lord Jesus Christ

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling,
and to present you faultless before the presence of His
glory with exceeding joy,

To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and
majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

Jude 25

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DEDICATION

*Dedicated to the Truth
as it is in Christ Jesus*

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INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

AUTHORSHIP

There is no book of the New Testament to whose authorship the testimony of history is more definite. Within the space of a few years after the death of John, the Apostle, it was being quoted and ascribed to John by writers who either knew him in person or who obtained their information from those who sat at his feet.

Papias

Our first witness is Papias. He was overseer of the church at Hierapolis, a city near Laodicea and Colosse. It was the last home and burial place of the Apostle Philip and two of his three daughters. Eusebius quotes Polycrates, elder in the church at Ephesus, saying, "Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis, and his two virgin daughters." Another of his daughters, who lived in the Holy Spirit, rests at Ephesus." Eccles. Hist. 111 C. 31, V. 24.

He was the author of a work of five books entitled, "An Exposition of Oracles of the Lord." The whole work has perished, except a few quotations from it by early writers, chiefly Eusebius. Eusebius says that Papias talked with the daughters of Philip. "But we must now show how Papias, coming to them received a wonderful account from the daughters of Philip."—Eccles. Hist. 111 39.

Irenaeus says that Papias was a companion of Polycarp and a hearer of John.

"These things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book, for their are five books compiled by him."—Heresies V. 33.

Papias conversed with various persons who had been followers of the apostle and inquired of them what the apostle taught. He says: "But if I meet with one who has been a follower of the elders anywhere, I made it a point to inquire what were the declarations of the elders. What was said by Andrew, Peter, or Philip. What by Thomas, James, John or Matthew, or any other of the disciples of the Lord; for I do not think I derive so much benefit from books as from the living voice of those that are still surviving."—Eccles. Hist. 111 39.

Papias, as best we know, was born about A. D. 70 and Eusebius says Papias bore testimony to a number of the New Testament books.

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Andrew of Caesarea, a Greek writer of the fifth century declares Papias bore testimony to the inspiration of the book of Revelation. The words of Andrew are as follows: "With regard to the inspiration of the Book (Revelation) we deem it superfluous to add another word; for the blessed Gregory, Cyril, and Theologus, and even some of still older date, Papias, Irenaeus, Methodius and Hippolytus, bore entirely satisfactory testimony to it."—Fragments of Papias VIII Anti-Nicene Library, Vol. 1.

Papias was a companion of Polycarp, who died February 23, A.D. 155. Polycarp declared at his martyrdom that he had served the Lord Jesus eighty-six years. The account reads: "Then the pro-consul urging him and saying, 'Swear and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;' Polycarp declared, 'Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me an injury, how then can I blaspheme my King, and my Savior?'"—Martyrdom of Polycarp C. IX Anti-Nicene Library, Vol. 1.

This dates his baptism as early as A. D. 70 the date of the destruction of Jerusalem. After his baptism he lived thirty years contemporary with the apostle John. And as John spent the later part of his life at Ephesus, only fifty miles from Smyrna, where Polycarp was appointed overseer of the church by the apostles (so declared by Irenaeus) he must have seen and heard John.

Thus we see that Papias, being a companion of Polycarp, who was instructed by the apostle was in a position to know the facts when he declared the book of Revelation was written by inspiration by the Apostle, John.

Irenaeus

To Papias may be added Irenaeus born between A. D. 115 and A.D. 125, who tells us he was long a pupil of Polycarp. "But Polycarp was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also by apostles in Asia appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna, whom I saw in my early youth, for he tarried a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having taught things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the church had handed down, and which alone are true."—Irenaeus, against Heresies 262, 263.

Of course, with such opportunities he certainly was not ignorant of what John had written, yet he declares explicitly that John is the

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author of the book of Revelation. He makes many quotations from the Apocalypse. He also states its approximate date, saying: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the names of the Anti-christ; for if it were necessary that his name should be revealed at the present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen not very long since, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian's reign."—Against Heresies Vol. 30,3.

Justin Martyr

He was a native of the ancient city of Shechem in Palestine, which was called Flavia Neapolis by the Romans, and is now called Nablus by the Arabs. His name, and that of his father, Priscus, and his grandfather, Bacchius, are Roman, indicating possible Roman lineage. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but he wrote about 150 years after Christ. He wrote two apologies, in the first of which he says, "Lest some should, without reason and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one-hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught; and should cry out against us as though all men who were born before him were irresponsible, let us anticipate and solve the difficulty."—First apology C. 46.

Justin Martyr quotes by name the apocalypse, or the book of Revelation and cites the name of the author. "There was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that those who believed in our Christ should dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem and that thereafter the general and in short the eternal revelation and judgment of all men would likewise take place."—Dialogue 1 6.C.61.

Tertullian

The next witness is Tertullian, a famous Latin writer of Africa who was born in Carthage about A. D. 160 and died about A. D. 240. His knowledge of the New Testament books extended through the last quarter of the second century. He frequently quotes from Revelation, ascribing it to John.

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“John in his apocalypse is commanded to chastise those who eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication.” (Rev. 2:14)—Prescriptions against Heresies XXXIII 40.

Eusebius

Eusebius, called the father of Ecclesiastical History, because he wrote the first church history that has come down to our day, lived from A. D. 270 to A. D. 340. He was bishop of the church in Caesarea in Palestine. He lived through the persecution under the Emperor Diocletian which continued from A. D. 303 to 313 A. D. which he describes. He lived to see christianity established by law throughout the Roman Empire. He was commissioned by Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, to have transcribed fifty copies of the Bible for the use of the churches in Constantinople. He declares that John wrote the Apocalypse. “What shall we say of Him who reclined upon the breast of Jesus? I mean John, who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the apocalypse, commanded as he was to conceal and not write the voices of the seven thunders.”—Eccles. Hist. VI, XXV, P. 246.

Muratorian Canon

We turn now from the evidence of the authorship of Revelation as given by the early church fathers, to the catalogues of the New Testament books.

The earliest formal catalogue of the New Testament books now extant, is a document called the Muratorian Canon. The manuscript of this document was found in 1740 A. D. in an old library in Milan, by an Italian named Muratori, whence the title Muratorian Canon. The manuscript belongs to the seventh or eighth century and is a Latin translation from a Greek original.

It claims to have been composed by a contemporary of Pius, bishop of Rome, who died in the year 157. It could not be of a later date than A. D. 170. The existing manuscript is fragmentary having lost some lines from both the beginning and the end. It contains in the canon the book of Revelation.

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Catalogue of Council of Carthage

Some of these catalogues are found in the acts of various ecclesiastical assemblies, which set forth the books of the Old and New Testaments.

The catalogue of the Council of Carthage names all of the canonical books of the Old Testament, included in our present Bible and then gives the New Testament books in the following order: "Four books of the gospels, one book of the acts of the apostles, thirteen of the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, one of the same to the Hebrews, two Epistles of the apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Judas, one book of the apocalypse of John." It concludes: "We have received from our fathers that these are to be read in the churches."

This will conclude the evidence on the authorship of the apocalypse, or the book of Revelation.

DATE OF COMPOSITION

The ancient church assigned the date of writing the book of Revelation, near the end of the reign of Domitian, the Emperor of Rome. In our study of evidence of the authorship of the apolypse as presented by Irenaeus, we found he said that John "beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen not very long since, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian's reign." This was in A. D. 96.

With this plain statement agree all the church fathers who speak of the subject, for the first three centuries. Beginning with the positive and definite statement of Irenaeus there is an unbroken agreement for nearly four centuries that the date of the writing of the book of Revelation belongs to the persecution of the reign of Domitian, some writers placing the exile in the fourteenth year of his reign, which extended from A. D. 81 to A. D. 96.

Clement of Rome

There is no book from an uninspired pen so highly prized by the early church as the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. Only three manuscripts of this Epistle are now extant. One of these, long believed to be the only one, is attached to the Alexandrian Manuscript of the New Testament, as if it were a part of the

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sacred volume. One was discovered in Constantinople in 1875. The third in Syriac Manuscript of the New Testament immediately following the catholic epistles viz. James, first and second Peter, first, second and third John and Jude.

"In 1875 critics and students were startled by the appearance of a careful and complete edition published in Constantinople from a manuscript discovered in the "library of the Holy Sepulchre", in that city. Its editor is Philotheos Bryennios, Metropolitan of Serrae.

Scarcely was this discovery realized when a Syrian Manuscript of the "Two Epistles was also found in 1876 in Paris."—Charteris, *Canonicity Int.* VIII, IX.

The epistle does not bear the name of Clement, but is written in the name of "the church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth."

While Clement's name is not attached to the Epistle, Eusebius accredited it to him. "Of this Clement there is one epistle extant, acknowledged as genuine, of considerable length and of great merit, which he wrote in the name of the Church at Rome to that at Corinth, at the time when there was a discension in the latter. This we know to have been publically read for the common benefit in most of the churches, both in former times and in our own; and that at the time mentioned an edition did take place at Corinth, is abundantly attested by Hegesippus."—Eusebius *Eccles. Hist.* 111, 16.

The epistle was written, according to the opening statement of this epistle by Clement, after some "sudden and calamitous events" had just happened at Corinth. Such persecutions frequently occurred under the reign of Domitian, and the most probable date assigned to the epistle is A. D. 96 or 97.

Clement was old enough in the year 93 to be appointed bishop of a large church like Rome and thus it would seem he lived through all the period of the apostolic writings. The earliest of the New Testament books was I Thessalonians, which was written A. D. 52, just 41 years before Clements appointment to office. He had knowledge, then, of what writings had come from the pens of the apostles up to the date of his own epistle, seeing that his epistle was written before the death of John.

While he quotes from Matthew, Luke, Mark, Ephesians, Romans, Titus, Hebrews I and II Peter, he quotes nothing from John, for none of Johns' writings had gone into circulation, and

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perhaps none of them had been written at the date of Clement's epistle. Then, this puts the date of the composition of Revelation close to the close of the first century.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The evidence necessary to confirm a document may be either external or internal. External evidence is that derived from other sources than the book itself, which has been the nature of the evidence we have already presented. Internal evidence is that found in the contents of the book itself. The proper method of procedure in this discussion is to first assume that the Book of Revelation is genuine, and then search its pages for evidence and reach our decision after this internal evidence is considered in connection with the external. We will consider only a few brief items.

First: An ecclesiastical organization reveals itself in the seven churches of the apocalypse which did not reveal itself until the very end of the first and the beginning of the second century. Note: Each church had an angel or man of the church through which the church is addressed. There is no evidence of an individual enjoying such a distinction before the last part of the first century.

Second: The expression "The Lord's Day" does not occur in the earlier apostolic writings. Rather, they always use the expression, "The first day of the week." (I Cor. 16:2) (Acts 20:7)

But the writers of the second century, even from its beginning use the phrase, "The Lord's Day."

This term then points to a period near the beginning of the second century.

Third: The expressions in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9 indicate a complete separation between the church and the synagogue. Such a separation did not finally take place until the time of the destruction of Jerusalem's down fall and the close of the first century.

Fourth: On the other hand, there is no internal evidence within the apocalypse against, either the genuineness of the book or the time of its writing at the end of the second century.

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THE PLACE

The place where John received the apocalypse of future events is declared by the author himself. It is the universal testimony of the early church that John survived the destruction of Jerusalem, that when the holocaust of war fell upon that city, John in obedience to the Lord's warning (Matthew 24:16) fled from the approaching desolation and took up his residence in Ephesus. There he labored among the churches established by the apostle Paul.

This region was known as Asia. This constituted the peninsula lying between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas and bounded on the west by the Aegean.

In the latter part of the reign of Domitian he was banished to a rocky isle, about 20 miles from the coast of Asia. In the southern part of the Greek Archipelago is a tiny island called Patmo, or Patmos. John declares he was banished to this small island "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." It is only about a mile in diameter, by six or seven miles long.

CIRCUMSTANCES

A period of about sixty years had passed since the first church was founded in Jerusalem. All the other apostles had passed to their reward, receiving the crown of martyrdom, except John, concerning whom the Master had said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:15-24).

Churches had been established in the principle cities of Asia and Europe, so much so that it aroused the fears and hatred of paganism.

Beginning with Nero, the church had undergone one persecution after another. The present persecution was that of Domitian. At this period, and for many generations after this, when the church is persecuted, the persecutor is always pagan Rome.

With this understanding, we need not wonder that the last of the apostles, fore-casting the future fortunes of the church should record the fortunes and misfortunes of the last great world empire, persecutor both of the Jews and the Church of Christ.

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SYSTEMS OF INTERPRETATION

Before we begin the actual study of this wonderful book, it would be profitable to consider some of the systems of interpretation followed by men.

There is probably no other portion of the Scriptures concerning the meaning of which the interpreters have so widely differed. The differences are due to the different systems of interpretation employed. Of these are three principle ones, all containing some truth. Shall we consider the three principle systems.

The Preterist: According to the interpreters following this system, the apocalyptic visions of the book apply to events, chiefly in the history of the Jewish nation and of pagan Rome. They hold that these events have already occurred. They declare that the events took place before the visions were given and that there is no such thing as prediction in the book. Hence these interpreters are called Preterists. Most Catholic commentators hold this view.

The Futurists: Those who take this view hold that the predictions in the book apply to events still in the future and will be fulfilled in the future history of literal Israel. They assert that Israel will again occupy Palestine, that the temple will actually be rebuilt and that the Holy City will be trodden down for 1260 days by the Gentiles.

The Historical: This system holds that a succession of historical events, future when John penned of them, but now in part in the past, are portrayed by a series of visions. This system seems more nearly correct, BUT THE ERROR MUST BE AVOIDED of supposing that the book is continuously historical from beginning to end.

It must be born in mind that there is more than one series of visions; that when one series ends another follows which is synchronous, at least in part. By this we mean both series may describe events happening at the same time. These events have coincident periods.

It must ever be kept in mind that this book is definitely a book of prophecy. In the Old Testament we have a succession of prophets appearing and making their predictions. In Revelation, we have one prophet, John, proclaiming a succession of prophecies.

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He was "shown the things which were shortly to come to pass." John recorded what he saw. The future was revealed to him in a series of visions. The pictures that appeared, in panoramic form before his eyes represents future events.

Thus we see that each is a symbolical representation of what was then future, but now may be past history. Symbolical pictures follow each other in rapid succession as the seals are opened and the trumpets sounded. A careful study of the scriptural meaning of these symbols is a necessary exercise to the proper interpretation of this mysterious book.

Divisions

We must ever keep in mind that there is more than one series of visions, and that these overlap each other, revealing different aspects and features of the same period.

There are two major divisions of the book.

First: The first division covers the first eleven chapters and is divided in turn into three parts.

1. The first covers chapters one through the third. This part deals with the introduction, the vision of the Son of Man and the letters to the seven churches.
2. The second part covers chapters four through the eleventh chapter and the eighteenth verse. This part opens with a vision of the throne, followed by a vision of a book sealed with seven seals in the hand of Him who sits on the throne and continues through the seals and trumpets.

The lamb of God prevails to open the seals. As each seal is opened a vision appears which presents a symbol representing a period of human history.

Six seals are opened in succession, followed by a pause before the opening of the seventh seal. When the seventh seal is opened it is discovered to embrace seven thunders and seven trumpets. The trumpets are blown in succession, each followed by great stirring events. When the last trumpet is blown the end comes when Christ is triumphant.

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The seven seals, with the seven trumpets contained under the last seal, reach to the end of time.

Second: The second division covers the last eleven chapters of the book, and is divided in turn into three parts.

1. The first part chapters 12 to 18 opens with the vision of a woman, a symbol of the church, confronted by an enemy which appears as a sevenheaded and ten-horned beast. Later a false church, in contradistinction to the first woman—the true church, appears sitting on the seven-headed Beast. These opposing powers, under the symbolism of Babylon, are finally overthrown.
2. The second part, chapters 19 and 20, describe the great victory over the Devil and his secular and religious organizations, the Millennial period and the final uprising and defeat of Satan.
3. The third part, chapters 21 and 22 describe the heavenly home of the Redeemed saints and ends with closing exhortations.

THE SCOPE OF REVELATION

The scope of Revelation is limited. It does not attempt to reveal all the everchanging history of all nations, races and kingdoms throughout the Gospel age. The question then arises: To what countries and accompanying events do the predictions and symbols apply?

If we turn to God's dealings with the Israel of God in the Old Testament as he spoke through a succession of prophets we will find a correct answer. There, we find, the central thought in all their predictions is the future history of the Old Testament People of God.

With this great divine purpose in mind, they predict the fate of the great gentile nations with whom the Jews come in contact, who affected their fortunes by aiding them or by becoming their conquerors. Hence Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, Rome and Greece are made burdens of their prophecy.

Exactly, and by the same token, the same is true of the New Testament prophecies contained in the Book of Revelation. The prophecies deal with the future of the New Testament Israel of God, the church, and of necessity reveal much concerning the opposing powers and persecuting nations.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

It was not Christ's purpose to give in Revelation the outline of all history, hence many nations are not mentioned, but to outline the fortunes, tribulations and triumphs of the church.

The church was, in the earlier centuries, almost wholly within the confines of the vast, persecuting empire of Pagan Rome, hence this opposing power presents itself often in the prophetic visions of Patmos.

Since later the mantle of the pagan empire, fell upon Papal Rome, we find that this new religious power plays a prominent part in the unfolding symbolic visions of Revelation. So we shall see that Revelation primarily outlines the history of the church, and in subordination of this primary purpose, it portrays the history of two great persecuting powers, Pagan and Papal Rome. Finally, it portrays the triumphant church and the glories of the New Jerusalem to be enjoyed by the overcoming saints.

Author's Foreword to the Reader

To write a book upon any subject is a task that calls forth the best that in a man lieth. To write a compendium on the Book of Revelation is the challenge supreme.

The writing of any book necessarily must be predicated upon some sound reason for such an engagement. The *primus mobile* of writing a dissertation upon the Apocalypse must be nothing short of a burning desire to magnify the sacredness, the authenticity and the inerrant accuracy of Divine prophecy.

To pen a text-book upon a secular subject enjoins a comprehensive knowledge of the best authorities on that subject, besides added individual research. To write a commentary on Revelation requires no less than the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit whom Christ commissioned to show the things to come.

One must be impelled by the loftiest motivation in order to even begin such an effort so confronted with mountainous difficulties.

The interpretation of any book of the Bible is a challenging endeavor. To unfold the mysteries of a book written entirely in signs and symbols, such as characterize the Apocalypse, is an Herculean task to be assumed only under the directive of the inspired Word of God.

In the anticipation of such a project, the author must confess that he found himself in "a strait betwixt two". There was a great hesitancy to take up the pen to write when remembrance called to

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

mind the fearful plagues promised as a wrathful visitation from God upon those who became guilty of adding to the things contained within the Apocalypse.

Again, the prospect of having his part in the book of life and of the holy city, taken away by taking from the words of the book of prophecy, also served as a strong deterrent for many years.

After a quarter of a century and more of contemplation of such a labor, the writer, by the grace of God, the love of Christ and the energizing of the Holy Spirit, began this work. I say began. Such a work can never be said to be finished.

The first determination to be made was, on the very face of things, that of method of interpretation. Three systems presented themselves.

First, there was the futuristic system. The proponents of this method of interpretation hold that everything described in the visions of this book is yet future to be fulfilled after the rapture of the saints. Obviously, the very first verse of this book of Revelation eliminates such a system. It reads:

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to show unto His servants *things which must shortly come to pass.*"

Second, there was the system, which for lack of better designation, I call the Spiritualistic. This is that method of interpretation which spiritualizes every thing away to where every symbol takes the meaning of each individual interpreter.

One verse of the Sacred Scriptures annihilates such an approach to the study of this great book:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (11 Peter 1:20)

With the elimination of these two systems only one remained—the Historical. This system is based upon the primal declaration of the book itself, namely, that John was to "write the things which thou hast seen and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." (Rev. 1:19)

But not only is the Historical view harmonious with the book's own declaration of its purpose, but history amply substantiates this viewpoint in that the events symbolized therein have either happened or are now coming to pass. So closely have the happenings of history paralleled the prophetic pronouncements of the Apocalypse that they cannot honestly be dismissed and rejected on the ground of coincidences.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

When throughout the book one beholds the events of history fitting hand-in-glove with the succession of prophecies presented therein he must, like Thomas, come to believe with a like firmness of conviction.

This historical approach becomes all the more realistic when it is understood that the various visions given do not chronologically follow one another in point of time, although the events predicted in the vision itself are chronologically arranged. This leads logically to the second determination to be made—the starting point of each separate vision.

Like a surveyor cannot run his line without beginning at the Bench Mark, so each vision has an historical Bench Mark, or time and place of beginning. Having scripturally determined the true beginning the Spiritual surveyor is able to survey a true line of prophetic interpretation.

The visions may have the same starting point and take us over a segment of time already covered by a former vision, but this is in order to present things from a different angle, or events of a different sphere, yet all related to the life of the church throughout the gospel dispensation.

The third determination was an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the rich symbolism of the book. There has been a golden rule of interpretation, followed by lovers of God's Word, which declares:

“When the plain sense of the Scriptures makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, literal meaning unless the facts of the context indicate clearly otherwise.”

When one enters into the realm of Revelation, certainly the concluding clause of this Golden Rule of Interpretation becomes operative. “The facts of the context indicate clearly otherwise.”

Revelation is pre-eminently a book of symbols, signs, wonders. The book is written not in common speech, like other books of the New Testament, but in sign language. “He sent and sign-i-fied it by His angel unto His servant John.

The interpretation of these symbols has proved to be a pitfall to many readers of the Apocalypse, although it should never have been.

If, as Peter says, “no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,” neither are the prophetic symbols to be privately interpreted.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Therefore, the author made, at the very outset, a fourth determination, namely, that every sign, symbol or figure is explained somewhere within the Bible itself. The Bible is its own, only and best interpreter. One may have to run the gamut of the entire Bible, but he will be richly repaid when in some "hidden corner" of God's Divine Library he discovers the meaning of some baffling symbol.

Added to the joy of a new discovery is the deep-down satisfaction of knowing God's mind in the matter.

The fifth and final determination was the naming of the book to be penned. At first no name presented itself with sufficient force to elicit lasting attention, but gradually and almost unconsciously an appropriate and scriptural title crossed and recrossed this stage of prophetic drama.

Since it was "the Revelation of Jesus Christ", it seemed altogether apropos to incorporate the name "Revelation" in whatever title was finally settled upon.

Again, since the Apocalypse was penned in a style nowhere universally characteristic of any other book of the Sacred Volume, that fact demanded consideration. Written, as it was, in the language of sign, symbol and wonder, why not call the book, "Revelation—the Wonder Book of the Bible"? And so the title was chosen.

John said, "Blessed 'is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand." (Rev. 1:3)

The author's fervent prayer is that this book, launched upon a vast sea of books, may have so carefully charted its course by the Scriptural compass of Divine Interpretation, that its readers may land safely on that enchanted Isle of the Treasure Trove of Truth.

If it shall have afforded safe passage to one soul in reaching Heaven's Harbor of the Holy City, the labor shall not have been in vain.

Prayer

Oh Master of Wind and Wave we thank Thee gratefully
that Thou hast enabled us to walk upon the waters of
symbolic wonders.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We are beginning the study of the final book of the Bible. It is, as it were, the climax of all the other books of the Holy Scriptures. So many other foolish vagaries and extravagant fancies have been published that many intelligent students of the Scriptures have turned away from the book of Revelation as a deep mystery that can not be understood. The book is not intended to be a puzzle, or an enigma which no one could solve. The writer expected his message to be understood by those who would spiritually discern its uncoverings.

Its very name signifies it can be understood; though all who approach its study must commit himself to a deeper delving into its truths, than any other book of the sacred volume requires. Here as in all other books, but in a greater degree, it is necessary that men shall have hearing ear and the understanding heart.

This book is called a "Revelation" of Jesus Christ of the things that must shortly come to pass. "The Greek word for the book is "Apocalypse", which means "uncovering". John used the word in the opening verse with the meaning that the covering is rolled off the future so that we may understand. So Revelation is not a sealed book, but the uncovering is done by the means of graphic symbolism. Doubtless, Christ resorted to symbolism to protect the book from destruction at the hands of the wicked institutions portrayed herein. Had such adversaries been called by their actual names they would have either destroyed the book, or declared the book of a later composition, because it named powers, religious and political, by names unknown until later centuries.

Again, symbolism was used that the true followers of Christ might know its mysteries, otherwise hidden to the worldling. Christ used this principle in speaking his parables. Upon one occasion as recorded in (Matthew 13:10-17) his disciples came asking "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given."

Why Men Have Blundered

There are several reasons why men have made grave mistakes in their attempts to understand the apocalypse.

First: They have stumbled at the symbolism. Indeed it is pre-eminently a book of symbols. There passed before John's eyes, like a panoramic picture, a great painting of scenes, made to move past the onlooker.

As Daniel by the river Ulai, and Ezekial by the river Chebar, saw series of visions in which were caused to pass before their minds a series of pictures portraying events of the future, so the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, as the New Testament Prophet, beheld a panorama of the "things shortly to come to pass" as the future was unfolded to John by symbols which fitly represented the things signified, so his visions are filled with symbols.

As in all Old Testament prophecy it is necessary for us to interpret symbols according to the laws of symbolism, so we find the same need in the apocalypse.

These symbols aptly represent events that are to take place in the political and religious arenas of history, particularly as they affect the fortunes of the true church of Christ.

John simply records what he saw. A prophet is a fore-seer. John saw upon the sky, or upon the waters of the sea, or on the sands of Patmos, the exact events he describes symbolically. It is our province to examine the symbols and determine their meaning, by a careful comparison with history.

Second: The apocalypse has been misunderstood because we have failed to study it in the light of history. These events were future history to John when he wrote, but most of them have become history now. It is well to hold this book of prophecy in one hand and the books of history in the other. Who could ever understand Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the man with the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron with feet of part iron and part clay without studying the history of the kingdoms of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome.

He who would approach the study of Revelation, must be versed in the history of the church, with her attendant perils from political and spiritual adversaries. Such a student will discover to his unending delight that secular history has unwittingly fortified the book of Revelation.

PROLOGUE 1:1-8

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; 2 who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

vs. 1 What a tender introduction is given by Christ to the church. This prologue runs through the first eight verses. This opening phrase could well read, "*The uncovering* by Jesus Christ, which God gave to show unto his servants." And the things shown were shortly to come to pass. The literal meaning is "to come to pass in quick succession." Christ sent and signified by his servant John or, he sent and sign-i-fied, uncovered the future in signs and symbols. He also signified by his angel. Throughout the apocalypse an angel appears to be employed in the task of unveiling the scenes that follow in successive order.

vs. 2 John bore record of all he saw and heard. A special emphasis is given here of his record because such world shattering events were revealed to him under such startling symbolism.

vs. 3 While the reading of any book of the Bible brings its blessing, it would seem that a special one is pronounced here upon the reader, the hearer and the faithful keeper of the "those things that are written therein." And it is an oft experienced fact that whether we can understand all that is written in this book or not yet it is always true that the book takes a peculiar hold upon the reader and hearer, as if to say, "stay by me, study me, search me." And this

grip the apocalypse lays upon the one who studies its contents is further enhanced by the fact that "the time is at hand."

vs. 4 Now John begins to deliver the record of the visions given him to be in turn, given to the seven churches of Asia. The Asia of John's day did not refer to our Asia as we understand it today, but rather to the Roman province called Asia of which Ephesus was the capitol. All seven churches named in verse 11, were in that province. It would seem that seven, the perfect and sacred Scriptural number was chosen, because the seven were to refer not alone to the seven individual churches within the province, but symbolize the whole church of Christ throughout her history. This becomes patent when we keep in mind that John was to write of "the things which *thou hast seen*, and the *things which are*, and the things which *shall be hereafter*. (Rev. 1:19)

Again he addressed himself to more than the seven individual churches, because we know there were more than seven churches in the province of Asia at this time. The New Testament speaks also of Colosse, Meletus (Acts 20:17) and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13)

Even a casual study of the salutations and benedictions of each church of the seven demonstrates to us that these refer to seven great epochs or periods in the entire history of the church.

The benediction, like that in other New Testament Epistles, shows that Revelation is also classified by John as an epistle. While this epistle is addressed to seven individual churches, yet through them it is addressed to all the churches in every age.

Grace comes from the Holy Spirit, the numbers even indicating fullness, completeness, perfection. In (Rev. 3:1) we read "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God." Christ, the speaker, has the fullness of the Spirit. Whereas, the apostles had the baptismal degree, others had a less measure conferred by the laying on of the apostle's hands, and those obedient to the gospel have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, as a teacher, comforter, energizer. Christ had the spirit without measure. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the Words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." (John 3:34) To give anything by measure indicates a partial, scanty bestowal. The Spirit of God, even in inspired prophets was but a partial and intermittent gift, but in Jesus, the Son of God, the Spirit of God dwelt fully and uninterruptedly. The present tense, "giveth" indicates a continuous communication of the Spirit. If Christ had received

the Spirit "by measure", then his gift of the Spirit could become exhausted. Hence the fullness of the Spirit possessed by Christ, is presented by John as the seven Spirits of God. This benediction comes from the Christ in whom "dwelleth the fullness of the God-head bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

vs. 5 We are loosed from our sins by the shedding of Christ's blood, which is applied to us when we are "baptized into his death," where He shed His blood. And through Christ's resurrection from the dead, life and immortality are brought to light for us all as we arise from baptism to walk in newness of life.

vs. 6 In Christ's church, or kingdom, each obedient baptized believer is a priest. No Christian needs a priest to offer up sacrifice for him, for he can go directly to the throne of grace, "by a new and living way, which He (Christ) hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say the flesh" (Hebrews 10:20) Peter, himself, said, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people." (I Peter 2:9)

vs. 7 This refers to Christ's second advent when He shall return to judge all nations (Matthew 25:31-46). (Acts 1:9,11). The clouds always accompany Christ's heavenly presence. All shall see Him because He will judge all and Israel which pierced Him in the crucifixion shall see him. While all shall see Him in His return, they particularly are selected out because of what they did to Him in the flesh. John here quotes (Zech. 12:10). Consternation shall reign because it will be the time of judgment.

It cannot be too carefully noted that here, as in many other references to His return. Christ makes his second advent at the time of judgment and not before.

vs. 8 Alpha and Omega—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, hence also called "the beginning and the end." All begins with Him and He will ring down the curtain on the drama of human history.

This verse closes the introduction and the apocalypse proper begins with verse nine. Verse nine marks the beginning of Part 1, of Division 1, of Revelation.

BEGINNING OF APOCALYPSE

PART I

Text (1:9-20)

APOCALYPSE PROPER BEGINS

9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet 11 saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. 12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13 and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. 14 And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. 17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, 18 and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter; 20 the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

vs. 9 John here names himself for the third time and twice again in Revelation he names himself by name (Rev. 21:2) and (Rev. 22:8).

He is an apostle, but walks as a brother not exalting himself above his brethren as men have done in later centuries who claim apostolic succession. He remembered Christ's injunction, "But be not ye called Rabbi for one is your Master, even Christ: and all ye are brethren." (Matthew 23:8).

He was a companion in tribulation because he was a partaker of the suffering of the church of Ephesus and of all the churches throughout the seven periods of history.

He was in the isle called Patmos. Our knowledge of the place of the revelation to John rests upon the testimony of John himself. It is a small island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea. Here he

was in banishment under the reign of Domitian, because of his faithful witness for the Word of God.

vs. 10 He was absent from the saints assembled in Ephesus—a few miles across the sea—but he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day. The expression “The Lord’s Day” does not occur in the earlier writings of the apostles; they always speak of this day as “the first day of the week”, when Christians came together to commune (Acts 20:7) and to hear the preaching (Acts 20:7) and to “lay by in store as the Lord had prospered them (I Cor. 16:2). But we find the writers of the second century used the term “the Lord’s Day.” Epistles of Barnabas, Ignatius and Dionysius, written about this time, call the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day and the name is of common occurrence from that time forward. Incidentally, this term, then, points to a period near the beginning of the second century as the date of the writing of the apocalypse.

How natural to so refer to the day as the Lord’s Day. On the Lord’s day, or the first day of the week, the church was born on Pentecost—a first day of the week, which followed the seventh Sabbath after the one which fell in the Passover week. On this day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. On this day they preached the first gospel sermon, on this day began the adding to those being saved. Since the Lord’s Day, or first day of the week was the day of worship under the Christian Dispensation, how fitting that the apocalypse should be given on that day.

vs. 11, 12 As John turned to see the speaker whose voice he had heard, his eyes rested upon a vision of surpassing glory. The first objects that drew his attention were seven golden candlesticks, which (Rev. 1:20) informs us are the seven churches, which in turn represent the seven great epochs in the history of the church.

And standing in the midst of the candlesticks he saw one “like unto the Son of Man”,—not like the Son of Man John had seen in the day of his flesh when Christ walked among men, but more like the glorified Christ he had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration. Every manifestation the glory of Diety is accompanied with brilliant splendor.

Whether the burning bush of Horeb, the glory of Sinai, the Shekinah of the Holy of Holies, the Transfigured Christ on Hermon, the Son of man on Patmos, all indicate that where ever Diety manifests itself there is no darkness at all.

In the great intercessor prayer (17th Chapter of John) Christ

had prayed "that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me" and here is the beginning of the answer to that prayer when John beheld Him in all his heavenly splendor.

vs. 13 Moving amidst the seven golden candlesticks or the church in its sevenfold development, He was keeping his commission promise, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

He was dressed in the long robe of the High Priest and girt about with the girdle of a King. His voice was as the sound of surging waters. Here He is represented in His three-fold office, Prophet, Priest and King.

vs. 14 His white hair portrayed glorious purity. His eyes were as a flame of fire—fiery eyes with which to see everywhere, for all things and all lives are naked and open to Him.

vs. 15, 16 Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. This is a symbol of the Word by which Christ carries on his spiritual warfare and wins all conquests. The Christian soldier is to be armed with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17) and this sword, "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12)

This was the sword with which Christ should smite the nations (Rev. 19:15).

vs. 17 Though John had been familiar with the lowly Son of man, and had seen His glorious transfiguration, when he beheld the transcendent vision of Patmos, his heart failed him, and he fell at Christ's feet as one dead. But when the hand that held the seven stars was laid upon him it was with the same tender touch of the yesteryears. Then the Lord revealed the purpose of His appearing unto John, "Fear Not." How often in the days of His flesh had he said to His disciples, "Fear not!"

vs. 18 Christ here bears testimony to his own life, death and resurrection. He pronounces his own "Amen" to his declaration.

He said He had the keys of hell, or Hades and of Death. When Peter confessed Him in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi as the Christ the Son of the Living God, Christ had declared, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not

prevail against it." (Matt. 16:13-18). And on Pentecost, the birthday of the church of Christ, Peter proclaimed in the first gospel sermon the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and as he came to the climax of that message he said, "He seeing this before spoke of the Resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell (Hades), neither did his flesh see corruption." (Acts 2:31)

Christ proved the truth of Peter's confession of Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, by coming back from Hades, whose gates could not prevail against his diety. Not only was Christ triumphant over death, but the very gates of death and Hades are under His dominion. Hence, He was able to deliver John who had fallen as one dead, but all who love and obey Him from the bonds of death.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them, who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15)

vs. 19 Christ divided up the apocalyptic visions into three parts; viz. the past, the present, and the future. He was to write of the things he had seen during his life time, the things as they were at the time of the Patmos visions, and the things which would fall under the time denoted as "the hereafter."

vs. 20 Christ explains the mystery of the seven Stars and the seven candlesticks. The seven stars He declares are the angels of the seven churches, represented by the seven candlesticks.

The word angel means "a messenger" and is equally applicable to the messenger of God, as well as of man.

This last verse of the first chapter is of special signification in that it throws light upon the *Book as a whole*, giving us a clear understanding of the *principle upon which the Book is to be interpreted*.

In Mark 1:2 referring to John the Baptizer, Mark quotes from Malachi, "Behold I send my messenger before my face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

It certainly holds the same meaning in this passage, for it is self evident these letters were not sent to the angels of God. The messengers were men filling some office in connection with the churches.

The term could not refer to a diocesan bishop, for such an office

did not exist until the church apostatized from the New Testament pattern. The term can hardly refer to an elder for all the churches of the first century had a plurality of elders. It would seem more likely to refer to the preachers or evangelists of the churches. Particularly does this become so when we recall that each church represents a church epoch or period. This apocalyptic uncovering is entrusted to the preachers throughout the sevenfold history of the church. Christ was holding them in His hand to support and strengthen them throughout the gospel age.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

The letters to the seven churches of Asia were composed in accordance with an exact literary arrangement. Each one consists of the same parts: a salutation to the church addressed; a description of Christ from some particular aspect with direct relation to the spiritual condition of the church; a message of praise or censure; exhortations in keeping with the special need, a promise to him that overcometh and an admonition "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

The only exception to this symmetry is in the matter of the last part—the admonition. In each of the first three letters it precedes the promise to the overcomer; in the last four letters it follows his promise.

The distinction makes two groups of letters, one of three and the other of four, just as the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials are divided into two groups each, of four and three. In this study of the seven letters see chart following page 41.

The Church in Ephesus

Text (2:1-7)

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: **2** I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and

didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; 3 and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. 4 But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. 5 Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

vs. 1 It was perfectly natural that the first church addressed should be the one in Ephesus. The city was the capitol of the province and its chief religious and commercial center. It was called "The light of Asia". One of the seven wonders of the world, the temple of Diana, or Artemis, was located there. Here Paul founded the church and labored with it for more than three years, (Acts—chapter 18) and afterward addressed to it one of the New Testament epistles. Later he sent Timothy there and addressed two letters to him. Here, too, if early church tradition is to be accepted, John labored from about A. D. 70 until his death.

It was natural that the first message should be addressed to the church nearest to the apostle's heart.

"These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the golden candle sticks." By some such phrase each letter is linked to the divine Christ.

In Bible language, to have a thing in one's right hand means to have it under one's power. "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. (Exodus 15:6)

The word "holdeth" in this verse is a stronger term than the "had" in (Revelation 1:16). In this salutation Christ assured the Ephesian church, which represented the infant church of the first century that he was not only walking among the churches but holding them in his strong right hand.

vs. 2 The patience of the church had been severely tried in its very inception, but Christ said, "I know thy works, and thy labor."

The church was not only to be praised for its work for Christ, but for the travail of labor in bringing the man-child, Christ, to the world.

The church also was commended for its utter abhorrence of those who were evil. This is all the more remarkable when we re-

member that these Ephesian Christians had but recently left the vileness of paganism. It puts the modern church, with its tolerance for all kinds of worldliness, to shame.

Again the church is commended for its rejection of false apostles. How well they had learned of John himself how such a test should be made. He had taught, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come. And even now already is in the world." (I John 4:1-3)

There was no false softness in those first Christians; they found such to be plain liars.

vs. 3 For Christ's name sake the church had borne the labor of opposing those who would corrupt the gospel and had not grown weary, knowing in due season they would reap if they fainted not.

vs. 4 After these words of praise a stain on the church is pointed out. They had been loyal to the truth, orthodox in the faith and outstandingly clean in life, but they had not maintained the ardor and devotion of their first love. Nothing but the fervent love of the bride can satisfy the Bridegroom.

The church had fallen into the temptation to which contenders for the faith once and for all delivered to saints are peculiarly exposed, namely, that of censoriousness, suspicion, bitterness, factiousness and division over non-essentials. Zeal for pure doctrine easily degenerates into hatred for those who differ in their beliefs.

vs. 5 Christ's rebuke is sharp. If they fail to remember from whence they are fallen and repent and do the first works, he will come, and that quickly, and remove their candlestick out of its place.

He would not come in person, but in providence and judgment.

vs. 6 But here is another ground for commendation. "Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."

The exact origin of this sect and character of its beliefs are in dispute, but it is generally thought that the followers of Nicolas taught that Christian liberty meant licence. More will be given on this sect when it comes to full flower in the life of the Pergamos church.

vs. 7 "He hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."

Since he addressed this injunction "unto the *churches*," it becomes evident that the epistle was not addressed to one local church alone, but to all the churches of the Ephesian period of church history.

This is a characteristic saying of the Lord. None other makes use of it. He employs it in connection with certain of His utterances in order to impress upon us their peculiar importance. It occurs eight times in the gospels, where in each case the plural "ears" is used. (Matt 11:15, 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9,23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35)

It occurs eight times in Revelation, in each of the seven letters, and again in Rev. 13:9, where the singular "ear" is used—in each case.

"To him that overcometh", is an expression peculiar to John. It occurs once in his gospel, six times in his epistles, I, II and III John, and sixteen times in Revelation, but only three times in all the remainder of the New Testament.

The reward to the overcomer is "to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God". This tree is seen in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:22), then here in this letter to Ephesus and, finally, in the New Jerusalem. (Rev. 22:2)

The Tree of Life is seen in the garden of Eden and man was driven from it after he had sinned in eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, lest he should eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. Now in overcoming sin, of transgression, of omission and seduction to false teaching, he is given access to the Tree of Life that he may live forever sinless.

Thus we see the tree figures prominently in the sinless earth at first and then again it figures conspicuously in the vision of the glorified earth with which the book ends. It is a figure of eternal blessedness, eternal salvation in its fullest sense.

The Church in Smyrna *Text (2:8-11)*

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again: 9 I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear not the things which thou art about to

suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

INTRODUCTION

"To the angel of the church of Smyrna write":

Following the letter to the church in Ephesus, it is quite natural that the church in Smyrna should be the next addressed. The city lay just forty miles north of Ephesus and still is second in importance. As Ephesus was called "The Light of Asia", Smyrna, because of its charming surroundings, was called "The Beauty of Asia."

The history of the planting of the church is unknown, but during the second century the church was quite prominent. Since the city had a large Jewish population, which was bitterly opposed to Christ and His church, it came to be known as "the suffering church", because of persecution.

vs. 8 To the church in Smyrna, Christ very fittingly presented himself as "the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive." To this martyr church came the cheering word that its head and Lord had triumphed over death and the grave.

It was well for the church now farther removed from Pentecost to be so saluted. He had been with the church from the beginning, as symbolized in the Ephesian epoch and he would be with the church through this church period, yea, even to the last one.

He wanted them to know that he was not dead, but alive. While he had given up His life, He had broken the shackles of death in the resurrected life. So if persecution should exact the extreme sacrifice of their lives He wanted them to hold fast to the promise, "For if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Romans 8:11)

vs. 9 He wanted them to understand that He knew of their works, which stirred up such persecution that they experienced great tribulation. Also He knew that their tribulation had produced their poverty.

The first century with its advantage of the newness of the gospel message has now passed and persecution sets in. Like Jesus enjoyed the period of popularity to be followed by that of opposition, so the Smyrnan church meets persecution.

But they were rich—rich in faith, hope and fruitful works.

Their witness for Christ was accompanied by vilification and slander. This form of blasphemy was attributed to Christ's old enemies, the Jews. They were experiencing what Paul earlier had experienced at Antioch of Pisidia where the Jews blasphemed and contradicted the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:44-46)

While all this was true yet there is a deeper meaning here. These were claiming to be Jews in the sense that they claimed to be the true Israel of God in opposition to the rightful claim of the persecuted church to this designation.

Paul said, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2:28, 29)

This is further evidence by these Jews being called "the synagogue of Satan, who is called the devil in verse 10. This is the first mention in Revelation of the great adversary.

Christ here denies the right of these opposers to employ the term "Jews" in the sense of being God's chosen people.

Here in verse nine the reference is made to what might be called ecclesiastical activities of the adversary; for one of the most successful devices against the true church is the organization of religious societies in imitation of the true church.

The pure primitive church was not an organization of government, but an organism of life, Christ being the head of his mystical, spiritual body. The church at Smyrna was opposed by such an organization. Those, who opposed the true church, professed to be "Jews", the symbolical name of God's people.

They set up substitute organizations for the church and declared they were just as good as those who refused to depart from the scriptural pattern. Christ calls this blasphemy. He stripped off their outward pretention and revealed them for what they were "the Synagogue of Satan."

Paul, the apostle likewise employs the name "Satan" in the same connection for in warning against false apostles who sought to pass

themselves off as the apostles of Christ, he said, "And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

It is significant that the only other church, besides that at Smyrna, which received unqualified commendation from Christ (The Philadelphia church) was also opposed by them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie." (Rev. 3:9)

vs. 10 The church was to fear none of those things because of the reasons about to be presented. The activities of the adversary take the form of physical persecutions. He wanted them to know that back of their suffering, imprisonment and trials was none other than the devil, using men and institutions as his agents.

He declared, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days" The number "ten" in Bible symbology indicates a complete testing, or trial to the limit of human endurance. Thus Jacob complained that Laban had changed his wages "ten times". (Gen. 31:7,41). The plagues of Egypt were "ten" in number (Ex. Chapters 7,8,9,10,11,12,13) Israel was tested with ten commandments. (Ex. 20:1-19). God's patience had been tried to the limit. He said, they had tempted him now these "ten times". (Numbers 14:22) Daniel requested that he and his companions be tested "ten days". (Daniel 1:12-15).

So the church at Smyrna was to be fully tested, as the persecuted church.

He said, "Be thou faithful unto death" (unto martyrdom). For this they were to have, not a royal crown, but the garland crown of victory over death. (I Cor. 9:24,25) (II Timothy 4:8)

vs. 11 Again it is a call to be heeded, not only by the Smyrnan church but "the churches", which the one at Smyrna represented. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Those who win this incorruptible crown shall live forever. This corruptible shall put on incorruption (I Cor. 15:54,55). To die the second death is to me sent from the final judgment throne into hell (Rev. 20:14,15). They might suffer the death of the body, but not of the soul.

The Church in Pergamos
Text (2:12-17)

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword: 13 I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. 16 Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

INTRODUCTION

This church was the farthest north, geographically speaking, of the seven churches in Asia. The city was a great religious center. The temple of Aesculapius was located there, to which sufferers came for healing from the four corners of the empire. Here also were the temples of Zeus, or Jupiter, Dionyson or Apollo. It was a perfect pantheon of pagan dieties.

Here Polycarp, that great Christian martyr was burned alive.

vs. 12 The salutation. Christ here presents Himself as, "He that hath the sharp sword with two edges."

How appropriate this salutation! Owing to the fact that conditions were to be found in this church which called for refutation by the word of God it was altogether fitting that, the two-edged sword, which is the Word of God, should be the symbol under which Christ presented Himself to this church period.

The bearing of this is seen in verse 16, where speaking of those whom He had just reproved, He says, "Repent or else I will come quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

vs. 13 This verse contains strong commendation. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." "Seat" here signifies "throne". This church was in a place of peculiar danger, being directly exposed to the Adversary. "Satan's Seat" here;

some have supposed referred to the worship of Aesculapius, from the serpent being his characteristic emblem.

But there seems to be a deeper meaning here. It is called "Satan's seat" here because it was where Satan's authority was in some special way acknowledged.

It must be noted that his devices in this case did not take the form of either spurious Christianity, or of physical persecutions as at Smyrna, but were of the nature similar to the device employed by Baalam against Israel of old.

Of course, these epochs blend somewhat and we do find some faithful saint, named Antipas suffering martyrdom, and we also know Polycarp was burned alive, but the opposition took on a new dress here;—something more subtle and deceiving.

vs. 14 It will be profitable here to give a brief study of the doctrine of Baalam. Baalam taught Balak, the King of the Moabites, to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel. Balak wanted the children of Israel cursed, but God would not permit Baalam to curse them as long as Israel was faithful to God's commandments.

So Baalam then taught Balak to induce the children of Israel to indulge in the heathen worship and orgies, and then, of course, they would fall under the curse of God. This was accomplished through the women of Moab, by whom the Israelites were seduced into to take part in idolatrous practices and to commit fornication (Numbers 25:1-3).

Evidently, here the true church, the Israel of God in the Christian dispensation, was enticed to commit spiritual fornication. The sin that answers to this on the part of the "Israel of God" today (Gal. 6:16) is their participation in the formal and ceremonial exercises of religious bodies, whose form of worship is not after the New Testament pattern.

And this is just what happened historically to the church in the Pergamos period. The church had just gone through the persecution under Diocletian A. D. 303 to A. D. 313. Myers describes that persecution:

"Toward the end of his reign, Diocletian inaugurated against the Christians a persecution which continued until his abdication, and which was the severest, as it was the last, waged against the church by the pagan emperors.....

For ten years, which, however, were broken by short periods of respite, the Christians were subjected to the fierce flames of persecution..It was during this and the various other persecutions that vexed the church in the second and third centuries that the Christians sought refuge in the catacombs."Pp. 522, 523 Myer's Ancient History. Revised Edition 1904

After the abdication of Diocletian, and the joint reign of Galerius and Constantine of only one year, Constantine was proclaimed emperor. In the now famous Battle of Milvian Bridge A. D. 312, Constantine's standard on this celebrated battle field was the Christian cross. And it was beneath this emblem that his soldiers marched to victory. This act constituted a turning point in the history of the Roman Empire, and especially the fortunes of the Church of Christ.

By a decree issued at Milan A. D. 313, the year after the battle of Milvian Bridge, the Edict of Toleration was issued and Constantine placed Christianity on an equal footing with the other religions of the empire. The Edict read as follows: "We grant to Christians and to all others full liberty of following the religion which each must choose." Hear Myers again:

"By subsequent edicts Constantine made Christianity in effect the state religion and extended to it a patronage which he withheld from the old pagan worship. By A. D. 321 he had granted the Christian societies the right to receive gifts and legacies, and he himself enriched the church with donations of money and grants of land. . . . From this moment can be traced the decay of its (the church's) primitive simplicity and a decline from its high moral standard. It is these deplorable results of the imperial patronage that Dante laments in his well-known lines!

Ah Constantine! of how much ill the mother,
Not by conversion, but that marriage dower
Which the first wealthy Father took from thee."

Inferno XIX 115-117

Myers Ancient History P. 526.

As Dante said, Constantine was not converted, but because he won the Battle of Milvian Bridge he embraced Christianity and

made his soldiers and subjects Christian. Being a pagan, there were brought into the church many pagan practices.

Thus the doctrine of Baalam, the doctrine of Compromise characterized the Pergamos Period.

Constantine called the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) at Nicaea, a town of Asia Minor, and the first creed, or formula of faith was adopted, now known as the Nicene Creed. It was the fore-runner of all human creeds.

vs. 15 Here we read, "so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes which thing I hate."

This departure made its first appearance in the first church period—the Ephesian. There it was referred to as the "deeds" of the Nicolaitanes; here it is their "doctrine."

The clue to an explanation is found in the name itself, and this is worthy of consideration because we find support in the meaning of the name "Baalam", which occurs in the previous verse.

The name "Nicolas" which belonged to the person of whom these Nicolaitanes were followers, means "one who conquers," or "Lords it over" the people.

Now it can hardly be a coincidence in a book where names and numbers, as well as objects, are used as symbols, that the name "Baalam" in Hebrew has practically the same meaning as "Nicolas" in the Greek.

This would point to the conclusion that "Nicolaitanism" was some form of heresy having for its object that of bringing the Israel of God into some sort of spiritual bondage.

In this church period there did occur such a compromise as portrayed in the doctrine of Baalam. Also there occurred in the same epoch, and following closely on the doctrine of compromise, a lording it over of God's people.

How logical then that these Nicolaitanes should first be mentioned in the first church epoch—the Ephesian! There Christ saw the beginning of such a departure.

How many times the Holy Spirit leaves some hidden door, which when discovered, makes proof of a truth crystal clear!

In (Acts 20:28-31), we have an account of Paul calling the elders of this same Ephesian church, which Christ used to symbolize the first church period, to meet him at Miletus. (Acts 20:17).

His conference with them was in the nature of a stern warning, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over

which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to feed the church of God." For I know this, that after my departing shall greivous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

This clinches the proof of the nature of the Nicolaitane doctrine—the doctrine of overlordship. In the New Testament church, there was a *plurality of elders* over *one congregation*, but never was there one elder, or bishop over a plurality of congregations.

The departure from the primitive order of government began right in the eldership. The seed was dormant in the elders of Ephesus, but came to life and developed in the Ephesian period. And by the time we reach the Pergamos period, we find a bishop presiding over a group of congregations. This was the over-lordship of Nicolaitanes. And it was this very departure that changed the form of government of the first century church, and, the Nicolaitane government meeting in church councils, wrote the first human creed—the Nicene. This inaugurated the apostacy which produced bishops, arch bishops, prelates, cardinals and finally the papa, or pope.

It corrupted the church in government and substituted human creeds, catechisms, and human confessions of faith, for the Authority of the Word of God. No matter of wonder then, that Christ said of the Nicolaitanes in both the Ephesian and the Pergamos periods of church history "I hate this thing." No wonder, then this doctrine only in the embryonic stage in the Ephesian, but now in full flower in the Pergamos period, was so hateful to Christ that He introduced Himself in the salutation to this Pergamos church, "These things saith He that hath the sharp sword with two edges." (Rev. 2:12)

Since the sharp sword with the two edges is the Word of God, His salutation becomes understandable. The only way to fight departures from the primitive order was to wield the sharp sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. Hence the call:

vs. 16 "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

From the wording of this warning it appears that we have here the case of a whole church being carried away with this evil doctrine, as the Ephesian church was charged with falling away from its first love. For Christ says, "I will come to thee and fight

against them"—those who teach and practice this pernicious and hateful doctrine.

Yet the call to repent was to the whole church, which is, of course, responsible for the evils allowed to exist in its midst.

vs. 17 Finally, came the wonderful promises: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." This appears in contrast to eating things sacrificed to idols. (Rev. 2:14) In connection with the mention of Manna, Christ calls Himself the Bread of life. (John 6:48, 49). Christ is unseen walking among the churches, hence called the Hidden Manna. He is the bread from heaven. "And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written." Among the Greeks a white stone was a symbol of acquittal, as a black stone was one of guilt. The white stone speaks of justification and victory over this abominable doctrine of overlordship.

The gift of a new name carries with it some great blessing of high honor. Christ is to have a new name known only to Himself, (Rev. 19:12) and His faithful followers also have a new name known only to themselves.

While the order of symmetry is changed, Christ gives the admonition "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Again it is not addressed to one church, but to *the churches*, proving again as in the two former church periods, the Pergamos church is symbolical of a period or epoch in church history.

Without this Nicolaitan apostacy of the Pergamos period, there could have been no following fruition of abomination in the succeeding Thyatira period.

The Church in Thyatira *Text (2:18-29)*

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass: 19 I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. 20 But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication; and to eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. 22 Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into

great tribulation, except they repent of her works. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. 24 But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say; I cast upon you none other burden. 25 Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father: 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

While we have no account of the establishing of the church in Thyatira, it is likely it began when Lydia and her household returned from Philippi, for certainly she was considered faithful by Paul. So she certainly would be expected to establish the church, in her home city Thyatira.

The Salutation

This is the longest of the seven letters. It reveals further the methods employed by the great Adversary, exposing the "depth of Satan."

vs. 18 In this salutation it is noteworthy as being the only time in the apocalypse that Christ is presented as "the Son of God." He, as the Son of God, is also described as He, "who hath his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like unto burnished brass."

The combination of these two symbols is very significant. The symbols strikingly present the Lord as the One whose eyes search out every evil deed, and whose feet trample in judgment upon the wicked deeds of men.

There is a special reason, why He introduces Himself to this church period as the "Son of God." It is because of the peculiar conditions found in the Thyatira period.

We must remember always that each of these seven churches is but a type of a succeeding church period, each revealing something in the affairs and history of the church through the ages.

Here in this letter we are given to see the inception of that masterpiece of Satan's deception, that monstrous heresy, which reached fruition in what we know today as Romanism.

vs. 19 Christ begins with the statement: "I know thy works and charity, and service, and faith and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." All these are peculiarly characteristic of the Roman Church. But you will note that her works are mentioned twice. While works are mentioned of other church periods, this is the only double reference to works. There is a reason.

A prominent feature of Romanism is its insistence upon works, and works that are wholly unlike those required of the New Testament church.

The works of the Roman church are derived mainly from pagan sources. This is not surprising when we remember our study under the Pergamos period how Constantine, the pagan Roman Emperor, embraced Christianity, not because of conversion, but because of a victory at Milvian Bridge. The unregenerated pagan flooded the church with pagan ceremonies and practices. In proof of this we quote from the *Externals of the Catholic Church*, "Her government, ceremonies, festivals, sacramentals, and devotions, by Rev. John F. Sullivan of the Diocese of Providence, second edition, Revised to conform to the new code of Canon Law. This is published by P. J. Kenedy & Sons New York 1918. It bears the approving names of Arthur J. Scanlan, S.I.D. Censor Librorum, and John Cardinal Farley, D. D. Archbishop of New York. March 27, 1918.

Just a few quotations to show the works of Romanism are pagan.

The Rosary—Page 186.

The use of some means of counting prayers is not restricted to catholics. The Brahmin of India or Tibet has his long rosary which he uses to measure his eternal repetitions of the praise of Buddha. The Mohammedan votary has his chaplet of ninety-nine beads to count his fervent invocations of Allah."

The use of the rosary "was established by St. Dominic, the famous founder of the order of Preachers, and he testifies in his writings that he acted under the direction of the Blessed Mother of God."

The Agnus Dei—Pages 204, 205, 206

"In every form of religion, even in the grossest paganism, it has been customary to consider certain objects as holy and to use them as means of supposed protection from evil."

The origin of this sacramental is a matter of great obscurity. When the people of Italy and other countries had been converted from idolatry, they retained some of their belief in charms and amulets; and it is probable that the Agnus Dei was devised as a substitute for these relics of paganism. The church in many instances took the religious customs with which the people were familiar, and made these customs christian.

They were first used in Rome, and it is possible that they go back as far as the final overthrow of pagan worship in that city, about the fifth century. Indeed, there is some evidence that they were in use even a little earlier, for in the tomb of Maria Augusta, wife of the Emperor Honorius, who died in the fourth century, was found an object made of wax and much like our Agnus Deis of the present time."

Holy Water—Chapter 27 entitled Holy Water

"It is interesting to note how often our church has availed herself of practices which were in common use among pagans. The church and her clergy are all things to all men, that they may gain all for Christ, and she has often found that it is well to take what was praiseworthy in other forms of worship and adopt it to her own purposes, for the sanctification of her children. Thus it is true, in a certain sense, that some catholic rites and ceremonies are a reproduction of those of pagan creeds, but they are the taking of the best in paganism, etc."

Then follows a detailed description of the use of holy water.

Pilgrimages—Chapter LV

"The pious practice of making journeys to distant shrines, . . . is by no means exclusively catholic. The Romans had their shrines of Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome, of Apollo at Delphi, of Diana at Ephesus. To visit Mecca at least once in his lifetime is the ambition of the pious Mussulman. The great temples of India have their countless throngs of worshippers who have come to offer their homage to the Hindoo gods and to

pray at the shrines of Buddha. In encouraging the making of pilgrimages our church has made use of a practice which has produced good results in other creeds," pp. 300, 302

These are only a few quotations of many that could be made.

vs. 20 The introduction of the name of Jezebel, as a symbol of evil seen by those flaming eyes, is very enlightening. Jezebel, a name meaning "unchaste" was the daughter of Ethbaal (with Baal). She became the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. Through her influence the pagan worship of Baal became the state religion of the ten tribes.

Baalism was a licentious religion; and hence it fitly symbolized that monstrous apostacy of the church, whose essential characteristic is spiritual unfaithfulness to Christ.

In this church period the one great aim of this enemy of Christ, which is called "the depths of Satan" is to degrade the Lord Jesus Christ from his place as the Son of God.

As the Son of God He is presented in the Scriptures as the only way of access to the Father. He himself said: "I am the way, the truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me!" (John 14:6)

In complete opposition of this, though such opposition is cleverly disguised with almost diabolical cleverness, the Roman church systematically present Jesus Christ, not as the Son of God, but as the son of Mary.

In its doctrine, ceremonies, liturgy, pictures and images, this Jezebel church, with consummate and satanic craft, exalts Mary, making her the compassionate one, the efficacious intercessor in behalf of sinners, the mediatrix between God and man. Her devotees are led to put their trust in Mary instead of the "Son of God." You can see why He presents Himself, as to no other church period as "the Son of God."

Steadfastly, Mary is presented by the Roman Catholic church as the Mediatrix between God and man. The title given her is "Mary Mediatrix."

In the Marian Congress held in Ottawa in June, 1947, a one hundred foot statue of her was displayed in fireworks. She was pictured standing on a new moon, wearing a crown of stars, with a caption

beneath the figure which read, "Ad Jesumper Marian" which translated reads: To Jesus through Mary.

This is pure paganism to present Mary as Mediatrix. In Babylon they had a goddess which bore the name Myletta, that is "The Mediatrix".

In accordance with this role of Mediatrix, she was called Aphrodite—that is the wraths of Douer—who by her charms could soothe the breast of angry Jove. In Athens she was called Amarusia, that is the mother of gracious acceptance! In Rome she was called 'Bona Dea,'—the 'good goddess!'

All this is sufficient to prove the pagan character which is ascribed to the Virgin Mary. It is an extraordinary thing that throughout history across the lives of the people of the pagan world is the figure of a woman which closely resembles the Virgin Mary of today. In ancient Babylon she was Semiramis; in Assyria she was Astarte; in Egypt, Isis, in Greece, Aphrodite; in Rome, Venus. Many of the titles which have been given to the Virgin Mary by the Roman Catholic church have been taken directly from paganism. Hesiod, one of the earliest Greek writers describes her as "the mother of the gods." Catholics call Mary "the mother of God!"

"And this introduction of rank paganism traced back to the Thyatira period of church history which began in the fourth century.

Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople set himself against this. Quoting him, "Has God," said he, "a mother?" Then is paganism to be pardoned for introducing a mother of the gods, and St. Paul is a liar, who said in speaking of Christ's god-head that it is without father or mother or descent. Let us cease to call Mary, her who bore God, that we be not tempted to become pagans." At this point the sermon was interrupted by the shout "That is atheism!"

From third chapter, 2nd volume of his "Handbook to the Controversy with Rome" by Karl Von Hase, professor of Theology in the University of Jena for 53 years, 1830 to 1883.

And this in the light of Mary's declaration (Luke 1:47) that she needed a savior! If she needed a Savior, how could she become a savior? Also this in the light of Paul's statement, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ." (1 Timothy 2:5). How then can Mary be called "Mediatrix?"

Not until 1854 was she declared Immaculate, on December 8th of that year. After the question had been considered by a special

commission of cardinals and theologians, and after consulting with the entire college of cardinals, Pope Pius IX solemnly declared the dogma in Peter's church in Rome in the presence of more than two hundred cardinals, bishops and others, who had been invited to the assembly. After mass and singing he read as follows:

"That the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin."

He decreed this to be a divinely revealed fact and dogma which must be believed constantly and firmly by the faithful. Those who refuse to accept it must be cut off from the church.

It was not until the end of the so called holy year of 1950 did the present pope declare the doctrine of her assumption. This then reached the fullness of paganism to deify her as ascending directly to heaven in bodily form. No wonder Christ spoke of the Thyatira church as "the depths of Satan."

In Biblical symbology, and particularly in the apocalypse, a woman is the symbol of an elaborate religious system. In this instance Jezebel stands for a system of doctrine, in that she is referred to as "a prophetess" one who taught Christ's servants to commit fornication—spiritual unchastity.

vs. 21 She was given time to repent for this spiritual fornication but she refused to repent. History has shown how she has only grown worse.

vs. 22 Sickness and a bed are scriptural symbols of affliction and punishment. Even today we have a saying; "He made his own bed, let him lie in it."

Her adultery was like the adultery of Israel. (Jer. 3:6-11) (Ezek. 16:23-42)

vs. 23 The words, "I will kill her children with death is significant as she teaches that she is the mother of all churches. Rome delights in the name "mother."

Her children are her adherents and Christ said he would kill them with death. This visitation of judgment would cause all the churches to know that Christ searcheth the reins and hearts of men and will reward every man according to his works. This word "works" calls up the idolatrous works of the Thyatira church, into which Christ looks with "eyes like unto flames of fire." (Rev. 2:18)

vs. 24 Evidently not all in Thyatira were involved in this paganism, because Christ has a special word of encouragement for them, "the rest in Thyatira (as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of satan, as they speak), I will put upon you none other burden.

vs. 25 The only burden he would lay upon them was "to hold fast until I come."

vs. 26 A prominent feature of Romanism is its settled purpose, from which it has never deviated in all the centuries of existence, to exercise "power over the nations." She has always advocated union of church and state and the power to crown and uncrown kings.

How appropriate, then, is this promise to those of Thyatira who overcome this pagan doctrine—the depths of satan. "I will give him power over the nations!" In the coming period when Christ shall rule all kingdoms the saints which have endured shall reign with him.

vs. 27 A sceptre of iron means a firm and enduring power. The word "rule" in the original means "to rule as a shepherd." It will not be the cruel rule of a dictator, but the gentle guardianship of a shepherd, even Christ, the good shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep.

Christ will break the nations in pieces and all shall become one under the rule of Him.

vs. 28. The promise of the Morning Star points to the possession of Christ in some special way. It is one of the titles of Christ. In Rev. 22:16 He says of Himself, "I AM the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." Christ will give to those who overcome "the depths of satan," a fellowship with Himself in that they shall share his dominion.

Summary Thus we have traced Paul's "mystery of iniquity (which) doth already work" (2 Thess. 2:7), called in the Ephesian period, "the deeds of the Nicolaitanes;" in the Smyrna period, "the synagogue of satan; in the Pergamos period, "the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes," "where Satan's seat is," and in the Thyatira period, "the doctrine of Jezebel," "the depths of satan."

Here in the Thyatira period the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes—the doctrine of overlordship—reached "the depths of satan."

We traced briefly in the Pergamos period how the simplicity of

the policy of the New Testament church was supplanted by a rising ecclesiastical hierarchy in the elevation of men in authority over the churches. "The depths of Satan" was reached in the Thyatira period when the bishop of Rome—called "papa" or "pope" gradually assumed supreme authority over the churches.

There began the growth of an empire within an empire. Quoting from Myer's Ancient History, pages 582, 583 we read:

"Long before the fall of Rome there had begun to grow up within the Roman Empire an ecclesiastical state, which was shaping itself into the imperial model. This spiritual empire, like the secular one, possessed a hierarchy of officers, of which deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops were the most important. These bishops collectively formed what is known as the Episcopate. There were four grades of bishops, metropolitans or archbishops, and patriarchs." At the end of the fourth century there were five patriarchs, that is, regions ruled by patriarchs. These centered in the great cities of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

Among the patriarchs, the patriarchs of Rome were accorded almost universally a precedence in honor and dignity. They claimed further a precedence in authority and jurisdiction. Before the close of the eighth century there was firmly established over a great part of christendom what we may call an ecclesiastical monarchy."

This ecclesiastical monarchy reached the "depths of satan" when, after centuries of argument, the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope was made a canon law in the year 1870 A. D. by the council called for that purpose by Pius IX.

With the growth of the papal state spiritually there was also a parallel development of the temporal power of the popes.

"In the dispute about the use of images in worship, known in history as the "war of the Iconoclasts," which broke out in the eighth century between the Greek churches of the East and the Latin churches of the West, drew after it far-reaching consequences as respects the growing power of the Roman Pontiffs. In this quarrel with the Eastern Emperors the Roman bishops formed an alliance with the Frankish princes of the Carolingian house. The popes consecrated the Frankish

chieftians as kings and emperors; the grateful Frankish kings defended the popes against all their enemies . . . Such in broad outline was the way in which grew up the papacy."

Myers Ancient History pages 585, 586.

Thus for centuries we behold union of church and state until July 2, 1871 when Victor Emmanuel entered Rome and took up his residence there.

"The occupation of Rome by the Italian government marked the end of the temporal power of the pope, and the end of an ecclesiastical state, the last in Europe, which from long before Charlemagne had held a place among the temporal powers of Europe . . . the papal troops, with the exception of a few guardsmen, were disbanded. . . . By a statute known as the Law of the papal guarantees (1871), the pope was assured in the exercise of his spiritual functions."

Thus, finally, as a result of the reformation the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, "which thing I hate" said Christ, was refuted, both in its spiritual and temporal functions. However, it must be said in the interest of truth that the doctrine still holds sway, spiritually, in the overlordship of the papacy over the Roman church, and, temporally, in the eternal struggle of the pope to regain his power over the nations.

In these letters we have revealed or uncovered to us those tactics the great adversary, the devil, employs against the church of Christ.

vs. 29 Again we meet with the statement which indicates that Thyatira, like the three churches before it, represents not just one church, but the churches of a period. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the *Churches*."

CHAPTER III

THE SALUTATION THE SARDIS CHURCH

Text (3:1-6)

3 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

SEVEN-FOLD ARRANGEMENT of the SEVEN LETTERS

	Chapters I & II				Chapter III		
	EPHESUS Verse	SMYRNA Verse	PERGAMOS Verse	THYATIRA Verse	SARDIS Verse	PHILADELPHIA Verse	LAODICEA Verse
SALUTATION	1	8	12	18	1	7	14
DECLARATION OF WORKS	2	9	13	19	1,2	8	15
PRAISE OR CENSURE	3	9	13	20	2	9,10	15a
REPROOF	4,6	None	14	21,22	3	None	16,17
EXHORTATION	5	10	16	23-25	4	11	18
ADMONITION	7	11	17	Promise 26-28	5	12	21
PROMISE	7	11	17	Admonition 29	6	13	22
APPROXIMATE TIME	Pentecost	A.D. 100	313 A.D. to	533 A.D. to	1517 A.D. to	1809 A.D. to	1909 to
OF CHURCH PERIODS	to A.D. 100	to 313 A.D.	533 A.D.	1517 A.D.	1809 A.D.	1909 A.D.	End.
CHARACTERISTICS	Doctrinally Right	Persecuted	Compromised	Apostacized	Denomi- national	Restored	Lukewarm
CHURCH IN HISTORY	The First Church	Church of 2nd, 3rd. Centuries	Church of 4th, 5th Centuries	Catholic	Denomi- national	Church of Christ	Present Church

2 Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. **3** Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. **4** But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. **5** He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. **6** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

The character of the last three messages to the churches is definitely different from the four preceding.

In the first four church periods we are given the uncovering of the development of an abominable doctrine which progressed through the stages from "the deeds of the Nicolaitanes," "the synagogue of Satan," "the seat of Satan," until it reached "the depths of Satan" in the fourth church period.

Beginning with Sardis we find, not the rise and progress of a system of satanic wickedness, but a state of decline and decay, dying out of spirituality and love for the truth.

While one church period blends into and intermingles with the preceding and succeeding periods, yet each epoch has an individual entity of its own.

Following the great, and longest period of Thyatira, or the Roman Catholic epoch, we know from history that there followed the weaker and declining period of denominationalism. The Sardis church ushers in the days of the Reformation. The preceding dark ages had left the church spiritually dead and decadent. After the reformation begun by Zwingli, Luther, Calvin and Knox, the church era was marked by multiple divisions, declining weakness and diminishing spirituality. This decline became so marked that the Wesleys spent their lives in an effort to restore some spirituality to a dying and decadent Christendom.

vs. 1 Hitherto, Christ has begun each letter with words of commendation, but here he commences with words of condemnation.

He presents Himself as "He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars. As already pointed out the "seven spirits" symbolize the fullness of the One Spirit. Upon Christ, the divine spirit abides in all the perfection of his operation and power. The seven stars represent the entire sweep of the life of the church from

Pentecost to the end of the age. He is asserting his complete authority over the church in all the Christian dispensation. He is able to impart spiritual life—the life that was lacking in this church period addressed. *“I know thy works,”* says the Christ. The denominational period has had a reputation for feverish activity. Services well attended and carefully conducted, with working committees and many social activities. This period has been characterized by great financial drives, building programs and world-encircling movements. *“Thou has a name that thou livest.”* How appropriate!

Perhaps nothing has so characterized the denominational epoch as the wearing and stressing of human names. Men have gloried in this name or that—names that gave no honor to the Christ, or his church, but rather have divided the followers of Christ into competing sects.

Since an outstanding trait of this church was its weakness, it is altogether logical that denominational names should be worn.

The word comes from the same root from which we get the word “denominator,” which means fractional, or below par. The wearing of a denominational name is an unconscious confession of being fractional and below par excellence. It cannot be too well noted that God has never permitted a church, which did not take the Scripture for full and final authority for its rule of practice, to wear the Scriptural name. Proclaiming part truth, they ever wear an unscriptural and below par, fractional, or denominational name.

So it is looked upon, by Christ, as dead.

vs. 2 But to this church period Christ makes a patient and gracious appeal. “Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.”

The denominational period has thrown off much of the doctrine of Baalam and the overlordship of the Nicolaitanes. Pagan practices borrowed from heathenism by the Thyatira church, have been expunged.

But there are still traces of compromising with error, setting up of ecclesiastical establishments to govern the beliefs and practices of its adherents.

Yet over against this there has been an awakening after the passing of the dark ages and the spiritual Renaissance which followed. The Bible has been loosed from the cloister pale, and translated and printed in over a thousand languages and dialects.

However, in spite of this noble endeavor, there has been a tendency to chain the Bible, not to a book shelf of the monastery, but to the prejudiced interpretation of denominational bias.

He declares, "I have not found thy works perfect before God," but be watchful and strengthen the things that remain.

vs. 3 To stimulate the church of this period to action, He makes an appeal to remember the better days. It shows that they had now heard His word, because they are to "remember how thou hast received and heard."

Church history discloses how the church of the Sardis, or denominational period, has lost its fervor for the Word of God and has turned to humanism, modernism, skepticism, and even outright doubt and infidelity. If they do not watch He says, "I will come on thee as a thief in the night."

While He is not announcing his immediate return, yet here seems to be the beginning of the calling to the church's attention that the return must be kept in mind. How significant! The denominational period of the church has throughout its days stressed, with increasing tempo, the return of Christ.

While a few misguided souls have set dates, Christ both in His ministry, through the voice of His apostles and here in his apocalypse, declared His coming would be "as a thief in the night." (Matthew 24:36-51) (1 Thess. 5:2) (2 Peter 3:10) (Rev. 16:15) The coming of Christ is a blessed hope to the watchful and ready, but to the unprepared it will be an event of surprise and terror.

vs. 4 But there were a few who had kept pure, both in faithfulness to God's Word and in life. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments."

How true it is that throughout denominationalism there are to be found those who, though wearing a fractional name, are living beyond the teaching of their particular group. They have outstripped their church in a return to New Testament belief, practice and living.

There are fine folk who have thrown off human creedalism, infant baptism, papal sprinkling (a practice authorized by the pope in the Council of Revenna in A.D. 1311), closed communion, human ecclesiasticism and many other unscriptural practices in order to stand free in Christ. These things need to be strengthened.

A few have not defiled their garments, either doctrinally or spiritually. These shall be clothed in white because they walk with the Lord. Their belief and practice kept step with Christ's commands. How well did Amos write, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

White is often applied to divine and heavenly things. The garments of the bride are to be "fine linen, clean and white."

On the earth, man is the only one of God's countless species of living creatures that has no natural clothing. Sin stripped him of his garments of glory and beauty, wherein he stood in the likeness of God. So he is the most shabbily dressed creature in the whole world.

But the worthy of Sardis are promised to one day walk with Him, dressed in the whiteness of the purity of His righteousness. (1 Cor. 1:30)

vs. 5 "I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life."

The book of Life is prominent in the last chapters of Revelation (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). The mention of it in the letters to the Sardis period is very appropriate in view of the fact that life and death are the main theme of the letter.

Among all denominations of this period there have been rare souls, who have not defiled their garments either doctrinally, or ecclesiastically, having obeyed the gospel and by that obedience and subsequent faithfulness have their names upon the book of life.

The final clause of this verse of promise recalls Christ's promise recorded in (Matt. 10:32, 33).

vs. 6 Then comes the final admonition, as in all seven letters. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." This regularly repeated injunction emphasizes the truth that each message is addressed to more than an individual church, but to many churches, represented in successive periods of church history.

The Salutation
The Philadelphia Church
Text (3:7-13)

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth: 8 I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. 9 Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. 12 He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

The Salutation—Christ does not present Himself to this church in characters taken from the sevenfold description of Him in chapter one.

To the other churches He addressed himself as holding the seven stars in his right hand, walking amidst the golden candelsticks, as the first and the last, as He which hath the sharp sword with two edges, as "He who hath his eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fine brass, etc.

Here, he uses an entirely new set of symbols of himself in this salutation to Philadelphia.

In each letter Christ reveals himself in a character that is in keeping with the condition of that particular church.

Since the conditions in Philadelphia are quite different from that of every other church, we find He presents Himself in an entirely different manner.

vs. 7 "These things saith He that is Holy."

There is no reference here to the eyes of flame or the feet of brass, nor the sword of His mouth. The very words indicate that the church in Philadelphia is in such a state of spirituality and harmony with God's will as to know Him who is holy, and who is true. Here Christ makes a strong assertion of His diety, for only

God can say, "I AM HOLY." "Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). "For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy." Isaiah 57:15.

"These things saith He that is true."

These words, "He that is true" take us to John 17:3, where He says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only True God." "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him *THAT IS TRUE*, and we are in HIM *THAT IS TRUE*, even in His Son, Jesus Christ." (John 5:20)

"These things saith "He that hath the key of David."

The study of this key becomes intensely interesting when we remind ourselves that these seven churches represent seven church periods. The period following the denominational period represented by "Sardis" which had the name it lived, is the Restoration period, in which there appeared again on earth the church restoring the practices of the first century.

As the first period of the church was marked by the first love, the restoration period is marked by the name, Philadelphia, meaning "brotherly love." Love had again been restored in the church. The Ephesian period was marked by leaving its first love, the Restoration period is one in which love is restored.

As the first church was given the keys (Matt 16:16-19)so here the keys are being restored.

The first use of the key to indicate restoration was in Isaiah 22:22 "And it shall come to pass in that day that I will call my servant Eliakim . . . And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder, so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." The key was laid upon Eliakim's shoulders in that he was given the key of government, or authority, so in the Restoration period, God is again setting up the kingdom, restoring it in that he is reigning in the church instead of the rule of church councils, presbyteries, synods, conference, etc. Christ's authority is again being restored.

Eliakim means "God will set up" and as in Eliakim's day, so the Restoration period, God is setting up or restoring the kingdom.

In Eliakim's case none could shut when he had opened nor open when he had shut, so it is in the Restoration period.

The key was given to Eliakim when there were breeches in the walls of Jerusalem (Isa. 22:9), and the key was restored in the

Philadelphia or Restoration period when there were breeches in the spiritual Jerusalem, caused by denominational division.

A lock on a door has a combination and a key must have the same combination as the lock in order to open the door.

When Jesus was about to leave His apostles He gave His commission under which they were to labor in opening up the Kingdom to the sinner.

This commission is found near the end of what are called the "synoptic" gospels, namely, Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are so called because they have a common or similar view. The commission, according to these three records of the gospel, reads as follows:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—Matthew 28; 19, 20)

"And He said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15, 16)

"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."—(Luke 24:46-48)

This commission is predicated upon all the right of absolute authority, and all the force of absolute power. Shall we present a breakdown of these three records.

Matthew mentions *going, teaching, baptizing* into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and *teaching* the baptized hearers to *observe all things whatsoever* I have commanded you, or in other words to continue in the things heard.

Mark mentions *going, preaching the gospel* (which consists of three facts—the death, burial and resurrection of Christ I Cor. 15:1-4, *believing, being baptized and salvation.*

Luke mentions the facts of the gospel *repentance and remission of sins, or salvation.*

Putting all these elements together we have: *Going, teaching or*

preaching, believing, repentance, salvation or remission of sins and continuing.

Having now ascertained the elements of the commission we are ready to consider the combination or order of these elements.

Naturally, the matter of "going" comes *first*. *Second*, the object of going is to *teach*, so teaching is the next in order. *Third*, hearing would be the next in order because the object of teaching is to get men to hear. *Fourth*, the result of hearing is *faith*, because Paul said, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:14-17) So the fourth in order is faith. The next or fifth would be *repentance*, because until we believe we will not obey Christ's command to repent. The *sixth* in order is *Baptism*, because all repentant believers were commanded to be baptized. This is not only the scriptural order, but, likewise the logical order. Faith changes our mind: repentance changes our will and baptism changes our state, translating us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Baptism is for the remission of sins because Peter so declared in Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

Our sins are remitted in baptism because Paul declares that in being baptized we are baptized into the death of Christ. It was in Christ's death that the only blood which could remit sins was shed. Baptism puts us into the death of Christ, or under the atoning blood.

Now shall we hear Paul on this:

"How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were *baptized into His death*? Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:2-4)

Therefore, since remission of sins is the result of the repentant believer being baptized into the death of Christ, it naturally is the *seventh* in divine order.

But while baptism remits or blots out our past "just as if I'd" never sinned, the sinner must continue to the end to be saved, or

to obtain salvation. Jesus said, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matt. 10:22)

He repeated the promise of salvation to the enduring or continuing one. In Matthew 24:13, we read:

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be *saved*."

So salvation is the eighth and final element in the order of the key combination of the commission. Briefly stated they are:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Going | 5. Repenting |
| 2. Teaching | 6. Being baptized |
| 3. Hearing | 7. Continuing |
| 4. Believing | 8. Salvation |

The order as Practiced by the New Testament Churches.

To Peter as well as to all the apostles was given the keys to the opening of the kingdom on Pentecost, the birthday of the church.

"And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18, 19).

This same power was given to the other apostles also. In John 20:23 we read, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

As the spokesman on the Day of Pentecost Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, using the divine combination, opened the door and all the divine elements are then either mentioned or implied.

1. There was a going—to the one place (Acts 2:1)
2. There was preaching—"But Peter standing up with the eleven, *lifted up his voice* and said unto them" (Acts 2:14)
3. There was a hearing, for we read, "Now when they *heard* this, they were pricked in their hearts. (Acts 2:37)
4. While faith is not mentioned, the very fact that they were pricked in their hearts and said, "men and brethren what shall we do?" And that they gladly received his word shows they believed. (Acts 2:37)
5. They were told to repent. (Acts 2:38)
6. They were baptized. (Acts 2:41)

7. They continued steadfast. (Acts 2:42)
8. They were recipients of salvation because "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47)

This, then is the combination of the Key, and the order of that combination as used by the first church of Christ of the New Testament pattern.

The Changing of the Combination

But what a change the centuries have brought. When through a gradual apostacy the Roman Catholic church came into being they changed the order.

Instead of going, they brought little babies and performed upon them what they called baptism for their salvation. Then, when the child reached the age of twelve put him in a confirmation class and taught him.

Their order is a departure from the New Testament order and runs as follows:

Teaching, hearing, believing, repenting, continuing.

The denominational churches that spring from the Catholic church, called Pede-Baptists, because they practice the baptism of infants, also follow the same order, perverting the combination by bringing babies to be baptized for their salvation and later teaching them.

It can not be said too forcibly that never was a person ever baptized by the New Testament church who did not first hear by being taught or being preached to. Jesus said, "Go teach, preach, he that *believeth* and is baptized *shall be saved*."

The Baptists have restored the order of going, teaching and hearing, but have also changed the order by putting repentance before faith. They base their action on Mark 1:15, which reads:

"And saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and *believe* the gospel."

At first reading this would seem to substantiate their practice, but further and more careful consideration does not. Rather it reveals their order to be unscriptural.

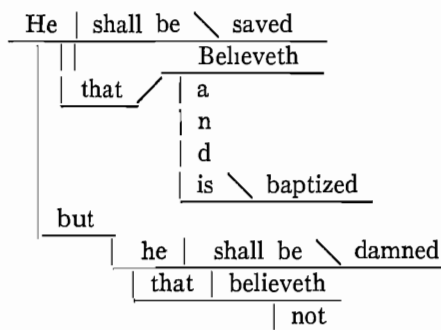
Paul commanded us to: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

The reason for the Baptist putting repentance before faith and basing it on Mark 1:15, is that they do not rightly divide God's Word. Mark 1:15 refers to a time before the cross, before the gospel had come into its fulness in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Since the facts of the gospel had not been fulfilled at the time referred to in Mark 1:15, all that could be said was, "Repent and believe the gospel when it comes in its fullness."

After the cross, after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the order of the New Testament church was to believe the gospel and then repent.

Then another change in the order or combination was made by the Baptists in that they teach that you are saved before you are baptized, declaring that you are baptized *because* you are saved. If this were true then the commission should have read, "He that believeth and is saved, shall be baptized." But it reads "He that believeth and is baptized *shall* be saved."

Salvation, according to the commission of Christ is predicated upon both believing and being baptized. Shall we diagram the sentence:



Thus it is manifestly clear that salvation does not precede baptism, but rather it follows baptism.

Since this is true then salvation is based upon a penitent baptized believer who must continue faithfully to the end. And it is not scripturally true that one who is "once saved is always saved," or "he who is once in grace is always in grace," or that he can never fall.

Yet Christ taught we must endure to the end to be saved. Paul said:

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27)

Again Paul said: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12)

Peter said: "If ye do these things, ye shall never *fall*." (2 Peter 1:10)

The escape from falling is conditioned on the principle "If" ye do these things.

There remains a brief consideration of the Church of Christ. In 1809 there began a movement to restore the Church of the first century by discarding human creeds, confessions of faith, books of discipline, and decrees of church councils, synods, presbyteries and religious conferences.

This came to be known as the Restoration movement. Among the many things restored after the New Testament pattern was the return to the divine order and scriptural combination of the use of the Key of the Kingdom. A study of the accompanying chart will give a graphic presentation of the restored order.

The Economy of the Gospel

Note:

On the chart on page 59A are listed the eight conversions recorded in the book of Acts. Under each conversion is listed only the numbers of the acts of obedience actually mentioned in each case. It will be seen that only number six, or baptism is mentioned in all eight records of conversion.

However, all were taught or preached to, even though, in some cases such teaching or preaching was not specifically mentioned. Since all were taught, it naturally and logically follows that all heard, although hearing is only actually mentioned in the cases of the Pentecostians, Cornelius, Lydia and the Corinthians. And so the other items not mentioned might be so considered.

Does this mean that each one was saved in a different manner? Positively not. God is not the author of confusion. There is being demonstrated to us here the Economy of the Gospel.

Each hearer was only told to do, that which he had not already done. What he had done, in complying with the whole range of required obedience, was not mentioned. All compiled with the same

requirements to be saved. There was a uniform pattern of obedience.

The same law of obedience is still binding on us today. Christ has neither changed the items, nor the order of scriptural obedience to the gospel.

The chart presents the principle departures from the divine order of obedience as practiced by certain groups in Christendom and the restoration of that divine order by the church of the Philadelphia, or Restoration Period.

vs. 8 "I know thy works." Their works were so pleasing to Christ that, even though they had a little strength, he had set before the church an open door that no man could shut.

The Restoration movement has not had the wealth and strength of ecclesiastical power that the denominational world, but because they have kept his words they have an open door.

"Thou hast kept my word." The Restoration movement has stressed as its motto, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak, and where the Bible is silent, we are silent." They have discarded all human creeds and books of discipline and taken the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

"Thou hast not denied my name." The Restoration movement threw away all denominational names and called the church, "The Church of Christ" and the individual followers of Christ "Christian," because that was speaking according to God's Word.

This church and the church of Smyrna are the only churches for which there is no reproof.

vs. 3:9 Then follows a word of encouragement and exhortation.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie, behold, I will make them to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

The Restoration movement has constantly faced the claim of the denominational world that they, too, are Jews." Note the word "Jew" refers to those who are the elect of God.

Like the other church without reproof, the church of Smyrna, we find two conditions that are repeated in Philadelphia.

First, they in Smyrna were opposed and persecuted by false brethren, who said they were "Jews," but in reality were "the synagogue of Satan."

Second, they were about to have great tribulation (tribulation ten days). This second condition is found in Philadelphia also,

<i>Scriptural Record</i>	<i>The Gospel—God's Power unto Salvation (Rom. 1:16)</i>	<i>Effect on Hearer</i>	<i>Conditions Met by Man</i>	<i>God's Offer of Grace</i>
Acts 2, The Jews on Pentecost	Peter preached Christ 1. God approved (22) 2. Crucified (23) 3. Raised (32)	Many "pricked in their heart" asked, "What shall we do?" (37)	Must "Repent and be baptized" (38)	1. Remission of sins (38) 2. Gift of the Holy Spirit (38)
Acts 3, Other Jews in Jerusalem	Peter preached Christ 1. Rejected of men (13, 14) 2. Raised (15) 3. Prophecy fulfilled (18)	Recognition of guilt implied by response	Must "Repent and turn" or "be converted" (19)	1. Blot out sins (19) 2. Seasons of refreshing (19)
Acts 8, the Samaritans	Philip preached Christ (5) and "Things concerning the kingdom of God" (12)	"	1. They believed (12) 2. They were baptized (12)	The blessings extended to all penitent, baptized believers (Cf. Acts 2: 38)
Acts 8, The Ethiopian	Philip preached Jesus (35)	"	1. Confessed his faith (37) 2. Was baptized (38)	1. Blessings of Acts 2: 38 or 3: 19 2. Joy (8: 39)
Acts 9, 22 and 24, Saul of Tarsus	Christ gave proof of his deity (4, 5)	Recognition of guilt demonstrated by response (22: 10)	1. Confessed Jesus (22: 10) 2. Fasted and prayed 3. Repented (22: 10) 4. Was baptized (22:16)	1. Blessings of Acts 2: 38 2. Peace (9: 19; Rom. 5: 1)
Acts 10 and 11, Cornelius	Peter preached "Peace by Jesus Christ" (10: 31ff.) Paul preached Christ to her (14) (Cf. 1 Cor. 2: 2)	Recognition of guilt implied by response	"Baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (10:48)	Blessings of Acts 2: 38 or 3: 19
Acts 16, Lydia		Recognition of guilt implied by response	1. Attended to things heard (14) 2. Was baptized (15)	Blessings of Acts 2: 38 or 3: 19
Acts 16, The Jailer of Philippi	Paul preached the word of the Lord (31, 32)	Recognized guilt by washing stripes of Paul and Silas and in obedience to the word (33)	Was baptized (33)	Blessings of Acts 2: 38 or 3: 19

for verse 10 reads, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

But there is the great difference. Those in Smyrna were to suffer "unto death," therefore the promise to the overcomers was that they "should not be hurt of the second death." There was no open door of escape for them.

But the church in Philadelphia, was to be kept from the impending trial, whatever the nature of it.

vs. 11 "Behold I come quickly." This great announcement explains how this church will enjoy exemption from the coming tribulation.

Since there is only one more church period to come, He directs this church's attention to his second advent. This solemn call prepares the church for the final call, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," the benediction given the church of Laodicea.

"Hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown."

This again takes us back to (Isaiah 22:22). There Shebna and Eliakim are the characters. Shebna had the "crown," he was "over the House," and wore the "robe" and "girdle" of office; but God said "I will clothe Eliakim with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit the government into his hands (Isa. 22:15, 20-22). Thus Shebna's crown was taken by another. So the Philadelphia church is warned lest some one take her crown. This crown was not the crown of royalty (Diadema in the Greek), but the garland crown (Stephanos) given as a reward. In Greek, a garland or crown was a wreath or chaplet. It formed the prize at the Greek games. Hence it became a symbol of victory. This reminds us of Paul's exhortation: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receive the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible," etc. (I Cor. 9:24-27).

vs. 12 "Becoming a pillar" is a term implying strength, permanence and honor. This speaks of finality, as the Bible does not speak of men as being pillars in His temple while on earth.

"He shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the

name of My God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God, and I will write upon him my new name."

These promises are great beyond the power of words to express.

Since the key of David and David, himself, comes into prominence in this church period, we are reminded of his longing for the House of God. (Psa. 23:6) and the one thing he desired and sought after was that he might "Dwell" in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. (Psa. 27:4)

The promise to become a pillar in the temple, refers not to any material temple, but in heaven. The New Jerusalem has no temple in it, because it is all temple.

The promise "I will write upon him" is interesting when we remember that as one enters the church the spiritual temple below, three names are recorded in the baptismal formula—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When he enters the kingdom above, three names are again written upon him, the name of God, of the heavenly city, and Christ's heavenly name.

The promise of the new name is again connected with that city in the last chapter of Revelation "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads." (Rev. 22:3-4)

vs. 13 Again he uncovers to us the fact that He is not addressing just one local congregation, but taking the church at Philadelphia as a symbol of an entire period of church history, which we have found corresponds to the restoration period that followed immediately after the denominational epoch called Sardis.

The Laodicean Church

Text (3:14-22)

14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. 17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. 19 As many as I love, I reprove and chasten:

be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 21 He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

While in the first four churches, we are given to see the development of a positive evil within the church, ranging from the "deeds of the Nicolaitanes" in Ephesus, "the synagogue of Satan" in Smyrna, "the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes" and "the doctrine of Baalam" in Pergamos, the "depths of Satan" in Thyatira; so with the Sardis church we have revealed to us the development of a state of decline, beginning with Sardis, "having a name and are dead," and reaching the final state in Laodicea in which the church is so lukewarm that "it is wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

vs. 14, 15 The Lord here presents Himself as "The Amen, the Faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God."

These characters are not taken from the seven-fold description of Chapter 1:13-16, but they are taken from other revelations of the Lord Jesus Christ found in that chapter. There He is presented as the "Alpha and Omega," the "Beginning and the ending" (vs. 8), and also as "The faithful Witness." (vs. 5)

Here Christ calls himself by one of the names of God. It is a remarkable name. It is found in Isaiah 65:16. It is found in the midst of a prophecy of the overwhelming judgments that are to fall upon apostate Israel.

So here in the last church period, Christ uses the name of God when judgment is to be meted out. In Isaiah 65:17, he says, "For behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth." So following the Laodecean there is to be a new creation.

Again this title "The Amen," describes God as the One who accomplishes all His purposes and all His promises. The Lord is this God, the Amen. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen!" (II Cor. 1:20) And most appropriately he presents Himself as "The Amen" in the closing period of church history. The very use of this title, gives us the cue of this being

the seventh and final stage of the history of the church in the closing days of the gospel age. God is about to ring down the curtain in the history of the church.

He presents Himself as the "Faithful and True Witness." The witness of the church had been dimmed by her departure into compromise, paganism, division of denominationalism and, after a brief return to adherence to His Word and name in the Restoration period, gone into total eclipse in the lukewarmness of the final epoch.

Therefore He wants the church to know He is keeping the witness clear, by introducing Himself as the "Faithful and true Witness."

"The beginning of the Creation of God." Here He presents Himself, not as a part of the creation, but the uncreated principle of creation from whom it (creation) took form.

Nay there is also here the added and deeper thought, that He is the beginning of the new creation in His redemptive work of bringing many sons into glory. (Heb. 2:10) He is the first born among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

"*I know thy works.*" In every letter we have, without exception, this soul-searching declaration. Christ not only knows the works of each individual congregation, but here he is declaring he knows the works of the last church period. This is because He knows all things from the beginning. He looked down the ages and saw this last age of the gospel dispensation and saw the paralyzing effects of lukewarmness.

The loss of first love, of the Ephesian period, reaches its ultimate end in the awful lukewarmness of the last and final age of this dispensation.

vs. 16, 17 The Sharp word of reproof. Usually, in the other letters, the third division of the seven-fold division of the letters, is a word of commendation, followed by the word of reproof. But in this letter the reproof comes before the commendation. It would seem that Christ is so displeased with the final stage of the church that he hastens to the reproof.

Thou art neither hot nor cold; I would thou were cold or hot, so because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

Tepid religion is nauseating to Christ. He looked with loathing on the Pharisees of the days of His flesh, who looked upon themselves as religious paragons while their hearts were not right with God, either spiritually or doctrinally.

The Laodiceans were not warm in their affection for Christ, they were not burning with zeal in His cause; nor yet were they cold and altogether heartless. If they had been outright cold, it would have been easier for Him to deal with them, and there would have been a greater likelihood of their discovering their condition.

Ignorance of its true condition was to be a characteristic of the last church period. How true this has become in our day and how completely fulfilled. The mass of people today do not realize their lost condition. They live in the midst of delusion about their lost estate. Thinking itself rich when in reality it was poor; thinking itself well supplied with all that a church of Christ should have, when in reality it was destitute of the most essential things.

This church is just the opposite of that in Smyrna, which was seemingly in poverty and tribulation, but in reality was rich. There was no tribulation in Laodicea, no persecution, no synagogue of Satan to molest them. They were having a very easy and comfortable time.

How true of this age. The church has fine buildings, up-to-date facilities, the services are carried out in the best approved form. But it is hard to get this kind of church today to realize their low estate, spiritually speaking.

vs. 18 But Christ does not abandon them, but says, "I counsel thee." He calls them to repent, coupling that call with a most tender word of exhortation. He had declared them "poor, blind and naked," but immediately offers to supply them with "gold" that they might be rich and white raiment that they might be suitably clad, and with eye salve, that they might see. He offers them:

"Gold tried in the fire" In Psa. 19:7-11, David declares the value of the Word of God—"More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold." But the church today is generally uninterested in the gold of God's word. Modernist preachers stand in the pulpit preaching platitudes and the hearers take dress for gold, and pewter for silver. Hence the appalling spiritual poverty.

"White raiment that thou mayest be clothed." Rev. 19:8 explains that the fine linen, clean and white, represents the righteousness of saints. In the last age when so many are rejecting blood atonement, no wonder he speaks of them as being naked.

"Eye-salve, that thou mayest see." The advice to "anoint thine eyes with eye-salve" suggests that the church of the last period is destitute of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for John speaks of the

Holy Spirit as the Unction (or anointing) from Christ, the Holy One. (I John 2:20)

vs. 19 Sharp as had been His rebuke to this lukewarm church, his rebuke was a proof of his unfailing love.

He calls them to be zealous, instead of lukewarm. He calls them to repent. He adds a final word. (Rev. 3:20)

vs. 20 This marvelous invitation needs consideration. First, it is not that Christ is outside that chiefly impresses us, but that He is so near, even at the very door, and not only so, but is ready to enter instantly it is opened. "Just outside the door," but the lukewarmness of the church fails to invite Him in. This is the only church of the seven that keeps Christ outside. The self-satisfied church is "inside," the door is closed, and Christ is knocking for admission.

The second thing that impresses us is that this invitation indicates this is the last church period and Christ is about to return and he "stands at the door and knocks." He is about to come in his second advent. Note: He wants to come in and sup with the saints. When Christ returns we are to sup with him at the wedding feast. (Luke 12:35-40) (Rev. 19:7-9)

There is no real commendation in this letter. There was nothing to commend a lukewarm church.

Next comes a word of encouragement. The message is that it has a special word to the individual—"If any man."

In Thyatira the Lord recognizes a remnant of faithful ones, "the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine;" and in Sardis, "there are a few names which have not defiled their garments," but in Laodicea there is a word of strong encouragement to the individual who, amidst general indifference to the things of God, longs for personal fellowship with the Lord.

It would seem that the indifference of lukewarmness of this last period would be so widespread that his encouragement would have to be given to the individual instead to the entire church.

vs. 21 Next comes the greatest of all the promises to any church.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His Throne." How significant this statement becomes since it is the closing promise!

Since He is about to return—stands even at the door and knocks—He promises them who overcome to sit down and reign with Him, since at His return the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

The devil had promised Him the kingdoms of this world in the temptation, but Christ rejected it, for the price of that glory was the worship of the devil.

Christ refused the offer from the devil, that He might wait for this glorious hour when He, as an overcomer, with all the overcomers, should have earned the right to reign.

Paul said, "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." (II Tim. 2:12)

Lastly, we hear the final urgent call. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit," etc. Like the declaration, "I know thy works," this call is found in all the seven letters. It is a stirring call to the churches of this Laodicean period. Seven times He repeats this injunction, lest we lose sight of the history of the whole church throughout the seven periods of her life from Pentecost to the end.

Thus we have seen that these letters foretold the main developments and principle eras of the church down through the gospel age.

Also they were written to admonish, encourage, warn, guide, reprove, and call us to heed, to the end that we may pass the time of our sojourn here working out our salvation with fear and trembling, having respect to the "recompense of the reward."

As each of Jacob's sons had different personalities and these personalities pictured the characteristics of the tribes descending from them, so do these seven churches, through their local conditions, symbolize the conditions in each of the seven great church periods.

PART II

CHAPTER IV

THE VISION OF THE THRONE

Text (4:1-11)

1 After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking

with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter. 2 Straightaway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; 3 and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon. 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. 9 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever, 10 the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning with this chapter we meet a tremendous change in the nature of the "unfolding" of the apocalypse. The chapter is filled with imagery of the most striking nature. The scene has changed entirely.

No longer does John see the Christ walking among the candlesticks, but in spirit he is permitted to look through a door opened in heaven and behold a throne! The throne is the central object of this scene, with all symbolism taking its place and significance with reference to that throne.

The entire symbolism here makes it very evident that the main purpose of this vision given John was to reveal the ascended and glorified Christ in the act of occupying His throne, at His Father's right hand.

It was of this enthronement which Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto

my Lord, *sit thou on my right hand*, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:32-36)

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, then, we have the "uncovering" of the transcendently glorious event fulfilling the prophecy, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies Thy footstool," (Psalm 110:1),—the event which the Spirit-endowed Peter proclaimed in his first sermon on the birthday of the church and later declared in his epistle, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him. (I Peter 3:22)

To this Paul adds his Spirit-filled testimony, "and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, *and set him at his own right hand* in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." (Ephesians 1:19-21)

In the light of these scriptures it is crystal clear that the group of visions beginning here in the fourth chapter, and embracing the entire program of the seals and trumpets, has for its starting point the ascension of the risen Christ into heaven and His occupation of the throne, of which He only could be worthy, at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens.

This group of visions has then, to do with those events which began to occur from his coronation at Pentecost.

In the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, very much depends upon where we locate this vision of the throne and the book.

By the references we have mentioned, it is impossible therefore, without setting aside the plainest declarations of the scripture, to place the occupying by Christ of His throne on God's right hand at any other time than upon His ascension into heaven.

Christ, himself connects this vision with the one preceding. In His letter to the church of the Laodicean period He said, "Even as I also *overcame* and am *set down* with my Father in His throne." (Rev. 3:21) The past tenses of the verbs used in this verse declare plainly that His occupation of His Father's throne had already

taken place when He appeared unto John in the vision on the isle of Patmos.

vs. 1 "After this," or "these things," as in the Revised version, means, after the letters addressed to the seven churches, this new and startlingly different vision was given to John. While the fourth chapter begins a second prophetic portion, it is not itself prophetic, but introductory.

"The first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking to me," seems to be the same voice of which we read in (Rev. 1:10) "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet."

That voice now summons John, evidently to pass through the open door, by saying, "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter."

But John, in the flesh, could not obey such a summons, so we read:

vs. 2 "And immediately, I was in the Spirit." Since the first vision of the seven-fold portrait of Christ came to John in the Spirit (Rev. 1:10-18) so this second vision of Christ, portrayed as now sitting on the throne, could only come to John "in the Spirit."

The voice called to John to leave the realm of the natural man and enter the region of the supernatural. These words indicate that, between the first vision and the present series of visions, there was an interval in the which John was in his natural state.

This experience of John recalls such an experience by the apostle Paul. (In II Corinthians 12:1-5) "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to *visions* and *revelations* of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven.

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth). How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities."

We must note this fact very carefully, that John, after his first vision left the spirit and reverted to his natural state and the second series of visions could not be given until he was caught up, as it were "in the Spirit" a second time.

We can never arrive at a true understanding of Revelation until we realize that the book does not give a regularly progressive unfolding of the future, but is divided into a number of visions, each complete in itself, and each beginning, not where the last one left off, but at some starting point, best suited to the series of events "uncovered" in that particular vision.

"Behold a throne!" introduces the special object of attention in this vision of the door opened in heaven. Truly, the throne is the central object of this scene. This becomes all the more evident when we note that in chapters four and five, the word "throne" occurs no less than seventeen times!

Thus, this rebellious earth has revealed to it, through the apocalypse, that there is a throne in heaven and that all things, both in heaven and on the earth are under Christ's authority. Did not Christ declare upon His departure to occupy this throne, "All power hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth"? (Matthew 28:18)

Truly we must ever remind ourselves that this book is a revelation, or "uncovering" of Jesus Christ. His participation in the government of the universe is but dimly seen by the eyes of men. This fact is known, and can only be known by the medium of revelation.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Christ. Christ, in the days of His flesh said, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." (John 16:13-14)

So John had to be caught up in the Spirit to have this revealing, by the Spirit, of the coronated Christ.

Christ has given us here a symbolic presentation of his two-fold work of creation and recreation or redemption. The symbolism of this vision reveals that redemption has been provided by the payment of the ransom price—"the blood of Christ" hence He is presented as the Lamb that was slain in the fifth chapter, and "by His own blood, He entered in once into the Holy place, having obtained eternal redemption." (Heb. 9:12)

But there still remained many things to be accomplished before "the redemption of the purchased possession. (Eph. 1:14) Unto this day of redemption we have been sealed, said Paul, by the Holy Spirit of God. (Eph. 4:30)

Between those two phases of His work of redemption—the pay-

ment of the purchase price by the Lamb of God who has shed His blood, and the taking of possession of the whole redeemed creation, is to be found the entire history of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation is the uncovering of the events between these two phases.

vs. 3 Just as John had given us a seven-fold description of Christ walking among the candlesticks, before he uncovered the history of the seven church periods, so here he describes the Christ sitting upon the right hand of God, before he proceeds to uncover the events contained in the seven seals, and the seven trumpets.

He said, "And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

The three stones mentioned here are, of course symbols. Doubtless their meaning is found in their colors.

The jasper stone is mentioned again in Revelation 21:11 where it is described as a stone most precious and of dazzling brightness, clear as crystal. It portrayed the wondrous light of the Holy Jerusalem, and that light it declares "is the glory of God." Evidently that is its meaning here. The jasper represented the glory of God.

The sardius is a dark red stone. Orpheus speaks of "the blood colored sardius." How appropriate, since Christ is presented in the fifth chapter as "the Lamb as it had been slain," that the blood-red sardius should appear in relation to the throne.

Since the rainbow is green in color "like unto an emerald," it may indicate that the events that are about to be "uncovered" have to do with the earth, since green is the color of earth, as blue is the color heaven.

"There was a rainbow round about the throne."

Much prominence is given to the rainbow by John. He was impressed by the fact that it was a complete circle. The rainbow we see on the storm cloud is incomplete—a half circle. This half rainbow is a token of the covenant God made with Noah and his sons, as well as with every living creature. (Gen. 9:8-17) This lengthy description in a book like Genesis noted for its brevity, testifies to its importance as a symbol.

The half circle rainbow was a token that the storm had already passed over the place where the beholders stand.

The complete, full-circle rainbow which encircles the throne

of God is visible to those over whom the spiritual storms have passed, because the onlookers had the blood of their passover Lamb upon them. The storm of God's judgment had already passed over the place where the redeemed stand and can never come again.

This complete rainbow is a token of Christ's covenant made with every redeemed Christian.

vs. 4, 5 John saw twenty-four seats, or literally "thrones." The central throne was encompassed by twenty-four lesser thrones. And upon these thrones he saw twenty-four elders sitting. Since these are so closely associated with the four living creatures, their identity will be better considered after an explanation of these four living creatures is given in verse six.

That they were clothed with white raiment speaks of their ineffable purity. In the fact that they were seated upon thrones and had on their heads crowns of gold, indicate they share the reign of Him whose throne they encircle. Since incense is a type of the "prayers of saints" (Rev. 5:8), it would seem that they are divine agents through whom the prayers of the saints reach God.

Such a function of divine being can be better understood when we recall that Daniel had his prayer delayed twenty-one days by the prince of the Kingdom of Persia. We read in (Daniel 10:12-13) "Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am *come for thy* words."

But the prince of the Kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days, but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me."

This brings to our minds Paul's declaration, "For we wrestle not against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. 6:12)

Evidently these are heavenly princes who have power with God in respect to our prayers. When Jacob wrestled successfully with the heavenly visitor until the breaking of day, the latter said unto Jacob, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a *prince* hast thou power with God and with men and hath prevailed." (Genesis 32:28)

So these princes in John's vision had power with God.

They undoubtedly belonged to the same class of heavenly intelligence as the four living creatures for the following reasons:

First, when the four living creatures gave glory to Him that sat on the throne, the twenty-four elders also worship Him. (Rev. 4:9, 10)

Second, They have harps and vials full of odors the same as the four living creatures.

Third, When the four living creatures say, "Amen," the twenty-four elders worship Him who is on the throne.

Fourth, When an innumerable company of the redeemed, praise God for salvation, the angels, elders and four living creatures are above the throne and not counted among the redeemed. (Rev. 7:9-12)

Fifth, They do not praise God for their own redemption. Lange on Revelation, Page 152, says the "us" of Rev. 5:9 is an interpolation. It has been found that the oldest Greek manuscripts give an entirely different meaning than the authorized version.

Tischendorf, Alford and Lange translate as follows:

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God by thy blood,
out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,
and hast made them unto our God kings and priests, and
they shall reign on the earth."

They do not praise the Lamb for their own redemption, but for the redemption of the world.

Sixth, In Revelation, 14th Chapter, the Lamb has one hundred and forty and four thousand saints about Him, who sing a new song *before* the throne, and *before* the four living creatures, and the elders. (Rev. 14:1-3) Only the redeemed could sing that new song; the elders did not join in the singing.

So we see they are about the throne, associated with the angels, but not with the martyrs. They are always separated from those who praise God for redemption.

This distinction reveals their character. They belong to the heavenly intelligences, to the same class as the cherubim. They are princes of heaven, and not of men.

The number twenty-four is probably associated with the twenty-four courses of the priests of the temple, which was a pattern of things in the heavens. Here in this vision we are looking at the heavenly things themselves (Hebrew 9:23) which no natural eye could behold.

The number twenty-four is the result of multiplying the factors

of twelve and two. The spiritual theocracy of God is represented in the Old Testament by the heads or elders of the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the New Testament the Christocracy of the Kingdom is headed by the twelve apostles.

We are not looking at objects that bear any physical resemblance whatsoever to the heavenly things. For instance, there could be no physical likeness between the glorified Christ and "A Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes."

What we are trying to do is to decipher a description *written in hieroglyphics*.

The seven lamps of fire are said to be the seven Spirits of God, which we found in the study of this symbol in the first chapter, represents the fullness of the Spirit as manifested in Christ.

vs. 6, 7 John saw four beasts, or to be exact, "four living creatures." The term "beasts" applied to these beings is incorrect, particularly in view of the fact that the same term is used to portray the monsters of iniquity as seen in chapters thirteen, seventeen and nineteen. The Greek word in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation is a different term. The Greek word for "beasts" is entirely different.

The word used for the four creatures is "Zoa," meaning "living forms," or "living ones."

We are now ready to decipher the hieroglyphic of "Living Creatures." Shall we let the Bible be its own interpreter.

In the first chapter of Ezekial, we find that the exiled prophet of the Old Testament dispensation saw, by the river Chebar of Babylon, the same beings that John portrayed in Revelation. While there were minor differences, the general features are identical. Both prophets, Ezekial and John saw (1) four living creatures; both saw (2) four faces, like those of a man, a lion, an ox or calf, and a flying eagle. The living creatures, described by each prophet, are full of eyes, (3) each are winged. There are minor differences in the wings: John saw six wings, Ezekial saw four wings and a pair of hands under the wings, making six members. Also the Seraphim of Isaiah sixth chapter had six wings. Finally, the same Greek term is used to represent the four living creatures of both Ezekial and John. It follows then that if we can ascertain the meaning of the symbols beheld by Ezekial and Isaiah, we shall thereby "uncover" the meaning of the same symbol in Revelation.

In the tenth chapter of Ezekial, the prophet speaking of the heavenly beings that he beheld the second time, says in verse 22,

"and the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves." In verse 15, he also says these are "the living creatures I saw by the river Chebar." In verse twenty, he says, "I knew they were Cherubim."

Isaiah says they were seraphim. It is also interesting to note that in Isaiah's description he also saw the throne in heaven and Him that sat thereon, and above the throne were the seraphim, and he also mentions the door. (Isaiah 6:1-4)

Therefore, we know positively that these four living creatures are cherubim, or seraphim, the highest order of the angelic hosts. We know very little about them, but they are always near the throne of God.

The cherubim were first seen at the gate of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24), guarding the way to the tree of life with a flaming sword.

In the tabernacle cherubim hovered over the mercy seat and were embroidered on the curtains. God is addressed in (I Samuel 4:4) as the one who dwells between the cherubim. His Shekinah glory, in the Holy of Holies, was manifested from between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. In Ezekial the brightness of the Lord is represented as attending the cherubim. In Rev. 5:6, the Lamb stands "in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures.

The forms seen by Ezekial and John have a symbolic significance. It may be they have to do with both the material creation and the final redemption. (Rev. 4:7) Their combined make up embraces the resemblance of the man, the lion (chief of wild beasts), the ox (chief of tame beasts) and the eagle (chief of the air).

They indicate possibly, that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now . . . waiting for the adoption to wit, the redemption of our body." (Romans 8:22, 23)

vs. 8-10 They were "full of eyes before and behind" in order to be able to see all things, their wings were always in motion, indicating tireless activity and like Isaiah's four living creatures, so John's four creatures utter the same "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

They praise Him as the one "which was, and is, and is to come." They proclaim Him as the self existant one—the I AM, and Rev. 4:9. They praise him as the eternal One.

vs. 11 They ascribe all glory to Him as the Creator.

While the authorized version reads: "And for thy pleasure they

are and were created," the Revised Version says, "Because of thy will they are, and were created." His will was the creative cause.

This well may be called the "Oratorio of Creation."

CHAPTER V

THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS

Text (5:1-14)

Introduction

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: 5 and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. 6 And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came, and he taketh it out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth. 11 And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. 14 And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

The last chapter which we have just studied centers its symbolism around the throne in the "way of the Holiest of all," where the crucified and risen Christ sits on God's right hand.

While in the earthly tabernacle there were the altar of burnt

offering, the laver and the holy place, with its furniture, consisting of the seven-armed candlestick, the table of show bread and its altar of incense, here in the vision of the most Holy Place, or heaven itself, these aforementioned pieces of furniture and the veil are gone. Paul tells us in (Hebrews 9:8) that the veil in the tabernacle and, later the temple on earth were to pass. "The Holy Spirit thus signifying that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as yet the first tabernacle was yet standing."

Furthermore Paul declared this veil before the Holiest of all represented the prepared body of Jesus Christ. (Heb. 10:5) He added, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say His flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," et. (Heb. 10:19-22)

When Christ was crucified, and yielded up the spirit as a ransom for sin, the veil was rent in twain from top to bottom. So in this vision there is no veil. We are looking into heaven itself "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." (Heb. 6:20)

"For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. 9:24) So the first part of the vision reveals Christ seated at the right hand of God.

In the fourth chapter, which covers the first part of the vision, the only activity is the worship of the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, or princes of God. The theme of their worship is "Creation," as revealed by their anthem:

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou hast *created* all things and because of thy will they are and were created." (Rev. 4:11)

If we had no other proof that these are heavenly intelligences and not redeemed men, this anthem would establish it. They sang not of redemption, for no redemption was ever needed by an obedient angel and no fallen angel was ever promised it. As created beings, higher than man, they sang of the glory of God's creation.

While the first part of this great vision of a door opened in heaven is centered around the throne and the worshipping angels,

in the second part the attention is directed to "a book," or scroll (such being the form of books in that day). This scroll is seen in "the right hand of him that sat upon the throne." It was written within and in the backside and sealed with seven seals.

The very atmosphere of this part of the vision assures us that this scroll represents something of transcendent importance. This sealed scroll being a book containing the hidden mysteries of the future, was unrevealed to both angels and men.

vs. 1, 2 But the contents were of such grave import that a strong angel proclaimed with a loud voice: "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"

The angel's interest in having the book opened reminds us of what Peter said concerning the desire of angels to look into man's salvation: "Which things the angels desire to look into." (I Peter 1:12)

vs. 3 John records that no man in heaven, nor in earth was able to open the scroll, neither to look therein." The word "man" does not occur in the Greek. Literally it reads, "no one" was found, either among angels, or among men.

This recalls Christ's own statement while in the flesh, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man (again the word man is not in the Greek) no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." (Matt. 24:36)

Again in (Acts 1:7), while addressing His apostles He said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

vs. 4 This caused John not only to weep, but to weep much. His distress shows that the finding of one worthy to open the book was a matter of greatest consequence.

What a revelation of John's interest in the future of the church, to which he had given so many years of labor and of which he was the last apostle! He was now old and about ready to depart. His intense anxiety to be able to penetrate the secrets of the future, as it related to the fortunes of the church which he loved better than life itself, is understandable.

His burdened spirit implores with a flood of tears that some one might be found worthy to open and read the scroll. And the longing of his loving heart is answered.

vs. 5 And one of the elders (one of the twenty-four) said unto him, "Weep not: behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to lose the seals thereof."

One of the twenty-four elders, or one of the heavenly princes, so speaking to John makes clear that the duty of instructing a prophet in things pertaining to spiritual matters has never been laid upon a human being under either the old or the new Testament Covenants. Such a duty marks out these elders as being heavenly beings.

vs. 6 The prophet turns to see the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and to his amazement, the Christ, who is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, now is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)

At Christ's second coming He will return as the victorious Sovereign—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, but in the mediatorial reign John saw Him as "the Lamb that was slain."

This Lamb had seven horns. A horn is ever a symbol of power—a symbol of kings, kingdoms or power. Seven horns here, then symbolize power without limitation, since seven is the symbol of perfection.

"The seven eyes" he says "are the seven Spirits of God." We have already, in the study of chapter one, learned that the seven Spirits symbolize the fullness of the Spirit without measure which Christ possessed. The sending of this Holy Spirit to the earth (John here says "sent forth into all the earth"), Christ promised just before His departure.

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when He is come, he will reprove the world of sin and of judgment." (John 16:7, 8)

The Christ makes known His wisdom through the Holy Spirit. "Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13)

So we see "the seven horns," signified the perfection of sovereign power, and the "seven eyes," or "seven spirits of God" signified perfection of wisdom. The combined symbols represented what Paul said of Christ: "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Cor. 1:24)

vs. 7, 8 John saw the Lamb take the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." This, truly, was the investiture of the King. This proclaimed His right to rule and control the unfolding events of the age to come.

Upon Christ taking the Book, the twenty-four angelic princes fell down before the Lamb, having golden harps and vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints.

This angelic function was dealt with in the fourth chapter. They are here represented as presenting the prayers of the saints on the earth, before the throne. What a comforting thought that our petitions are presented before the throne of grace by none other than these princes of God! What heavenly import and dignity are given our prayers.

The Heavenly Doxologies *Text (5:9-14)*

These elders sang a new song; new, because it is in praise of a new triumph of Christ, who has been found worthy to open the seals which are to "uncover" the events of the future.

ing the "Oratorio of Creation," here there is being sung the "Oratorio

Whereas, in the fourth chapter, we hear the angelic princes singing of Redemption."

Music lovers will understand that an oratorio is a musical composition in which solos and choruses are sung in accompaniment to instruments. Here we see Cherubim and Seraphim and angelic princes, with their golden harps, together constituting a heavenly choir, chanting celestial music.

Note the arrangement and order of these musical numbers.

The oratorio begins with a quartet, the four living creatures, singing the seraph's song. "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." (Rev. 4:8)

This is followed by the massed singing and playing of the twenty-four princes.

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor, and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. 4:11)

Thus we see the first part of the oratorio is devoted to the subject of the creation. The created angelic intelligences, having never needed nor experienced redemption, could sing only in praise of their creator.

Following the singing of creation there is heard a solo voice of a strong angel;

"Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (Rev. 5:2)

Then follows the gladsome response by one of the elders:

"Weep not: behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed (or overcome) to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof." (Rev. 5:5)

When the Lamb takes the book out of the hand of the Creator, the quartet and the choir of heavenly princes break forth in unison, singing the new song.

"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made them to be unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9, 10)

Then the entire angelic choir, consisting of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousand of thousands bursts forth in majestic chorus, which must have reverberated throughout the corridors of glory. They sang perfectly as one voice and with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

Then comes the grand finale of this stirring oratorio as it comes to a swelling crescendo. In this concluding epilogue of this transcendently glorious oratorio the "four living creatures," or seraphim and cherubim; the elders, or angelic princes; the myriads of angels, heavenly creatures a little higher creation than man (Hebrews 2:6, 7); and every created thing which is in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them join in mighty chorus in praising both Creator and Redeemer:

"Blessing and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne (the Creator) and unto the Lamb (the Redeemer), for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13)

Then as the heavenly oratorio, like the sound of many waters, dies away, there is heard the sound of a great and grand "Amen." It is chanted by the "four living creatures," or the highest range of God's angelic intelligences, the cherubim and seraphim.

Then there seems to fall a great hush and breathless silence as

the twenty-four heavenly princes fall down to worship Him who liveth forever and ever.

Truly we have been listening through the open door to the oratorio of the Choir Invisible!

This instrumented Heavenly choir has prepared us for the opening of the seals. How fitting this should be:

The prophets of old prophesied to the tune of instrumental music:

"Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them; and they shall prophecy."
(I Samuel 10:5)

The hand of the Lord came upon Elisha when the minstrel played.

"But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him." (II Kings 3:15)

The sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun prophesied with harp, psalteries and cymbals (I Chron. 25:3-6)

And Habakkuk closed his prophesies with instructions "to the chief singer on my stringed instruments." (Habakkuk 3:19)

As the prophets of old spoke to the accompaniment of instrumental music so the opening of the seals was preceded by the massed choirs of heaven and earth singing this wondrously soul-inspiring oratorio.

No wonder Christ in the model prayer taught them to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) It is His Divine will that singing, and with instruments shall be done by choirs on both sides of the veil—heaven and earth.

CHAPTER VI

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

Text (6:1-17)

INTRODUCTION

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come. **2** And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat

thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. 4 And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand. 6 And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. 8 And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.

12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; 13 and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind. 14 And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?

In this chapter it is given to us to see how the Redeemer proceeds to exercise the power or authority bestowed upon Him. He opens six seals in succession, after which the dramatic action is interrupted by a separate vision of the four angels standing on the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1). The seventh seal is not described until the eight chapter is reached.

Since this book was in scroll form, which was a long strip of parchment rolled up and sealed with seven seals, our understanding is that Christ breaks the first seal, thus revealing the words written in the scroll as far as the second seal. He then opens the second seal

and further unrolls the scroll. This He continues until the scroll is completely unrolled.

The unrolling of the scroll has these effects: First, it uncovers to view the hidden purposes of God, and second, it reveals the successive events whereby His purposes are accomplished.

We must constantly keep in mind the scope of Revelation, that it is limited. It does not attempt to reveal the future history of all nations, but deals with future history of the church and those opposing powers that affected the fortunes of the Bride of Christ.

Since the church, at the starting point of this vision—the enthronement of Christ at the right hand of God—is wholly within the confines of the vast persecuting empire of pagan Rome, we logically and rightfully understand the events of these seals begin in the Roman empire nearest to the starting point of time and continue through the seventh seal where the remotest events are chronicled.

We must ever remember there was being revealed “things which shortly must come to pass.” Therefore, the events of this vision do not refer to things somewhere in the distant future. Also John was to “write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

And these things are recorded in the Book of Revelation—a book which is written in the language of signs. He sent and “signified” it—Sign-i-fied it, that is communicated it by *signs* to His servant John.

Thus we must move slowly in the “uncovering” of the symbols contained in the seven seals. In determining the meaning of this series of prophetic symbols, portraying events which follow successively, it is of supreme importance to correctly interpret the first seal. A wrong start will lead us astray throughout the unrolling of this scroll.

Certainly we are not to spiritualize these visions because John, as we have seen already, was to write the things he had seen, the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter. If language means any thing, then these are *actual, historical events*.

These seals uncover a series of events affecting the fortunes of the church, but also immediately connected with the vast Roman empire in whose confines the church lived and moved and had her being.

These are visions of peace and war, of famine and death, of the persecution of the church and the judgments with which this age will end.

The First Seal

vs. 1, 2 As this first seal is broken, John heard the voice of one of the four living creatures saying with a voice of thunder, "Come and see."

Beginning with the breaking of this first seal we note that the first living creature speaks, and with the opening of each succeeding seal another one of the four living creatures speak.

With the opening of this first seal, as well as the next three seals, the contents of the book are not read, but its messages are translated into action.

In response to the invitation to come and see, immediately John beholds "a white horse and he that sat thereon had a bow, and a crown was given him and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

There are a number of features to this vision.

First, our attention is called to a horse. We are to remember that this is a symbol and the Bible must be consulted to interpret its meaning. The horse is a symbol of war. He was never used by either the Jews or the orientals as a beast of burden; the ox and the ass were used for that purpose. The horse was always reserved for war.

Shall we turn to the Old Testament for our interpretation of this symbol, for the horse is not mentioned in the New Testament, except in Revelation. We discover that the horse is first of all the symbol of strength of a certain kind; not strength for labor like the ox, or for the mastery of enemies, like the lion, but a symbol of might or conquest. Especially does it typify strength and courage for conflict.

In (Job 39:19-23) the description of a horse pertains to qualities that have to do with war. God in addressing Job said, "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him *afraid* as a grasshopper? The glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his *strength*. He goeth on to meet the *armed* men . . . neither turneth he back from the sword."

In the 25th verse of this same chapter we read, "He saith among the trumpets Ha, Ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of his captains, and the shouting."

In the song of Moses on the far side of the Red Sea, we read, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." (Ex. 15:1)

From this we learn that the horse represents the progress of some great force or cause backed by strong military power.

Bearing in mind the significance of the horse as a Bible symbol, this first horse, as well as the remaining three are prophetic pictures of mighty military forces and campaigns beginning with the time of the enthroning of Christ on the right hand of God and continuing one after the other.

Second, "A white horse." Since there are three more horses in the three remaining seals, each of different colors, each color must hold some very significant meaning.

The white horse here must have an altogether different signification from the red, black or pale colorations. White was, then in the arena of war a symbol of victory, prosperity and joy. It was a symbol of triumphant war.

When a Roman general returned from victorious campaigns in the far-flung frontiers of the empire he halted with out the city walls of Rome until the senate voted the manner of his entry. If that body voted that the general was entitled to a triumphal entry, snowy white horses were hitched to his chariot and drawn through the streets of the imperial city, followed by a long line of captive generals, slaves and spoils of war.

Third, the armed warrior. We know this was a military figure because he carried a bow, a weapon of war. The symbolism here points to a period of triumphant war.

Fourth, the bow. There were bowmen in all ancient armies, but the prominence given the bow here would seem to point to a particular race of people.

Fifth, "A crown was given Him." The crown upon this rider indicates that he shall be a crowned monarch. And note carefully that he is not crowned *because* of his *conquests*, but it was given him before these victories.

Sixth, His mission. "He went forth conquering and to conquer."

Having now determined the meaning of these symbols it now is our task to discover if "shortly" after John wrote, history records events which correspond to these symbols.

At the time John penned this "uncovering" of things he had seen, which are, and which are to come to pass shortly, a great Roman general was successfully extending the borders of the empire to its greatest bounds. He truly "went forth conquering, and to conquer. Hear Myers on this:

"To Trajan belongs the distinction of having extended the boundaries to the most distant points to which Roman ambition and prowess were ever able to push them."—Myers Ancient History—Page 506.

A grateful emperor erected a memorial to Trajan's achievements in what came to be known as Trajan's Forum, a splendid marble shaft called Trajan's Column. The stately pillar is almost as perfect today as when reared nineteen centuries ago.

Trajan's reign marked not only an age of conquest and victory, symbolized by the white horse and his rider, but also an age of internal peace and prosperity. I have before me Volume I of Gibbon's Rome edited by Milman. On Pages 95, 96 we read:

"If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom. The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of four successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect. The forms of civil administration were carefully preserved by Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, who delighted in the image of liberty."

Of these four, Trajan, who ascended the throne four years after the death of Domitian, is the most outstanding. The symbols of this first seal are strikingly fulfilled in this epoch of Roman history. It furnished one of the greatest conquerors of the Roman Empire, and, at a time which fits into this vision on Patmos. Trajan was a crowned conqueror, as revealed in this vision and went forth conquering and to conquer. Since the scope of John's prophecy falls within the Roman empire, all events of this epoch correspond to the divine revelation.

Particularly, one feature of this vision is significantly fitting. The rider of this white horse—the symbol of military conquest—was armed with a BOW! At first this would seem contradictory evidence, for the bow was not a Roman weapon. Rome ever conquered with the sword, carrying into battle the javelin for longer range fighting, but the sword to be used in close quarters. There were bowmen in the Roman legions, but they were not Romans. The use of the bow as a symbol is quite enlightening.

There were two nations on the earth at the time of this revelation who were renowned as users of the bow. The bow was the military weapon of the Parthians beyond the Euphrates, and of the Cretans, dwellers of the island of Crete. Cretan bowmen were constantly featured in Grecian history.

So the bow, the weapon carried by this first rider, must signify some one whose ancestry was rooted in Crete. How amazingly accurate this symbol is to history! If a Roman had been symbolized in this rider, he would not be represented armed with a bow. The bow points us to some one of another nation rather than that of Rome. And history supplies us with the answer.

Beginning with Julius Caesar, the twelve Caesars who reigned over the Roman empire were all of pure Roman blood. Domitian, the one who exiled John to Patmos, was the last of the twelve Caesars. He was followed on the throne by Nerva, the founder of a line that supplied five Caesars in succession.

The five "good emperors" as they came to be known, were Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the two Antonines—Aurelius Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius. They reigned from A.D. 96 to A.D. 180.

Nerva, the first of this new line of emperors was not of Roman blood. Cassius, a historian of that day declares that Nerva was a Greek and Aurelius Victor, another Roman Historian says that Nerva's family came from the Grecian island of Crete.

Already we know that *the national weapon of the Cretans was the bow*. The Cretans were as famous for their skill with the bow as the Rhodians were for their use of the sling, or the Romans with the javelin and short sword.

We cannot note to carefully that the founder of this new family of emperors, was an alien—the first to ever rule Rome. His family was of Cretan blood and the national weapon of the islanders of Crete was the *bow*!

The Second Seal

vs. 3, 4 "And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "come and see" The second cherubim repeats the command of the first living creature, "Come and see."

vs. 4 At once the first vision makes way for a second, "And there went out another horse that was *red*." This horse, also representing some great military force, naturally symbolizes, chronologically, the next series of events following those of the first seal.

But the horse is no longer white, but red. The horse is the symbol

of war, but the changed color points to the fact that the conditions of war are entirely changed. It would seem to indicate that now the stage of the conflict has brought blood shed within the empire. Whereas the white horse symbolized peace, prosperity and victory within the Roman empire, now blood shed invades her borders.

It is a fact in history that during the period of the first seal—through the reigns of “the five good emperors”—the Roman Empire never saw the forces of an invading army. All conquests were waged in the countries of her enemies, for Rome was *going forth conquering and to conquer*.

Under the strong but mild rule of Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines, every man dwelled safely under his own vine and fig tree. No hostile invasion or internal upheavals ever troubled the tiller of the soil or the artisan of trade. The first seal was a period of triumphant war, but of internal peace.

The second seal indicates from its very opening the continued existence of war. Internal peace has vanished. The first and second horsemen are strikingly contrasted. The first horsemen represents peace though there was outside war, but the second horse symbolizes civil war and bloodshed.

This is all the more emphasized because this is a blood-red horse.

“And power was given unto him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth.” The earth spoken of by John would be the Roman Empire, for the empire was the last great world empire as seen by Daniel, and the scope of Revelation always contemplates this world power.

In this epoch, peace is taken from the empire and we know this peace has been lost through civil war by the phrase, “That they should kill one another.” This is in as plain language as symbolism can speak.

As the first seal of peace was substantiated by corroborating history, so we may expect to find further events of history corresponding to the symbolism of this second seal. This we find to be abundantly true.

At the close of the reign of Commodus we find the end of peace in the Roman empire. Commodus was slain. As son of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Antonines, he proved to be a most unworthy successor of his illustrious father. For three years he reigned well, but an unsuccessful attempt against his life, three years after his ascension to the throne seemed suddenly to kindle all the dormant

passions of a Nero. The remaining ten years of his reign were marked by the perpetration of all manner of cruelties and the staining of the imperial purple with the most detestable debaucheries and crimes.

The empire was finally relieved of this insane tyrant by some members of the royal household who put him to death. This began a reign of civil war. Hear Myers on this:

"For nearly a century after the death of Commodus (192 to 284 A.D.) the emperors were elected by the army, and hence the rulers of this period have been called, "The Barrack Emperors." Upon the death of Commodus, Pertinax, a distinguished senator, was placed on the throne; but his efforts to enforce discipline among the praetorians aroused their anger, and he was slain by them after a short reign of only three months. The soldiers then gave out notice that they would sell the empire to the highest bidder. It was accordingly set up for sale at the praetorian camp and struck off to Didius Julianus, a wealthy senator, who promised twenty-five thousand sesterces to each of the twelve thousand soldiers at this time composing the guard. So the price of the empire was three hundred million sesterces (about \$12,000,000).—Myers Ancient history P. 515.

This gives us a preview of what lay in store for the empire. During this period of the national history thirty-two emperors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne. Hear Sismondi:

"With Commodus commenced the third and most calamitous period. It lasted ninety-two years, from 192 to 284. During that period thirty-two emperors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne by *incessant civil warfare*. Ninety-two years of almost incessant civil warfare taught the world on what a frail foundation the virtue of the Antonines had placed the felicity of the empire."—Sismondi's Fall of the Roman Empire Vol. 1, P. 36.

Gibbon in the first volume of his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire devotes two hundred pages to the description of this "Red Horse" period of civil strife and rapine.

Of these thirty-two emperors, besides the pretenders only two died natural deaths; Severus, who died 211 A.D. and Volusion who died 253 A.D. All others died violent deaths.

What could more fittingly represent a period of fratricidal bloodshed and rapine, of constant civil war, than a *red* horse and its rider "to whom was given a great sword, and the power to take away peace, that men should kill one another?"

We wish to further consider the giving of that "great sword." The bow is gone now, which was the emblem of an alien, and a sword, the national weapon of Rome, replaces it.

This sword marks some special feature of the fulfillment of the events of the seal. It points to an epoch when the jealous ambitions of men of the sword drove them to brutality and murder.

There were stationed at Rome an army corps which outranked all others. We have already referred to them as the Praetorian guards and recounted their sale of the empire to Didius Julianus. It was an order in which the Praetorian Perfect was inducted into office by the public investment *with a sword*. It was the Praetorian Perfect and his guard that inaugurated this century of bloodshed.

What could more fittingly describe such a period, as portrayed under the second seal, than the giving of a great sword, the military emblem, to the *figure that rides the red horse* of John's prophecy?

The Third Seal

vs. 5, 6 Famine always follows war, and particularly civil war with its internal devastation of men, materials, industry and food production.

Therefore, it is only natural that we should read when the third seal was opened: "I heard the third living creature say, come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, a measure of wheat for a penny: and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

How natural that the period of civil war, indicated by the *red horse*, a period of bloodshed and anarchy should produce events symbolized by a *black horse*.

The horse, whatever his color, is a symbol of war, the change in color only signifies a changed aspect of that war. Black would indicate that the empire is still torn by calamitous war, but war that brought mourning and despair. Black has ever been the color of mourning in Scriptural usage. Jeremiah said: "Because of the

drought Judah mourneth, and the gate thereof languish; they are in deep mourning (literally black) for the land." (Jer. 14:2)

After noting the color of the horse, recognition is given to the fact that "he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." If the balances were presented alone, we might see in them a symbol of justice, but in the hands of the rider of the black horse, and in connection with the weighing of grain that follows, they undoubtedly indicate a period characterized by scarcity of food.

The significance of balances in relation to food is made clear in the Scriptures. "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, the women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver your bread again by *weights* and ye shall eat and not be satisfied" (Lev. 26:26)

"Moreover he said unto me, son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by *weight*, and with care; and they shall drink water by *measure* and with astonishment: That they may want bread and water and be astonished with one another, and consume away for their iniquity." (Ezek. 4:16, 17)

The prices quoted here for wheat and barley are famine prices. The "measure" spoken of here was, roughly speaking, the equivalent of our quart, and the word rendered "penny" is the Greek "denarius," which equals about fourteen cents in our money. A bushel of wheat, at the price designated would be nearly five dollars, and a bushel of barley one dollar and fifty cents.

A denarius was the usual rate for one day's labor. In our money, considering the rate of exchange, that would mean a bushel of wheat cost about twenty dollars and a bushel of barley shows that rich and poor alike were affected, because wheat was the grain of the rich and barley the staff of the poor.

Since oil and wine were common articles of food for the people, the prohibition of their use, taken in connection with the context would seem to imply that at this time these items were no longer used by the common people.

But balances were also, in that day, employed in taxation. A portion of the production of the land was a part of the taxes extorted by the Roman empire. The balances then would symbolize a period of excessive taxation, as well as scarcity.

This heavy taxation began even in the days of the second seal period when Caracalla granted Roman citizenship to multitudes in his empire in order to tax the more persons.

"Caracalla's sole political act of real importance was the bestowal of citizenship upon all the free inhabitants of the empire; and this he did, not to give them a just privilege, but that he might collect from them certain special taxes which only Roman citizens had to pay."—Myers Ancient History P. 517

But with the death of the last emperor of the third seal period, Carinus in 284, a new type of government was inaugurated by Diocletian. The change was marked by Diocletian's assumption of the titles of Asiatic royalty and court ceremonials. Ostentation and extravagance marked all the appointments of the palace. He also inaugurated a new administrative system.

"The century of anarchy which preceded the ascension of Diocletian; had made manifest the need of a system which would discourage assassination and provide a regular mode of succession to the throne. Diocletian devised a system the aim of which was to compass both ends. First, he chose as a colleague a companion ruler, Maximian, who, like himself, bore the title of Augustus. Then each of the co-emperors associated with himself an assistant, who took the title of Caesar and was considered the son of the Emperor. There were thus two Augusti and two Caesars. (From the number of rulers, this government has received the name of Tetrarchy) . . . a most serious drawback to this system was the heavy expense involved in the maintenance of four courts with their endless retinue of officers and dependents. It was complained that the number of those who received the revenues of the state was greater than those that contributed to them. *The burden of taxation grew unendurable. Husbandry in some regions ceased* and great numbers were reduced to beggary or driven into brigandage . . . it was this vicious system of taxation which more than any other one cause, after slavery, contributed to the depopulation, improverishment and final downfall of the nation." Myers' Ancient History Pages 521, 522.

This feature of taxation is peculiar to the third seal. A quotation or two will suffice. This taxation began even in the second seal, but reached such ruinous proportions in the third seal as to render it an outstanding feature of that epoch. Gibbon speaks of the beginning of such taxation under Caracalla. (A.D. 211-217)

"Nor was the rapacious son of Severus (Caracalla) contented

with such a measure of taxation as had appeared sufficient to his moderate predecessors. Instead of a twentieth, he exacted a tenth of all legacies and inheritances, and during his reign he crushed alike every part of the empire under the weight of his iron scepter."—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of Rome* Vol. , P. 95.

Lactantius, an historian of the fourth century recorded:

"Swarms of exactors sent into the provinces, filled them with agitation and terror, as though a conquering enemy were leading them into captivity. The fields were separately measured, the trees and vines, the flocks and herds were numbered, and an examination made of men . . . the sick and the weak were borne to the place of inscription, a reckoning was made of the age of each, years were added to the young and subtracted from the old, in order to subject them to the higher taxation the law imposed. The whole scene was filled with *wailing and sadness*." —Lactantius.

Surely, no more impressive or expressive symbol, than a black horse, indicating *mourning*, and its rider holding a pair of balances in his hand, indicative of famine, could have properly described the epoch covered by the third seal.

The Fourth Seal

vs. 7, 8 "And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with beasts of the earth."

The conditions under the fourth seal reach the worst. The color of the fourth horse is pale. Remembering the horse is ever a symbol of war, whatever its color, we are by the continued use of the symbol of the horse reminded that it is still a time of war. The color of the horse now being "pale"—the bloodless color of death—pictures such conditions that the rider of this pale horse appropriately is called "Death."

Behind him Hades, the abode of the dead, follows close upon Death's heels, to swallow up the dead in his awful maws.

Death and Hades accomplish their task by the employment of four familiar and fearful instruments:

1. The sword, or war. 2. Hunger, or famine. 3. Death, or pestilence, for the word here used is often so translated, and such is its signification here, and 4. Finally, destruction caused by wild beasts.

The conditions described under the fourth seal are the logical result of the events which transpired under the three preceding seals.

When we recall that thirty-two military governors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne in a period of ninety-two years, and that of the thirty-two military governors all died violent deaths but two, we can better understand how Death and Hades took such a toll of human life by civil war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts which would increase as the provinces became depopulated.

Shall we turn to the most authentic Roman historian which we have, even Gibbon:

"But a long and general famine was a calamity of a more serious kind. It was the inevitable consequence of rapine and oppression, which extirpated the produce of the present, and the future harvests. Famine is almost always followed by epidemical diseases, the effect of scanty and unwholesome food. Other causes must, however, have contributed to the furious plague, which, from the years two-hundred fifty to the year two-hundred sixty-five, raged without interruption in every province, every city, and almost every family of the Roman Empire. During some time five thousand persons died daily in Rome; and many towns, that had escaped the hands of the barbarians, were entirely depopulated . . . about half the people of Alexandria perished." Volume 1, pages 328, 329.

No wonder it was said that power was given Death and Hades to destroy one fourth part of the earth.

Summarizing, we have found that:

1. The first seal was the *seal of conquest*.
2. The second seal was the *seal of civil war*.
3. The third seal was the *seal of want or famine*.
4. The fourth seal was the *seal of Death*.

The seals on the one hand collectively, say, "Here is the future in symbolism." History, on the other hand, says, "Here is the fulfillment."

How faithfully they agree! At the mouth of two or three witnesses a thing is established.

The Fifth Seal

vs. 9-11 With the opening of the fifth seal the scene changes completely. It is obvious, from the radical change of imagery, that the subject of the prophetic vision is completely different. No longer is the horse, the symbol of war, present. With the passing of the horses, the armed riders are gone. The fifth seal gives us a vision of the suffering saints.

The vision implies the peril and persecution of the church on earth. This is to be expected when we consider that Revelation is the "uncovering" of the future as it relates to the church, or the Israel of God under the Gospel Dispensation.

"And when he had opened the fifth seal I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

Since this calls our attention to something happening under the altar, which was a piece of furniture in the temple, it would indicate that this vision refers to the martyrs of the church. This is not an oratorio of praise, but a chant of suffering, coming from the souls of those who had been slain.

The fifth seal is the *Seal of Persecution* and it evidently refers to some period in the history of the church when a war of extermination was waged against the early Christians.

Since the first four seals cover conditions through the terrible events from Pentecost to nearly the close of the third century, we naturally look to see if conditions following these seals correspond to the symbolism of the fifth seal.

At the death of Commodus, a very notable, but cruel ruler came to the throne of the Roman Empire. He was Diocletian, who reigned from 284 A.D., to 305 A.D. Myers says:

"The ascension of Diocletian marks an important era in the history of the Roman Empire. The two matters of chief importance connected with his reign are the changes he effected in the government and his persecution of the Christians."

Myers Ancient History P. 520.

While the church had suffered persecution before, beginning with that perpetrated by the Jews of the Apostles' day, and with the beginning of Gentile persecution under Nero, no persecution had ever before been so universal, so long continued and so brutal. Diocletian determined to wipe the name "Christian" from the earth. Says Myers:

"Toward the end of his reign, Diocletian inaugurated against the Christians a persecution which continued long after his abdication, and which was the severest, as it was the last, waged against the church by the pagan emperors.

The imperial decrees ordered that their churches be torn down; that the property of the new societies should be confiscated; that the writings of the sect should be burned; and that the Christians themselves, unless they should join in the sacrifices to the gods of the state, should be pursued to death as outlaw. For ten years, which, however were broken by short periods of respite, the Christians were subjected to the fierce flames of persecution. . . . It was during this and various other persecutions that vexed the church in the second and third centuries that the Christians sought refuge in the Catacombs, those vast subterranean galleries and chambers under the city of Rome."—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of Rome*, pages 522, 523.

To Myers we add that of the ancient historian Gibbon. He writes of the persecution inaugurated by Diocletian as follows:

"The resentment, or the fears of Diocletian, at length transported him beyond all bounds of moderation, which he had hitherto preserved, and he declared, in a series of cruel edicts, *his intention* of abolishing the *Christian name*. By the first of these edicts, the governors of the provinces were directed to apprehend all persons of the ecclesiastical order; and the prisons, destined for the vilest criminals, were soon filled with a multitude of bishops, presbyters, deacons, readers and exhortists. By a second edict, the magistrates were commanded to employ every method of severity, which might reclaim them from their odious superstition, and oblige them to return to the established worship of gods. This rigorous order was extended, by a subsequent edict, to the whole body of Christians, who were exposed to a violent and general persecution."—Gibbons *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume

11, page 69.

Diocletian's persecution certainly would inaugurate conditions as symbolized under the fifth seal.

Other persecutions had been local, this was general. Others were for a little season, Diocletian's persecution raged for ten years; others were designed to stay the progress of Christianity, the prime purpose of this was "to abolish the Christian name from the earth."

No wonder the bleeding, mangled church cried, 'O Lord, how long dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'

These martyred Christians called for judgment and retribution. The answer to this cry is worthy of our notice. Three things are featured.

First, it is said that they must await the great judgment, which would not occur until another distinct group of martyrs should be slain. The group of the fifth seal had been slain by pagan Rome, the second group referred to evidently were to be those martyred by Papal Rome, which succeeded the pagan empire.

Second, they must wait "a little season." Of course such a season must be measured by God's standard of measurement, to whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (II Peter 3:8)

Third, they were to be given white robes. White robes are a symbol of justification and victory. In the marriage of the Lamb, to his wife is "to be granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19:7-8)

Another startling factor in this promise to the martyrs is this: These souls were not in the Holy of Holies, a type of heaven itself (Heb. 9:24) but under the altar of the outer court—a type of the world.

These white robes—symbols of justification and victory—then imply the justification and triumph of the church on earth. And thus everything did come to pass.

At the close of this persecution symbolized in the fifth seal, Constantine, by a decree issued at Milan A.D. 313, the year of the Battle at the Milvian Bridge, declared, and here are the words of that decree:

"We grant to Christians and to all others full liberty of following that religion which each may choose."

The Sixth Seal

vs. 12-17 The opening of the sixth seal is described in six verses of rare majesty and power. The scenes portrayed are calculated to fill the heart with awe and consternation.

The earth with mighty convulsions reels with a terrific earthquake that shakes mountains and islands from their places. There are also heavenly demonstrations. The sun becomes black as sackcloth; the moon turns red as blood, stars fall and the heavens themselves are rolled away as a scroll. The inhabitants of earth are so terror stricken at the sight they call for the mountains to fall upon them.

The imagery here is very striking, but we must remember that these are not literal earthquakes, falling stars, moving islands or mountains. These are symbols, so we look not for literal fulfillment of such *physical phenomenon*, but for *historical* events which correspond to these symbolical pictures.

Before, we search out the fulfillment in historical events, we must first ascertain the meaning of these symbols which are used. These symbols are borrowed from the mightiest agencies and powers in nature.

A Study of these Symbols

First, we take up the meaning of an *earthquake* when used symbolically. As John's "earth" constantly refers to the Roman Empire, this earthquake refers to political and religious upheavals within its borders. The earthquake is used by the prophets of the old Testament as a symbol of political and religious agitation. In Haggai 2:6, 7, we read:

"Yet once, it is a little time, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."

Second, the sun, moon and stars are used in the Scriptures to represent earthly potentates and dignitaries and great lights in political and religious realms. To illustrate: In the dream of Joseph which turned his brothers against him, these physical symbols were employed to represent people.

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold,

the sun and the moon, and the eleven stars made obeisance to me." "And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, what is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (Gen. 37:9, 10)

Orientalists often referred to the king as a sun, and princes and lesser rulers to stars. In Daniel, as he describes the world kingdoms we read:

"And it (the little horn) waxed great, even to the host of heaven: and it cast down some of the host of the *stars to the ground* and stamped upon them." (Daniel 8:10)

Again in Ezekial 32:1-15 we have a prophecy which will help us in the imagery of divine symbolism of the sixth seal. The prophet is predicting the violent overthrow of Egypt at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. This national overthrow is described in the following symbols:

"And when I shall put thee out (or extinguish thee), I will cover the heaven, and make the *stars* thereof dark; I will cover the *sun* with a cloud, and the *moon* shall not give her light." (Ezekial 32:7)

Again in Joel 3:15, we read:

"The *sun* and *moon* shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth *shall shake*."

In the above quoted passages we see that the overthrowing of a nation was described in the imagery of the sun being blackened, the stars becoming dark and the earth being shaken.

Isaiah, also, furnishes us with a passage which is closely related in thought and verbiage to that of the sixth seal. The prophet is speaking of the time when "the indignation of the Lord shall be upon the nations."

"And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be *rolled together as a scroll*; and their *host shall fall down*, as the leaf falleth off the vine, and as a *falling fig* from the *fig tree*." (Isa. 34:2-4)

How similar this language to John's who said, "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs."

We are not studying physical astronomy in the Book of Revelation. That is where so many folk have been in error. They have tried to associate these symbols with actual physical earthquakes, falling material stars and darkening of the sun.

We are studying spiritual astronomy here and these symbols portray human events in the which great dignitaries in the political arena are said to fall and governmental systems are shaken.

Third, the *mountain* and *island* are used to denote earthly kingdoms. *Mountains* in the scriptures stand for conspicuous nationalities. In Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon, he says:

"Behold, I am against thee, O Destroying Mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyeth all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a *burnt mountain*." (Jeremiah 51:25)

The island symbolizes lesser powers. In his prophecy of Christ, he said, "He (that is Christ) shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." (Isaiah 42:4)

This imagery is most appropriate to express a complete breaking up and removal of the whole system of human government.

With this clarification of the symbols, it is not difficult to discover that the sixth seal is a period of great and startling revolutions, not in the heavens, but upon the earth. All this symbolism foreshadows a violent, bloody upheaval of governmental systems, rulers and the establishment of a new order on the earth.

And since "earth" to the mind of John is the Roman Empire, it naturally is within its boundaries that we must search for the fulfillment.

We shall look for events in political, social and religious spheres, which are pictured here in terms of physical things.

There are some stirring convulsions in history immediately following the persecution under the fifth seal. As the fifth seal was the seal of *Persecution*, the sixth seal can be designated, "the seal of *Revolution*."

Having considered the meaning of the symbols, we are now ready to search out the time of this seal.

The Time of this Seal

We found that the fifth seal closed with the Edict of Toleration issued by Constantine in A. D. 313, so then these events naturally follow that epoch.

We note that one of the characteristics of this sixth seal is that the time will be one of mourning. The mourners now are not the souls under the altar, but the falling stars, or great of earth, who opposed the One who sat on His Throne. They cry out and say to the mountains: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16)

Then taking a brief look forward to the next chapter—the seventh—we observe there follows a period of great joy and prosperity experienced by the people of God.

Holding this sixth seal and its symbolism in one hand and a book of history in the other, do we find a time in which the unbelieving world on the one hand is in mourning, and the church, on the other hand enjoying a time of victory and prosperity?

Hear Myers on this:

"Galerius and Constantine, who became Augusti on the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, had reigned together only one year when the latter died at York, in Britain. His soldiers, disregarding the rule of succession is determined by the system of Diocletian, proclaimed his son Constantine emperor. Six competitors for the throne arose in different quarters. For eighteen years Constantine fought to gain the supremacy." —Myer's Ancient History, page 524.

Also hear Gibbon on this matter:

"The abdication of Diocletian and Maximian was succeeded by eighteen years of discord and confusion. The empire was afflicted by five civil wars; and the remainder of the time was not so much a state of tranquility as a suspension of arms between several hostile monarchs, who viewing each other with an eye of fear and hatred, strove to increase their respective forces at the expense of their subjects."—Gibbons Decline and Fall of Rome, page 451.

In passing we may say that Gibbon devoted fifty pages (small print) to the description of the evils of this time. Surely, we have here a time of death and mourning when kings and pretenders fell like stars and great mourning resulted from one civil war fol-

lowing after a preceding one. This was a time when kingdoms, indicated by mountains and islands, were moved out of their places.

The forces of paganism had rolled around the enemies of Constantine. When he was crowned in triumph upon the wreck of six imperial thrones and their royal claimants, there was great mourning on the part of the enemies of the Lamb and the cross. For when Constantine, after the battle of Milvian Bridge, granted amnesty to all Christians, paganism went into deep mourning.

Shall we enumerate a few of the outstanding earth-shaking, heaven-removed-as-a-scroll, results of all this change. Not only was paganism shaken but Christianity waited with bated breath. The church watched Constantine progress with singular interest. While Constantine had not embraced Christianity before Milvian Bridge, yet his mother, Helena, was a Christian and it was generally believed he was friendly toward his mother's faith. After his embracing of the Christian faith these earthquake like results followed:

1. In 313 A.D. Constantine issued the decree at Milan placing Christianity on an equal footing with the other religions of the empire.
2. In 319 A.D. he decreed his mother's religion should be the acknowledged faith of the empire.
3. In 321 A.D. he decreed that Sunday, the day of worship of Christians, since Pentecost, should be observed in all the cities by a cessation of labor.
4. In 325 A.D. he abolished by royal decree the bloody gladiatorial combats, against which the Christians had objected. The far reaching impact of this can better be grasped when we remember this Roman institution had existed for one whole millennium.
5. In 325 A.D. he called the first general council of the church at Nicea, a town in Asia Minor, Arianism was denounced, and a formula of Christian faith adopted, which became known as the Nicene creed—the mother of all human creeds.
6. In 331 A.D. he decreed that the pagan religion should no longer exist and ordered the destruction of all heathen temples.
7. He completely reorganized the government by laying out the

empire into four divisions called prefectures, which were subdivided into thirteen dioceses, and there again into one hundred and sixteen provinces. Truly, the old heavens were being moved away as a school and the Roman earth was being shaken like a mighty earthquake.

8. But the greatest earth-shaking change is yet to be described. Constantine did not seem to be satisfied with the destroying pagan faith, changing Roman customs and laws, he aimed his greatest blow at the imperial city itself. For over one thousand years Rome had been the seat of the empire, growing from a tiny village to the capitol of the world. In 330 he determined to shake the Roman world from center to circumference, by removing the capitol from Italy to a new city on the banks of the Hellespont, and to call it after his own name—Constantine. Surely, the mighty mountain of the west was moved from its place.

Hear Myers on this:

“After the recognition of Chirstianity, the most important act of Constantine was the selection of Byzantium on the Bosporus, as the new capitol of the empire. There were many and weighty reasons urging Constantine to establish a new capitol in the east.

First, there were urgent military reasons for making the change. The most dangerous enemies of the empire now were the barbarians behind the Danube and the kings of the recently restored Persian monarchy. This condition of things rendered almost necessary the establishment in the east of a new and permanent basis for military operations.

Second, there were also commercial reasons for the transfer of the capitol. Rome had long before this ceased to be in any sense the commercial center of the state, as it was in early times. Through the Roman conquest of Greece and Asia, the center of the population, wealth and commerce of the empire had shifted eastward. Now of all the cities in the east, Byzantium was the one most favorably situated to become the commercial metropolis of the enlarged state.

Third, there were religious motives. The priests of the pagan shrines particularly resented the action of Constantine in es-

pousing the new and rated religion, and regarded him as an apostate. It was the existence of these sentiments and feelings among the inhabitants of Rome, which, for one thing, led Constantine to seek elsewhere a new center and seat of his court and government.

But far outweighing all other reasons for the removal of the capitol were the political motives. Constantine, like Diocletian, wished to establish a system of government modeled upon the despotic monarchy of the east . . .

In honor of the emperor the name was changed to Constantinople, the "city of Constantine."—Myers Ancient History, pages 527, 528.

These historical events, forming the most remarkable revolution that the world has ever seen, constitute an exact fulfilment of the symbolism of the sixth seal. Sun and moon are darkened and stars fall, mountains and islands are removed out of their places.

With the blasting of pagan hopes by the victories of Constantine and his subsequent embracing of Christianity, accompanied by his decree to destroy all heathen temples, more than one imperial champion of paganism called out in distress.

Some of the pagan writers almost used the very language of Revelation in their description of this particular period of history:

"As a dreadful and amazing prodigy, which covered the earth with darkness, and restored the ancient dominion of chaos and night."

We have styled the sixth seal as "the seal of Revolution," both in the political and religious realms.

CHAPTER VII

SEALING OF GOD'S SERVANTS

Text (7:1-17)

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was

given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. 4 And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: 5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; 6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; 7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; 8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

9 After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? 14 And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: 17 for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

vs. 1 After the cry of the panic-stricken kings and potentates resulting from the political and religious upheaval symbolized in the sixth seal, we would naturally expect the seventh seal to be opened at once, and the unfolding events described therein to follow immediately.

But this is not the case. Rather the first of two parenthesis of the first division of Revelation is thrown in to reveal the sealing of God's servants.

Here in this parenthesis a scene of a very different character is presented.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of earth, holding the four winds of earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." (Rev. 7:1-3)

Why, we might ask, is this particular vision, occupying the entire seventh chapter, introduced at this time? The answer is obvious. The preceding visions of the seals "uncover" how things were to go, during that time in history, with men in general. The need now was that a vision should be given to show what provision God had made for His own during this time of political and religious revolution.

The company of sealed servants of God is in direct contrast to that of the panic stricken opponents of the Lamb of God.

We must remember that we are still under the sixth seal and will be until the seventh seal is opened in (Rev. 8:1).

"And after these things" (Rev. 7:1) refers to the events described under the seals of the sixth chapter. Now the sealing of the saints follows "after these things."

John saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds. These four angels undoubtedly represent four hurtful agencies which are to perform their works of destruction.

The wind in the Scriptures is used as a symbol of divine visitation using human instrumentality to accomplish God's purpose. We read in (Jeremiah 51:1)

"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up against Babylon and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind."

Again in Jeremiah 49:36, the divine judgments coming in from every quarter are spoken of as the *four winds*.

"And upon Elam will I bring the *four winds* from the four quarters of heaven."

In Daniel 7:2 we read, "Daniel spoke and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea."

These scriptures not only define the symbol of "wind" as a divine visitation using some human instrument of force, but they give us a strong hint that armies of powerful and cruel nations play a significant part in this last stage of the sixth seal.

These four powerful angels seen by John were observed holding back for a time these four destroying powers.

vs. 2 and John says, "I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of God, and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels . . . saying, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

What this sealing in the foreheads was is not revealed, but it certainly has to do with their eternal safety. In a similar impending temporal judgment on the population of Jerusalem, Ezekial saw a vision of God's glory, and heard a command given to one clothed in linen to go through the city and set a mark on the foreheads of those who sighed and cried because of the abominations thereof. (Ezekial 9:3, 4) This man had an inkhorn by his side, and while it is not said that he used this inkhorn, yet the implication is that he did use it in marking the foreheads.

vs. 3 In Rev. 22:4 we read, "And they shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads." The servants of Christ dwelling in the place of Christ has gone to prepare will have His name on their foreheads. Here in Rev. 7:5 it would seem the mark in the forehead refers to an open profession of obedient belief in the Lamb, as the mark in the hand would indicate service. The seal is the mark of God, as the seal of a state is the mark of that state.

vs. 4 John heard the number of them that were sealed. It was one hundred and forty-four thousand of the tribes of the children of Israel. John, in this vision of the sixth seal, saw two companies of sealed saints. He saw first a vast company of Abraham's descendants in the blood line, and then he saw another company so vast in host that no man could number them. Since the gospel, as Paul said, is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), so the Jewish Christians are likewise mentioned first here.

The number of the tribes of Israel mentioned here is one hundred forty-four thousand and twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Significance of the Number Given

These numbers are hardly to be taken literally, since we must ever keep in mind that we are still in the realm of symbolism, and studying in a book sign-i-fied" or written in symbols. They signify a great number. But there seems to be a profounder meaning than this. The number signifies "totality," that is to say, the complete and perfect number of God's servants out of the old Israel of God.

The meaning is intensified by the fact that of each tribe the number sealed is given as precisely twelve thousand. In the total, the number twelve is multiplied by itself and then by one thousand. This makes a square of twelve multiplied by the number of enlargement and totality—a thousand.

In Exodus 30:12-15 we have God's original directions for numbering His Israel of God in that day.

"When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, them that are to be numbered then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary . . . the rich shall not give more than a half shekel, when they give an offering to the Lord to *make an atonement for your souls.*"

This presents these glowing facts that every man who is numbered has been ransomed, for whom atonement has been made, and that all men stand on the same level with God, who is no respecter of persons. All require precisely the same ransom, for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for "both have been proved under sin." (Romans 3:9, 222, 23)

When the people were numbered by Moses, the number came out *unequal*, signifying incompleteness, "for the law made nothing perfect." But in this final enumeration of those for whom Christ "gave Himself as a ransom" (1 Tim. 2:6) the result is perfection.

The number "twelve" not only symbolizes completeness, but it also symbolizes the perfection of the final abode of the ransomed. We shall deal with this when we come to the description of that eternal city which has twelve gates, twelve angels at the gates, and twelve foundations, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, etc.

There is some difficulty in reference to the naming of the twelve tribes of Israel in the vision John saw. Of the tribes, Ephraim ap-

pears under the name of Joseph and the tribe of Dan is omitted altogether. The number twelve is preserved by naming Manassas, Joseph's first born son in the place of Dan. Dan's name may have been dropped because he fell away into idolatry, but this is only a surmise.

vs. 9. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude," which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues."

Here we find an innumerable multitude which no man could number. They were from every nation.

This second multitude represented the saved of all the nations—the Gentiles, in other words.

In the first part of this vision, which had to do with Abraham's descendants being sealed, John said he *heard* the number of them. Here he is given to *see* the vast throng of sealed from every nation.

Christ spoke of this Gentile multitude, "and I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 8:10, 11) John here sees the fulfillment of Christ's prediction, when this host of Gentiles is incorporated into the Israel of God today.

These "stood before the throne, and before the Lamb clothed with white robes." This is ever the garb of the redeemed. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"And palms in their hands." This declares them to be sharers of Christ's victory.

vs. 10-12 "And cried with a loud voice, saying salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

This multitude, "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," are by their singing of salvation identified with the company John heard singing the new song in Rev. 5:9, for that was a preview of this. The theme of the song here entitled "Salvation" is given in fuller detail in the vision of the seals, where we have the words, "For thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation."

This is the "great salvation" whereof Peter speaks in (I Peter 1:9-12), which things the angels desire to look into," for the next words of the scripture here are,

The Seven-Fold Doxology

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four living creatures, and fell down before the throne

on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen."

It is interesting to compare this seven-fold doxology with that of Chapter 5:12. They are identical in six of the seven items (for "strength" in Rev. 5:12 is the same in the original as "might" in Rev. 7:12). The only difference in terms being that in this later song the expression "thanksgiving" takes the place of "riches" in the former song. This is understandable in that here is the fulfillment historically of that in prospect in Rev. 5:12. They were singing "thanksgiving" for the "riches of His grace."

vs. 13, 14 As if to call especial attention to this singing multitude, one of the elders, or angelic princes, answered (we wonder if this is in response to an unrecorded question of John's) saying unto John, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

vs. 14 John confesses his inability to answer either question by saying, "Sir, thou knowest." whereupon the elder replies: "These are they which come out (literally "are coming out") of the great tribulation." While the authorized version reads "great tribulation" there is an article in the Greek,—literally "those who are coming out of the great tribulation."

What Tribulation is Meant Here?

Some expositors teach this "great tribulation" to be the same spoken of by Christ in (Matt. 24:21) "And then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor even shall be." They make it a period of tribulation yet future, a period *immediately* following the return of the Lord to raise the dead and transform the living saints. These of the "Futurist" school teach there is to be a "great tribulation" after the rapture of the saints.

But this cannot be because the elder expressly said of those John saw, that they were *then*, at that very time, *coming* out of the great tribulation. This forever forbids postponing the tribulation mentioned here to some future dispensation after Christ's return.

Another identifying feature of the time of this tribulation is a fact that we must not overlook. This opening of the sixth seal corresponds historically with the beginning of the *Pergamos period*, in which the doctrine of compromise in writing of human creeds (Council of Nicea called by Constantine) and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes

(Elevation of bishops to lord it over God's heritage) lead to the "depths of satan" in the Thyatira Period. *And it was in the Thyatira Period* that we read of the apostate church, called Jezebel, but known historically as the Catholic church, in (Rev. 2:22)

"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her *into great tribulation*, except they repent."

This "tribulation" in the vision of the seven churches, coincides with that of the parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals. In the Thyatira church there is mentioned the *cause* of the tribulation and in Rev. 7:14, we see those who have repented and *are coming out of the great tribulation*.

vs. 15-17 Because they have stood the trial and remained true, "Keeping his words unto the end" (Rev. 2:26), they are permitted to be before the throne to serve God constantly and experience the unspeakable joy of having God's presence among them. They shall neither hunger or thirst any more and all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. The "Man of Sorrows" shall banish all sorrow.

Summary

Thus we bring to a close the discussion of the parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals by presenting a summary of the chapter.

The theme has been the sealing of the servants of God, both of the Jews and the Gentiles. But while we have been absorbed in this task we must not lose sight of the fact that four destructive agencies were being withheld until this sealing was completed.

These powers were restrained until some great work of the church could be accomplished. The eighth chapter continues with the opening of the seventh and last seal, in the first division of which, this quartet of destruction is let loose under the symbolism of the blowing of four trumpets in succession. We shall find that these first four trumpets heralded the four tides of invasion which swept over the western half of the Roman Empire.

But before these great catastrophes fell upon the western part of the empire, did the church experience a great triumph? Let us remember this is a book of great symbolism and this is a symbolic picture of great historical events connected with the welfare of the saints.

We have already learned under the sixth seal that Constantine had embraced Christianity and by decree in A.D. 331 ordered the destruction of pagan temples and the abolishing of pagan worship in the empire.

Thus we see that the church of Christ had grappled with the ancient pagan religions and, after centuries of trial and untold suffering, had won a glorious victory. The temples of Jupiter, Mercury and Mars were closed and their idol worship forbidden. If a person today could have visited Rome in the end of the second century he would have beheld a pagan world. Had they visited the eternal city in the latter portion of the fourth century he could have hardly believed his eyes, for he would have looked upon an empire blessed with churches filled with followers of the Christ.

Until this sealing of the saints, was completed, the four winds of destruction were held back. It was a definite act of God to see that they were restrained from their missions of destruction until Christianity had captured the empire.

Had these four destructive agencies done their work before this great victory of the church in the sowing of the seed of the kingdom everywhere, Christianity could never have survived the wreck of the empire and the passing of a civilization hoary with age.

Christ indwelling in the hearts of converted Romans helped them to rise above the ruins of the past. The invading hordes from the north laid aside their paganism and embraced the Christian belief from those whom they had vanquished.

We are now ready to consider the events accompanying the opening of the seventh seal.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEVENTH SEAL OPENED

Text (8:1-13)

1 And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

3 And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

7 And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of

the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9 and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.

10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; 11 and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.

13 And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.

INTRODUCTION

We have now arrived at the beginning of a new period in the history of the Roman Empire, the arena in which the history of the church is also unfolded. The saints having been sealed, the four agencies of destruction could no longer be held back. Let us say, in passing, there is nothing mysterious to be attached to this sealing of the saints. What Paul said of the Ephesians, could just as truthfully be said of the saints of this parenthetical period of time:

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, *ye were sealed* with that Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13,14)

After the sealing of the saints, the seventh seal is opened and we read,

vs. 1 "There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."

This silence comes as a sudden surprise. This comes in marked contrast with the *rejoicings* in heaven at the beginning of this series of visions, when the Lamb that was slain "came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne." (Rev. 5:7).

This silence is too startling to be given over to conjecture in interpretation. Shall we let the scriptures help us. In Habakkuk 2:20, we read, "The Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth *keep silence* before Him."

These words are spoken in connection with the going forth of Almighty God in judgment. Hence, when He is about to visit the earth (the Roman Empire, as understood by John), with the awful judgments of the seventh seal, nothing could be more fitting than that heaven itself should stand breathless, awaiting the blowing of the seven trumpets of the seventh seal.

Another passage will suffice. In Zephaniah 1:7, in a passage which incorporates the judgments of God Almighty, we read these significant words: "*Hold thy peace* at the presence of the Lord God; for *the day of the Lord is at hand*."

The word, "Hold thy peace" here is identically the same as that rendered "Keep silence" in (Hab. 2:20).

In the light of these passages, it can be clearly seen the appropriateness of introducing the fearful judgments to follow with a half hour silence in heaven.

It is, as it were, the hush before the march of events about to begin; the calm before the storms of judgment break.

It doubtless, also is designed to give great emphasis to the events that follow.

vs. 2, 3 "I saw the seven angels which stood before God". It seems that among angels there are ranks, degrees, dominions, powers. These are "the seven who stand before God." In Matthew 18:10, we learn that those who believe in Christ have angels who stand before God and behold His face:

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, (In Matt. 18:6, Christ identifies 'one of these little ones' as, 'one of these little ones which believe in me') for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

We even know the name of one of these angels, "And the angel answering said unto him (Zacharias), I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad things. (Luke 1:19).

"And to them were given seven trumpets." The fact that the trumpets are committed to angels of the highest order indicates the importance in God's sight of these trumpet judgments.

But before the first trumpet is sounded, "Another angel came and stood at the altar." (Rev. 8:3). The scene is borrowed from the service of the Old Testament tabernacle. In the Holy Place, before the second veil, stood the golden altar . . . Morning and evening, fire was placed upon it from the altar of sacrifice, and upon the fire was poured the sacred incense. The incense that Moses was commanded to make was a most hallowed thing—so hallowed that if any one should even attempt to imitate the fragrance, he was to be 'cut off from his people.' (Exodus 30:34-38).

The cloud of perfume which rose and filled the sanctuary, was a symbol of prayer.

To this ministering angel was given "A golden censor and there was given to him much incense." We have found that incense, in the Bible, is a symbol of prayer.

Here, however, another feature is added, or rather included. He was given *much incense*" that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which is before the throne."

Two things present themselves here. First, a ministering angel matches the prayers of petitioning saints. The more we pray, the more is prayer offered from the heavenlies. Yea, more, *much* incense was given him, as if to say, heaven more than matches the volume of earthly prayers.

Second. It would seem that the prayers of the saints become acceptable only when there is added to them the incense of the prayers of heaven, or in other words, there must be added the intercession of Christ and the effects of his atoning work.

This brings to our mind the inspired statement of Paul, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26,27).

vs. 4 "And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

What a comforting thought! We can be sure that our prayers are acceptable to God, because of the added incense of the ministering angel. This gives us another insight of the work of angels. Paul said of them, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

But the symbolism suddenly changes. Rev. 8:5: "And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth." We have a similar instance in Ezekial 10:2. "And he spoke unto the man clothed with linen, and said, go in between the wheels, even under the cherub and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city."

As here in Ezekial, so in Revelation, the fire of God, like coals from the altar, is cast upon the earth.

"And there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake," These symbolize the terrible things that will happen in the scenes to follow when the seven angels sound their trumpets. All things are now ready for the blast of the first trumpet.