

THE SEVEN EPISTLES OF CHRIST

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THE BOOK OF ALL NATIONS

Word of God-the grand unveiling
Of His glory and His grace:
When the lamps of earth are failing,
Here is light for all our race.
Word of truth-through all Time's changes
Its glad messages abide;
Homeward, past earth's cloudy ranges,
Still our footsteps it will guide.
Word of wisdom for the erring;
For the weary, word of strength;
Sure and steadfast hope conferring
Daily all the journey's length.
Thy good news to every nation
In its own tongue now declare-
Till the Author of salvation
Find His homeland everywhere.
Word triumphant!-spread thy pinions,

Take from land to land thy flight,
Till the earth's distraught dominions
In the love of God unite.

FORWARD

WITH THE exception of the four Gospels, the books of the New Testament were written in the form of epistles, or letters, to individuals, to local churches, or to the apostolic church as a whole. It is universally recognized, however, that this does not in any way affect the application of these scriptures to Christians and Christendom to the end of the gospel era.

Paul wrote nine epistles to seven local churches and three to two of his companions in labor, but no person has any difficulty whatever in applying their revealed truths to his own heart and life down here in the twentieth century. The same is true of the epistles of Peter and John. The person who reads or preaches from these epistles is in no danger of being challenged on the 'basis of the time they were written and the persons or groups to whom they were originally sent.

One of the books of the New Testament bears the name of Jesus Christ as its author. It is prefaced with seven epistles addressed to seven of the many churches of Asia Minor. Should not reason and logic place this book and these epistles of Jesus on the same basis as all the others of the New Testament, giving them a universal as well as a local application? In fact it would seem most natural and reasonable for the epistles written by Christ and with which He completed the canon of Scripture, to receive as much attention as or even more than those written by His apostles. However, the Apocalypse and its introductory epistles to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, constitute the most neglected portion of the New Testament, if not of the entire Bible.

In the light of this amazing fact the writer is constrained to say to the members of the modern church, and especially to his brethren in the ministry, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." Many preachers and writers are earnestly trying to change this situation. For this we should thank God and take courage. To this end is this book being written and dedicated, with the prayer that it will inspire many to give the Revelation its proper place in modern religious thinking and preaching. The motto of the godly Bengel is especially appropriate in our attitude toward the last book of the Bible: "Apply thyself wholly to the Scriptures and apply the Scriptures wholly to thyself."

THE AUTHOR

1. THE CROWN JEWEL OF PROPHECY

THE REVELATION is the last book of the Book of books, the last installment of God's love letter to man. It therefore concludes and crowns the canon of Scripture. This last book of the Bible is the final revelation, which crowns the Scriptures with a crown of glory and seals divine inspiration with the seal of the living God. Not only is the Revelation one of the most brilliant gems among the sacred writings, but it is the crown jewel. One writer calls it "the capstone of divine revelation and inspiration." It puts the finishing touches on a perfect book that reveals to man the eternal purpose of the Most High. "The Apocalypse completes the Canon of Scripture; and with reverence be it said, the sacred Canon would be imperfect without it." (C. Wordsworth, Lectures on the Apocalypse.)

Not only does the Revelation complete and crown the Biblical canon, but it is also the summary of the entire Bible. It has therefore been appropriately called a mosaic of the rest of Scripture. Almost everything in the Apocalypse can be traced to some other part of the Bible. Of the thirty nine books of the Old Testament, twenty-six are directly quoted from in the Revelation, and of the four hundred and four verses in this last book, two hundred and seventy-eight are either quoted from or colored by Old Testament passages. The first five chapters contain twenty-seven, fifteen, thirteen, sixteen, and fourteen references respectively to various books of the Old Testament. Hengstenberg declared that “the seer of the Apocalypse lives entirely in Holy Scripture.” This last book sends the searchers for truth into every part of the Scriptures. Thus it is proved to be an essential part of the whole gospel design. Then, too, the rays of divine light emanating from every other part of the Bible focus upon this final installment of revealed truth.

The Epilogue

Genesis is the prologue of the Bible and the Revelation is the epilogue. It is the epilogue of divine revelation, in which the principal topics are recapitulated in order to emphasize their importance. George W. Davis has said that “Moses and John clasp hands across the space of sixteen centuries, completing the full testimony of God.”-The Patmos Vision, Page 10. The Bible would be as incomplete without the Revelation as without Genesis. The first two chapters of Genesis describe the Paradise that was lost through sin, and the last two chapters of the Revelation picture the Paradise that will be restored when sin and sinners are no more. Between these two perfect states is the long dark night of sin. What was begun in the prologue is finished in the epilogue. “In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end.” (White, Acts of the Apostles, Page 585.) Here they come to a glorious climax.

Speaking of this purpose of the Revelation, one writer said: “The Apocalypse is an epitome of the whole Bible, a unique interweaving of all the symbols, types, shadows, figures and fundamental ideas of the entire Old Testament into one comprehensive book of brief compass. Just as the acorn contains in embryo and potentiality the entire oak with its roots, fiber, bark, branches and leaves, so Revelation as no other one book embodies in itself the entire volume of the Scriptures.”-S. L. MORRIS, The Drama of Christianity, Page 11.

The Revelation is essentially a last days book, written especially for the last generation. It contains the instruction most needed by the church in the last days of the reign of sin. This is the chief reason that it sums up the entire Scriptures and is the epilogue of revealed truth. Its purpose is to prepare God’s remnant people for the closing crisis of human history and the Second Advent of Christ. This book should therefore be of special interest to present-day Christians. “I come quickly” is said three times in the last chapter. All the prophecies and revelations of the book climax in the return of our Lord. The book therefore demands our careful study at this time.

Although this last book is divinely called a revelation, it is also declared to be a prophecy. In the first chapter the writer uses the expression, “the words of this prophecy,” and in the last chapter he refers to what he has written as the prophecy of this book,” “the book of this prophecy,” and “the words of the prophecy of this book.” Prophecy is history written in advance. It is the recording of events before they come to pass. One writer said: “As the ages roll by, history practically takes the place of prophecy, the foretold becoming the fulfilled.” The Revelation is one of the greatest if not the greatest of the prophetic books of the Bible. It is the complement to the book of Daniel, and what Daniel is to the Old Testament, the Revelation is to

the New. This last book foretells the events and condition of the last days in order that the remnant people of God may be safely guided through of the crises years of human history.

The Promised Blessing

“Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand.” “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Revelation 1:3; 22:7.

Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, no other begins and ends with such a promise to the reader, hearers, and doers. We may justly claim this beatitude as in this treatise we pursue our way through a portion of the Revelation. The word blessed means “happy, joyful, blissful, beautified, hallowed, consecrated.” The revelations of this book place all who study and obey them in the very atmosphere of heaven, so that they will walk with God as Enoch did in days of old. This book opens with a beatitude and closes with the benediction, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” This also is true of no other book of the Bible. This constitutes a divine endorsement of the book as a whole as well as an incentive to study and a promise that it can be understood. The church will never know the great loss sustained by neglecting its study. Bengel rebukes Christians for their attitude toward the Revelation, declaring that they have reversed the promise, making it read, “Blessed is he that reads not.”

“Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear,” indicates public reading by the minister and an attentive attitude on the part of the audience. “Blessed is he who reads aloud” is the James Moffatt translation. The Author intended that His book should be read publicly to the churches to which it was sent that public reading of the apostolic epistles was the custom of the time, just as the Law and the Prophets had been read in the synagogues from time immemorial. Only a few copies of the Scriptures were available, and they were in the keeping of the religious leaders. The laity did not have personal access to the scrolls of the prophets or to the epistles of the apostles. This custom continued till the invention of printing placed the Scriptures in the hands of the people in their own tongues. The custom of public reading from the Bible still prevails to some extent, although the former chief reasons for it no longer exist. The Bible is now in practically every home.

It is evident from verse 11 that only one copy of the Revelation was written by John, and it had to be passed from church to church and read to the congregations by the elders. The promised blessing must also include private reading and study in these days when the art of printing has placed the book within reach of every individual. The present neglect of the Revelation by ministers in their private study and public preaching is doubtless largely responsible for the small amount of reading and study devoted to it by the laity. Suppose the book is difficult to understand and is filled with seeming mysteries. The promised blessing is unconditional to all who read and bear and are willing to obey the instruction as fast as it is revealed and understood.

Neither readers nor hearers can claim the promised blessing, unless they are willing to “keep” or “lay to heart” what is written. “Keeping strictly the things in it having been written.” (Emphatic Diaglott.) Strict obedience to the light revealed is an important condition to receiving the blessing. This is true of all the Scriptures. (Matthew 7:24-29; Romans 2:13; James 1:22; 2:12.) One of the authors of Pulpit Commentary tells what is meant by keeping the things

revealed: “(1) Seize the principles of the book, and abide in them. (2) Study its prophecies, and wait for them. (3) Learn its promises, and lean on them. (4) Ponder its precepts and obey them.” (Revelation, Page 10.) Another writer asks: “How keep them?” and then answers: “One part in one way, another part in another; the commandments by obedience, the mysteries by thoughtful reception; as Mary, herself a marvel, kept mysterious intimations vouchsafed to her, and pondered them in her heart.” (C. Rossetti.) “Those things which are written therein,” must include the entire contents of the book, and not merely a few of the exhortations scattered through it. The statement “For the time is at hand,” emphasizes the importance of immediate action and the danger of delay.

The Threatened Curse

“For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Revelation 22:18, 19.

No other book of the Bible contains such a malediction on those who treat it unfairly. This indicates that the book contains no nonessentials that need to be eliminated, and that it is too complete and perfect to be improved by the process of addition or subtraction. In divine revelation there is no room for improvement. To attempt to read into the Revelation anything that was not written or authorized by the Author, adds to it; and to lightly esteem or neglect as unimportant any part of its revelations places the guilty party under the threatened curse. The malediction also includes those who exalt their own opinions above divine truth, or who change the meaning to suit their own interpretation or convenience. When we attempt to add to what God has said, He adds to us the curse. If we attempt to subtract from His Word, He subtracts from us the blessing. (See Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32.)

In view of the way the Apocalypse has been neglected and mistreated, the warning is indeed timely. Commenting on the threatened curse, The Cambridge Bible says: “The parallel of those passages proves, that the curse denounced is on those who interpolate unauthorized doctrines in the prophecy, or who neglect essential ones; not on transcribers who might unadvisedly interpolate or omit something in the true text. The curse, if understood in the latter sense, has been remarkably ineffective, for the common text of this book is more corrupt, and the true text oftener doubtful, than in any other part of the NT. But it may be feared that additions and omissions in the more serious sense have also been frequently made by rash interpreters. It is certain that the curse is designed to guard the integrity of this Book of the Revelation.”-The Revelation of Saint John the Divine, Page 146.

The Author

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” Revelation 1:1, 2.

Even though the Revelation, like all scripture, had its origin with God the Father, the Author and Fountain of all truth, and was given to man through the Son, who is the spokesman of the Godhead and the only Mediator between God and man, the human instrument or writer

was John. Four times the writer designates himself as “John” or “His servant John,” but he gives no further means of identification. There has been some dispute as to whether this refers to John the apostle or to some other John, but the weight of authority is in favor of the former. Paul, Peter, James, and the other apostles used similar expressions in identifying themselves, indicating that they were too well known to require further identification.

The writer not only took it for granted that his readers would identify him as the only John among the disciples of Jesus, but he also declared that he had borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. “This is the John who taught the truth concerning the Word of God and the truth told us by Jesus Christ—a faithful account of what he had seen.” (Weymouth.) Does this refer to the Gospel which he had previously written? It would seem so. He identifies himself as the John who had written the account of the life and teachings of Christ.

A careful examination will prove that the Gospel, the epistles of John, and the Revelation were written by the same author. More than twenty texts show a striking resemblance. It is a well-known fact that all writers use expressions peculiar to themselves. No other writer speaks so often of Jesus as the Word and the Lamb, or uses the words witness, overcome, manna, sheep, and shepherd, or refers to the “living water,” as does John. A. T. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 6, Page 274) declares that “there are numerous coincidences in vocabulary and style between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse,” and Dean R. C. Trench asks the question: “Who else, without arrogance, could have taken for granted that the bare mention of his name was sufficient to ensure his recognition, or that he had a right to appropriate this name in so absolute a manner as his own?”—Commentary on the Epistle to the Seven Churches in Asia, Page 3. For another to assume the mere title of “John” would seem akin to forgery.

The earliest Christian writers indicate that the church of early post apostolic days never questioned that John the apostle was the author of the Apocalypse. Justin Martyr, in the early part of the second century, testified that John the apostle was the author. In his Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, he said: “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 would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem.” (Chapter 81.)

Eusebius, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, and Victorinus, the latter being the author of the oldest extant commentary on the Revelation, and all living between the middle of the second and the beginning of the fourth century, unanimously testify that John the apostle was the writer of this last book of the Bible. Davidson declares that “enough has been given to show that the apostolic origin of the Apocalypse is as well attested as that of any book in the New Testament” (Samuel Davidson, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, Volume 1, Page 245), and Robertson says that even though some attempt to throw doubt on the apostle John’s authorship of the Revelation, “a respectable number of modern scholars still hold to the ancient view that the Apocalypse of John is the work of the Apostle and Beloved Disciple, the son of Zebedee.” (Page 273.)

Date Written

There is likewise a difference of opinion regarding the date of the writing of the Revelation. Some place the date during the reign and persecutions of Nero in AD 69, and others during the time of Domitian in the year 96. The weight of authority is in favor of the latter date. Irenaeus, who was but a few decades removed from John, speaking of the apocalyptic vision,

declared that it “was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.” (Against Heresies, Book 5, Chapter 30.) Victorinus ascribed the writing of the book to the time of Domitian. He said: “When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse.” - Commentary on the Apocalypse, From the Tenth Chapter, v. II.)

Eusebius, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian, declared that John was banished in that year to Patmos, where he had his visions, and Jerome, one of the most learned of the early writers, bore testimony to the same fact. He said: “Having been banished in the fourteenth year of Domitian to the Island of Patmos, he wrote the Apocalypse.” (Treatise on Illustrious Men, Chapter 9.)

Further evidence that John was not banished during the reign of Nero is that the persecutions of that emperor did not extend beyond the city of Rome. According to Tacitus (Annals, Book 15, Chapter 44), the persecutions of Nero had no relation to religious belief but were mere outbursts of a tyrant’s rage to shift the responsibility for the burning of Rome. Domitian, who reigned from AD 81 to 96, carried on the second of the ten bloody attempts of pagan Roman emperors to destroy Christianity and thus preserve the gods and religion of the Romans. Moffatt declares that the earlier date for the writing of the Revelation is “almost impossible,” and such is the conclusion of the most dependable scholars.

John’s Banishment

It is believed that John was banished in AD 94 and that he received his visions during the latter part of 95 and the beginning of 96. According to Tertullian, the apostle was “plunged into burning hot oil without being hurt and then banished to an island.” “John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of His faithful servant, even as He preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.” - E. G. WHITE, Acts of the Apostles, Page 569, 570.

Trench says that “the deportation of criminals, or those accounted as such, to rocky and desolate islands was, as is well known, a common punishment among the Romans.” (Pages 22, 23.)

“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 1:9. John was banished because he was a witness for Christ in the preaching of the gospel. At that time Christianity was outlawed as a form of treason against the Roman gods. Paul declared that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” It has always been the fate of Christians, and especially of the prophets of God, to suffer persecution and sometimes martyrdom. Satan never persecutes his own citizens, nor does he afflict cold or lukewarm church members.

It was the godliness of the early Christians that brought on them the wrath of the great adversary. This explains why persecution is largely unknown to the modern church. This fact is set forth by a well-known Christian writer: "Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is, that the church has conformed to the world's standard, and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God

are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled."-WHITE, *The Great Controversy*, Page 48.

Christ prophesied that persecution would be the fate of His followers, including His immediate disciples. (Matthew 23:34-36.) This prediction was literally fulfilled. His forerunner, John the Baptist, was beheaded by order of King Herod; Christ Himself was scourged and crucified; Stephen was stoned to death; James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. Philip was scourged, imprisoned, and crucified; Matthew was killed with a halberd; James the Less was stoned, and his brains were dashed out with a fuller's club; Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded. Andrew was crucified at Edessa; Mark was dragged to pieces by an infuriated mob on the streets of Alexandria; Peter was crucified, head downward at his own request; Paul was beheaded at Rome by order of Nero. Jude, the brother of James, and who was also called Thaddeus, was crucified at Edessa; Bartholomew was beaten and crucified; Thomas was thrust through with a spear; Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. Simon Zelotes was crucified in Britain; and John was persecuted and banished to Patmos, and was the only one of the early disciples who died a natural death. (See Fox's *Book of Martyrs*.)

Persecution for Christ's sake has always been a blessing in disguise. Of the Israelites in Egypt we read that the more they were persecuted "the more they multiplied and grew." Thus it has ever been. The ten pagan Roman persecutions of the early church were terrible beyond description, but during that period Christianity made its greatest progress. By the end of the first century it is estimated that there were more than six millions of Christians in the Roman Empire, and by the end of the third century Christianity had supplanted paganism as the religion of the empire. The first gospel seeds were watered by the blood of martyrs, and bountiful was the harvest. Tertullian wrote to a persecuting Roman ruler: "Kill us, torture us, grind us to dust. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in numbers we grow; the blood of Christians is seed." (Apology, Chapter 50.) This experience was repeated during the persecutions of the Middle Ages, and will be repeated again just before Christ returns. (Matthew 24:21-22; Revelation 7:13, 14.)

Place of Banishment

Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea about fifty miles southwest of Ephesus, the home of John in Asia. It is a mass of barren rocks, dark in color and cheerless in form. It has neither trees nor rivers, and the only land that can be cultivated is in a few little nooks between the ledges of rock. The island is about ten miles in length and five or six in width, or about thirty miles in circumference. The present population is about four thousand, mostly Greek miners and fishermen. It is also known as Palmosa or Palmos. In the side of its highest hill is a cave, or grotto, where tradition says John lived, and received and wrote his visions. There can be no question but that John wrote the Revelation on the island of his captivity. Twelve times he was told to write what he had seen in vision. Revelation 10:4 indicates that he wrote as the successive visions were given.

Banishment was one of Rome's chief methods of punishment, and islands were often used as places of confinement in order to make it more difficult for the criminals to escape. There were two degrees of punishment determined on the basis of social and political rank. Prisoners of wealth and social standing and high political rank were given an allowance and permitted the

freedom of the island. They were not compelled to labor, and could even work for hire. On the other hand the lot of the common prisoners was very severe. They were condemned to sleep on the hard floor or ground and were permitted few privileges. They soon died under the severe strain or sank to the level of beasts. It was a condition of hopeless despair.

Christians shared the fate of the common prisoners, and John was their “companion in tribulation.” According to tradition, as given by Victorinus, John was condemned to work in the mines. These mines were doubtless marble quarries, as there is no discovered evidence of any other kind on the island. With no apparent hope of ever again seeing his home in Ephesus or visiting the churches of his love and care, he made the book of Revelation his last will and testament, as it were. However, the sudden assassination of Domitian on September 18, 96 AD, unexpectedly ended the banishment of John. Nerva, the new emperor, released the prisoners of his predecessor. Clement of Alexandria says of John that “on the tyrant’s death, he returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos.” He then describes John as traveling “to the contiguous territories of the nations, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, there to ordain such as were marked out by the Spirit.” (Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved, see. 42.)

Out of a Roman penitentiary came the Apocalypse to bless Christendom. From the barren rocks of the volcanic hills of Patmos came the book that completes and crowns the canon of Scripture. Although his only earthly companions were criminals, John did not become discouraged and lose hope. He rose above his circumstances and environments. Although he had been compelled to sever his connections with home and loved ones, he maintained his union with God and held communion with heavenly beings. We should be thankful for the bleak and barren places of life that cut us off from all earthly help so that heaven can draw near. Lonely Patmos became to the prophet “the house of God” and “the gate of heaven.” A monastery now crowns the summit of the most nearly central height, where tradition says John received his visions. It was built eight centuries ago and dedicated to “Saint John.”

From the places of exile and affliction have come the characters and literature and music that have been the greatest blessing to mankind. While in exile, facing the wrath of his brother Esau, Jacob in his extremity found God, and his character was so transformed that he was given a new name to correspond to his new character. It was while Joseph was in exile in Egypt that he developed a character that gave him the blessings of heaven and the favor of Pharaoh. He became a savior of the nation and of his own people. Moses was a fugitive when he met and talked with God at the burning bush, where he received his commission to deliver Israel from affliction and bondage. While a fugitive from the wrath of Pharaoh he wrote the books of Genesis and Job.

The experience of David while fleeing from the wrath of Saul brought him the greatest blessings of his life. It was during this time that he produced the best and most spiritual of his psalms. Elijah was in exile fleeing from the wrath of the angry Jezebel when he heard the “still small voice” directing him to his last work, which culminated in his translation by means of the fiery chariot. Ezekiel and Daniel wrote their great prophecies during Babylonian captivity. Tyndale and Luther produced their Bible translations while fugitives from the wrath and power of papal Rome. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress came out of Bedford jail to bless the world. In the dark room of affliction and hardship the greatest characters have been developed and the greatest literature has been produced. Such also is the noble heritage of the Revelation.

2. THE GREAT PROPHETIC DRAMA

THE FIRST three verses constitute the introduction, foreword, or superscription of the Apocalypse, which is the first division of the book. Every book has a preface or introduction to the main work, and this one runs true to form. It contains a brief summary of the contents of the book, with preliminary information in regard to the author and the purpose of its publication. In harmony with the divine plan of the book, the introduction is divided into seven parts. It contains the title of the book, its divine origin, the mediums of its revelations, the name and identity of the writer, the manner in which it was revealed, the purpose of its publication, and the promised blessing on the reader, the hearers, and the doers. Seven is the sacred number representing completeness and perfection. In all literature there cannot be found an introduction that is so brief and yet so complete and perfect. Modern writers would demonstrate their wisdom by following this example. Perhaps then more of their introductions would be read.

The Revelation is the greatest panorama of prophetic events ever written, yet it is more than a prophecy. It is a revelation of the past, present, and future. Its visions reach back to the very beginning of sin and graphically describe its long, sad history. The Apocalypse reveals “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” It describes the revolt of Lucifer and the war in heaven by which he was cast out of his high official position in the government of God. It pictures the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christy the conquering “Lamb of God” and “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” The world-embracing scope of these visions which cover the past, present, and future history of the reign of sin and the triumphs of righteousness, is set forth in Revelation 1:19: “Write the things which thou has seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” The chief portion of the book, however, is prophecy revealing “things which must shortly come to pass.”

It is because this book covers the past, present, and future that it is called “The Revelation” instead of “The Prophecy.” In his book, Daniel dealt only with the present and the future. But the Revelation is the seal and summary of the whole Bible, and is therefore all-embracing. “Genesis presents before us man and his bride in innocence and blessedness, followed by man’s fall through Satan’s subtlety, and man’s consequent misery, his exclusion from Paradise and its tree of life and delightful rivers. Revelation presents, in reverse order, man first liable to sin and death, but afterwards made conqueror through the blood of the Lamb. The first Adam, and Eve, represented by the second Adam, Christ, and the Church, His spotless bride, in Paradise, with free access to the tree of life and the crystal water of life that flows from the throne of God.”-JAMIESON, FAUSSET, and BROWN, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, Volume 2, page 548.

“Paradise Lost” in the book of beginnings is replaced by the matchless vision of “Paradise Restored” in the book of consummations. Here is made known all that had been left unrevealed in the other scriptures. The Revelation is the climax and completion of the history of redemption, and a prophecy of the consummation of God’s eternal purpose. In this revelation, therefore, all the books of the Bible meet and end.

The Scriptures abound in sharp and striking contrasts. Sin and righteousness are often placed side by side that we may shun the one and accept the other. The fearful results of transgression are placed over against the blessings of obedience so that we can decide whether we will suffer the penalty of sin or enjoy the reward of holiness. The Revelation is in a special sense the book of contrasts. It describes the sad conditions prevailing in the church in order that

Christ may be pointed to as the only remedy. Apostasy is graphically portrayed in order to place the greater emphasis on the value of loyalty. Terrible war scourges are pictured as the natural aftermath of rejecting the overtures of the Prince of Peace. The antichrist is placed in contrast to the true Christ; the false prophet to the faithful messengers of truth; the harlot woman, symbolic of the church of Satan, to the beautiful virgin, representing the church of Christ. Satan's counterfeit system of religion is described as an incentive for the acceptance of the everlasting gospel.

Mediums of Revelation

In Revelation I we are given, as in no other scripture, the divine order of the mediums of revelation: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass. And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." First is the Eternal Father, who is the fountain and origin of all light and truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second Person of the Godhead, is the Word of God and Spokesman of the Trinity. He is the channel of communication between the Father and man, the only Mediator between heaven and earth. He is the ladder of Jacob's dream, by means of which the angels carry on their mission of ministering to the heirs of salvation. Although the Apocalypse was given more than sixty years after His ascension, Jesus still received His revelations from the Father as while on earth. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is the third medium of revelation and is mentioned in verse 4. It was He who inspired all the holy prophets as they wrote their messages. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The fourth agency in the revelation of God is said to be "The angel," who was doubtless Gabriel, "the angel of prophecy." It was Gabriel, the mighty angel who stands in the presence of God, who brought Daniel his visions concerning many of the same events portrayed in the Revelation.

The fifth in the line, and the first human agent, was the prophet John. The beloved apostle was the scribe, or amanuensis, of the celestial beings-the one who transcribed the message in the language of man. "The genesis of the Apocalypse has now been traced from its origin in the Mind of God to the moment when it reached its human interpreter." (H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Page 2.) Bengel says, "It is indeed John, the apostle, who wrote this book; but the author is Jesus Christ." (*Gnomon of the New Testament*, Volume 5, P. 181.)

The prophet is designated "His servant John," with the statement that he was commissioned to pass the revelation on to Christ's other servants in the churches. Only servants of Christ can understand and appreciate the Revelation, for to them it was given and is dedicated. The last agency in reaching mankind with the gospel is the church, the organized body of believers or servants of Christ. (Verses 4, 11.) Through the church the revelations of God to man are to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, embracing "every creature." This has ever been God's method of revealing his will, and He has no other plan. From the original source, the Eternal, to the final recipient, the world, there are seven links in the chain that unites man with God and earth with heaven.

Method of Revelation

The Revelation was "signified" by the angel to the prophet. Signify means "to make signs or tokens; to communicate by signs; to signify by symbols." The messages of the book are revealed in signs and symbols. Its prophecies are symbolic. The Apocalypse is the companion to the book of Daniel, and the two must be studied together. "Daniel is the key to Revelation:

Revelation is the key to Daniel. Both are complete together divided, they are incomprehensible.” (Davis, Page 16.) The language of both books is highly figurative, requiring great care in the interpreting of their symbols. The Bible is its own best interpreter and commentator.

The purpose of Christ “to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass,” also indicates a panoramic method of instruction. At the beginning of the various visions, John uses the expressions I “saw” thirty-five times, I “beheld” seven times, “I looked” five times, He “showed me” two times, “and there appeared” two times, I “heard” twenty-eight times. And eighteen times he was told to “behold,” and four times to “come and see.” In the two great prophetic books, events, conditions, nations, and religious movements and organizations are pictured in prophetic symbols. They are pictorial presentations or prophetic cartoons.

The Revelation is declared by one writer to be “God’s picture book,” and another calls it “a vast picture gallery.” There are many different kinds of pictures, some of which need no explanation, because in them everything is real or natural. But in symbols or cartoons each object represents something else than that which is pictured. There are many things that cannot be pictured except by symbols or cartoons, and for this reason the Lord makes use of a method well known and approved by man. A nation or a political party or a church can be pictured only in symbols. There is no other method of pictorial presentation.

Ordinarily the Scriptures must be understood in the natural sense in which they are written, unless there is every reason to believe that the language is figurative. The presumption, however, is always in favor of the literal interpretation until the interpreter can prove otherwise. The burden of proof is always on the side of the symbolic interpretation. God always means exactly what He says and in the way He says it unless there is sufficient evidence that figurative or parabolic language is being used to illustrate divine truths.

Whenever pictures are shown in the pictorial book under consideration, we naturally conclude that they have a symbolic meaning. This is a well-recognized rule among Bible students in dealing with prophetic interpretation. It is a very simple matter to understand a good cartoon if one is familiar with the symbols employed and the thing or event being pictured. At the same time nothing is more obscure and devoid of meaning, or subject to such a variety of interpretations, as symbolic pictures that are unfamiliar and therefore enveloped in mystery.

The language of the Apocalypse, like that of the book of Daniel, is not only figurative but highly dramatic. It was presented to and written by John in the form of a play or drama, as if the various scenes were acted out on a stage before him in prophetic vision, or thrown on a screen in a series of moving pictures. The Apocalypse is the great prophetic, drama of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a drama of life and death, and in it we must find ourselves as actors, “for we are made a theatre unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” 1 Corinthians 4:9, marginal reading. In the Revelation the curtain that veils the future is drawn aside by a divine hand and the events that affect the people of God in their contests with the forces of evil are presented in the form of moving parables or dramatic episodes. Christians should ever be grateful for the promise: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7.

The Revelation was written in the age of Greek drama, when parables, pageants, and panoramas were popular. Like the Greek pageant, the Apocalypse is divided into different scenes, participated in by different actors. At regular intervals between scenes that are dark and drear the chorus of victorious saints on earth or celestial beings in heaven is heard singing

heavenly anthems or spiritual oratorios to bring cheer and consolation to the valiant soldiers of the cross. A drama consists of various parts such as a prologue, different acts and scenes with interludes, choruses, plots, and counter plots in which actor heroes suffer temporary defeats ending in ultimate victory. These are all found portrayed in the Revelation.

Many apocalyptic students divide the Revelation into seven scenes or panoramas in harmony with the divine arrangement of the entire book. These great scenes are subdivided into smaller acts or episodes. The entire Christian dispensation is covered by the whole. It would have been impossible to cover the entire Christian Era with its many events and various phases in one panorama. The interlude choruses of good cheer and consolation give silver linings to the dark clouds of the apocalyptic scenes. They are the songs in the night mentioned by the psalmist.

Many modern commentators make a grave mistake in attempting to prove that the various visions of the Revelation are successive instead of parallel. The Revelation follows the method used in Daniel of presenting the same great line of events from different viewpoints and thus covering the same periods of history. They may start at different dates and with different events, but they all end with the same great climax, the Second Advent of Christ to establish His everlasting kingdom.

The following quotation sets forth the design of the apocalyptic visions: "The Visions of the Book are not successive but parallel. One Vision brings us to the verge of the Second Advent, and so closes. Another Vision opens out of it, returning to the course of the Christian era dealt with in the previous Vision, and displaying another aspect of the great subject of the Book." - A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 5. The efforts to fit everything after the first three chapters into a period of three and one half years immediately preceding the Second Advent is indeed pathetic. This false conception, for the purpose of maintaining a preconceived and erroneous position, has made almost completely useless many of the recent commentaries on the Revelation.

Why Symbols Are Employed

In answer to the question of His disciples, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Jesus set forth the chief purpose of symbolic or figurative language: "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." "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (See Matthew 13:10-16, 34, 35.)

A parable is defined as "a thing darkly or figuratively expressed, a figure or similitude." The word comes originally from the Greek parabol which literally means "to throw beside, to compare; a comparison." The figures and symbolic representations that passed before the prophet in vision were parables in action. In them the Lord revealed "things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world." The parabolic method of teaching is employed all through the Old Testament Scriptures, and was very popular in Christ's day. It was an approved and up-to-date method of imparting instruction.

Jesus taught in parables for various reasons, but chiefly that He might conceal truths from His enemies and at the same time reveal them to His friends and disciples. He was constantly hounded by spies seeking His destruction. The time came when Jesus could no longer use plain language that could be used against Him, and He spoke in parables in order to keep His work from being cut short before His mission was accomplished. He was thus able to proclaim great

truths and at the same time administer severe rebukes in parables, and His enemies could not use them to condemn Him. When they attempted to interpret them they condemned themselves. (Matthew 21:33-46.) By the use of a parable the prophet Nathan caused King David to pass sentence upon himself, and thus in an impressive manner convicted him of his awful sin against Uriah. (2 Samuel 12.)

The purpose of parables or symbols is beautifully set forth by William M. Taylor: "Now let us ask why the Lord Jesus used parables in His discourses. And to that we may answer, first of all, that He employed this form of instruction as a means of attracting attention. But another reason why our Lord used parables in His teaching was to prevent His auditors from being repelled by too sudden revelation, either of His purpose or of His message. He had to reveal His truth to men 'as they were able to bear it. In the third place, He employed them [parables] to stimulate inquiry. Parable was the veil which Jesus put over the face of truth, to secure its safer perception to those who listen to His words. Parable was a veil, which both revealed and concealed the truth. To those who had the spirit to discern, the outward covering brought the truth nearer; but to those who lacked that spirit, there was nothing but the story.'" -The Parables of Our Savior, Page 7-11.

"The form of His expressions whether He uttered parables, proverbs, maxims, or apparent paradoxes, was intended to spur men's minds to profounder thought, to awaken the Divine consciousness within, and so teach them to understand that which at first served only as a mental stimulus. The form of teaching, which repelled the stupid, and passed unheeded and misunderstood by the unholy, roused susceptible minds to deeper thought, and rewarded their inquiries by the discovery of ever increasing treasures.

"So far as they [the hearers] hungered for true spiritual food, so far as the parable stimulated them to deeper thought, and so far only, it revealed new riches.... And so, in proportion to the susceptibility of His hearers, the parables of Christ revealed sacred things to some and veiled them from others, who were destined, through their own fault, to remain in darkness.... The parables served to sift and purge the throng of Christ's hearers." -AUGUSTUS NEANDER, The Life of Jesus Christ, Page 102, 103.

In the use of symbols the lower and natural is used to illustrate the higher and the spiritual. All nature thus becomes alive to the spiritually discerning, so that illustrations of the truths of the kingdom of heaven are everywhere visible. The use of symbols and parables throughout the Scriptures is therefore not arbitrary, but is based on both usage and reason. In order to understand the parables and symbols of the Scriptures, it is necessary to study them in connection with the other volume of God's holy word, the book of nature, the illustrated edition of the Bible.

When one thinks the matter through carefully, it is seen that the parabolic method of revealing the future is absolutely essential. In a special sense Daniel and the Revelation forecast the rise and fall of great earthly powers under satanic control and waging warfare against the church and saints of God down to the very close of human history. In order to protect these prophecies from the wrath of God's enemies and preserve them for the future use of His people, it was necessary that they be couched in language that only the saints could understand. Had John named pagan Rome in his Apocalypse instead of describing it in symbols, his book would never have lived to reach the churches to which it was written. We may be sure that all writings were censored by a Roman official before being permitted to go on their mission to the mainland.

How much more difficult it would have been to preserve this book through the pagan Roman persecutions of the early church and the Scriptures as a whole through the persecutions of the Dark Ages if symbols had not been employed to describe pagan and papal Rome and their misdeeds.

Spiritual Discernment

Christ dedicated the Revelation to "His servants," and there is no promise that others will be able to understand its visions. The secret of wisdom in things divine and spiritual is given in Daniel 12:10: "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." Here is doubtless the secret of the present ignorance regarding the true meaning of these two great prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. (Matthew 11:25; Mark 4:10-12; 1 Corinthians 2:11-14.) Spiritual things have always been foolishness to the unspiritual, just as the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians are foolishness to those who cannot read them. Only to a few dialectic students are they full of meaning. The importance of their message was unlocked by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, by which an alphabet was made possible. Thus the meaning of the symbolic prophecies is plain to those who hold the key of spiritual discernment and cherish a willingness to obey the truths revealed. Some laugh at the idea of beasts and birds being used in the Scriptures to symbolize nations, but at the same time they speak reverently of the American eagle, the British lion, the Russian bear, and the Chinese dragon. God employed many of the very symbols of nations; they were used and recognized by men everywhere.

The Lord has promised to preserve His Word down through the centuries. "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shall keep them, O Lord, Thou shall preserve them from this generation for ever." Psalm 12:6, 7. This prophetic utterance has been completely fulfilled, so that in this last generation the Scriptures come to us fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, untarnished and unsullied. A divine hand has preserved their purity through all the ages. One of the greatest factors in the preservation of the Word of God has been the use of signs, symbols, and parables by which truth has been hidden from those who would destroy it, and revealed to those who appreciate and obey it. As the various truths are needed they become meat in due season to the people of God. Light is released from the great storehouse as it is needed and becomes applicable. It is thus that "the path of the just is as the shining light" that shines with ever-increasing brilliance "unto the perfect day."

Spiritual light will continue to increase, till the last generation is flooded with a blaze of glory. In one of his visions John saw an "angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." Revelation 18:1. One writer has said that there has ever been an increasing flood of light, "from the solitary ray of Eden, to the clear, widespread beams of Daniel, and to the rich glow of the Apocalypse." The patriarchs, with partial knowledge, looked forward to the advent of the Redeemer, the great goal of prophetic vision. The prophets saw even more clearly, and the apostles walked in the very presence of the Light of the world "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." But the accumulated light of all ages has been reserved for the last generation, when the great gospel commission is to be fulfilled in all the earth.

In a special sense the prophetic portion of the Bible belongs to the last days, inasmuch as most of the great lines of prophecy focus on the Second Advent. "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My

counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.” Isaiah 46:9,10: A well-known writer says: “Chronological prophecy was intended, as we have seen, for the benefit of later generations, and especially of the last. The lapse of time only could fulfill it, and the lapse of time only could explain it. The light that it sheds falls not on times near its own, but-as a lighthouse illuminates the ocean afar, and not the rock on which it stands-on remote future ages.”-H. GRATTAN GUINNESS, *Light for the Last Days*, Page 48. We have now come to the most remote of all generations since the prophecies were given, and it is time for the church to live in expectation of the translation of the visions of the prophets into joyful realities.

3. THE UNVEILING OF CHRIST

THE DIVINE purpose of the last book of the Bible is to reveal Christ to the church and through the church to the world. He is the central theme of all its visions, the chief Hero in the various scenes of its dramatic panoramas. Its visions and symbols emphasize the eternal verities that are the very substance of revealed truth. The love, justice, holiness, and majesty of an omnipotent God are here set forth. Christ is portrayed in His combined offices of prophet, priest, and king. He is the eternal Son of God and also the Son of man. As the God-Man, Christ is revealed as Emmanuel, the only Mediator between God and man. In order to become this connecting link, He had to combine in Himself both the divinity of God and the humanity of man. He is the slain lamb, for it was by His death and resurrection that He secured the triumph over sin that is ours by faith. In His nail pieced hands He holds the destiny of nations. Here the Holy Spirit is also revealed in His ceaseless and sevenfold ministry.

The purpose of this book is revealed in its title. Revelation is the English for Apocalypse, which is the Anglicized form of the Latin from the Greek. Before the eleventh century this book was known only as the Apocalypse, as indicated all the early manuscripts. This is the only book of the Bible that was divinely named. The name given by the translators, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” is a contradiction of the inspired title as given in the first verse. John is not “The Divine,” and the book did not originate with him, nor was it written to reveal him.

The use of the word divine in connection with religious leaders in the Christian church seems to have had its origin with Eusebius, or at least it began in his time. Recent archaeological discoveries in the ruins of Ephesus show that “divine” was one of the titles used by the pagan priests of the Temple of Artemis, or Diana. Like many other pagan practices, its use came into the church during the great apostasy, or “falling away.” Although provision has been made through the gospel whereby man can be made partaker of the divine nature, he should never assume a title that ‘belongs alone to the Deity. We speak of the divinity of Christ because He is a member of the Godhead and is therefore divine.

Revelation is defined as “the act of revealing; a disclosure of what was before unknown; also that which is revealed.” The word reveal comes originally from the Latin *revelare*, which literally means “to unveil.” All Apocalypse is therefore something disclosed, unveiled, discovered, or brought to light. An Unveiling is “the act of removing, turning back, or taking off the veil so as to discover what previously was hidden from view.” It conveys the idea of the drawing aside of the curtain of concealment. When the curtain is drawn back, the scene behind it becomes clearly exposed to view and that which was hidden becomes visible.

“The Unveiling of Jesus Christ” is the rendering in the Concordant Version. Apocalypse carries the meaning of both a revelation of information that had been kept at least partially

concealed, and also the unveiling of some person, or persons, or events, so that they can be more clearly seen. The word Apocalypse combines the meaning of revelation and unveiling and is therefore the most appropriate title of the book. It is called The Revelation and not The Revelations. It contains many visions, but like the Bible itself it is one book, written for the one purpose of revealing Christ to man.

Book Not Sealed

The contents of this book are not sealed or concealed; they are revealed, unfolded, made known. The author never intended that these visions should be an unsolvable puzzle, a mystery, or a conundrum. He expected them to be understood. In fact, the prophet was given explicit instructions not to seal the book. "And he said unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand." Revelation 22:10. We must conclude that this instruction was obeyed. The prevailing idea that the Apocalypse is a sealed book and cannot be understood is entirely refuted first, by the title; second, by the promised blessing on all who read, hear, and obey what is written in it. Third, by the instruction not to seal the book; and fourth, by the oft-repeated injunction that all who have ears to hear should "hear what the Spirit said unto the churches."

If the Apocalypse were a sealed book, a more appropriate title would have been The Apocrypha, which means just the opposite of apocalypse. An apocrypha is something hidden, obscure, unknown, veiled. Or the title would have been The Mystery, The Sealed Book, The Enigma, The Sphinx of the Bible, or The Book of Hidden Secrets. As we begin the study of this book we should thank God and take courage because it is a "revelation," and this fact in itself gives assurance of success. The erroneous idea that this book is sealed has been the chief factor in making it the neglected book of the Bible, and also constitutes the principal excuse for not studying it.

Those who thus excuse their neglect are described in Isaiah 29:11,12: "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he said, I cannot. For it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he said, I am not learned." Here are the two principal excuses for neglecting the study of the Revelation. The learned say, "It is sealed," and the uneducated say, "I am not learned." The minister hides behind what he thinks makes it impossible for him to interpret the book, and the laity behind their lack of theological knowledge and training in the Scriptures. Nevertheless the divine promise is: "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 29:18-19. Is this a prophecy of the universal study of the Revelation resulting in the bestowal of the blessings promised to those who read, hear, and obey?

The book of Daniel is the only book of the Bible ever sealed, and then only till a certain time, "the time of the end," or the last days, when "many would search it through, and knowledge would be great." (See Daniel 12:4, 9.) This book has long since been unsealed and its glorious truths have been given to the church and the world. But notwithstanding all the internal and external evidences that the Revelation is an open book, many still persist in declaring it to be sealed and therefore unfathomable. Herder speaks of those in his day who considered it the mark of a sound understanding to abstain from the study of it. Archbishop Benson asked a friend,

“What is the form the book presents to you?” and the answer was, It is chaos.” Dr. Robert Smith said that “the study of the Revelation either finds or leaves a man mad,” and another writer declared it to be “a dark and inexplicable hieroglyphic, which it is humility and duty to leave unopened.”

But we must remember that the hieroglyphics can now be read and understood, and so can the Apocalypse. William Milligan said of the Revelation: “To numbers it is not only absolutely sealed; they imagine, and are content with imagining, that no loosing of the seals is possible. Sometimes deliberately, almost always practically, the book is laid aside. The effect is more than negative; the result worse than loss. The symmetry and completeness of Scripture are marred. The idea of Revelation is disturbed.... The Book is there, and it must either be excluded from the New Testament, or the Church must continue her struggle to comprehend it until she succeeds in doing so.”-Lectures on the Apocalypse, Page 4. It is cheering to note a recent change for the better in the attitude of Christendom toward this hitherto neglected book.

Christ Unveiled

The Revelation is more than a prophecy given by Christ; it is a revelation of Him. "This is the unveiling of a Person -Jesus Christ-and not merely a prediction revealed through Him" is the footnote in the Concordant Version. To reveal or unveil Christ to mankind is the chief purpose of all prophecy and especially of the last book of the Bible. No other portion of the Scriptures is so completely saturated with revelations of the personality, power, ministry, and eternal purpose of Christ. One writer declared that this last prophecy "arches over the guilty and suffering race like the grand vault of heaven, illuminated by the glorious central Sun-Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness."

In the Apocalypse the name of Jesus or its equivalent is found forty-nine times in the first chapter, thirty-nine times in the second, and forty-nine times in the third, or a total of one hundred and thirty-seven times in the first three chapters. Twenty-eight times in the Revelation He is called the “Lamb.” To understand this book we must constantly look for the Man of the book, the One whom it was especially written to make known. Dr. Gordon tells of the lesson he learned from his little son to whom he had given a puzzle map of the United States. He was amazed because the map was so quickly and successfully put together. When he asked for an explanation the boy showed him a picture of Uncle Sam covering the entire back of the map. He had put the man together and in so doing had solved the puzzle. Only as we keep our eyes on Jesus can we understand the secrets of the Revelation.

Christ is the chief secret of all prophecy, for its purpose is to reveal Him. Peter wrote: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” 2 Peter 1:19. Christ is the Day Star, whose entrance into the heart brings the day’s dawning and whose Second Advent ends the night of sin. To reveal Christ was the purpose of the lamb offered by Abel; the test of Abraham on Mount Moriah; the Mosaic tabernacle and its typical services; and the writings of all the prophets. After Jesus rebuked the disciples for their ignorance and unbelief concerning His sufferings and death, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27. Jesus said to the Jews, “Had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me.” John 5:46.

It was the revelation of Christ in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost that brought conviction and conversion to three thousand sinners. The name Jesus appears nearly one

thousand times in the New Testament, and the word Christ more than five hundred times. The Emancipation Proclamation has been so written that as it is read the face of the author, Abraham Lincoln, becomes visible on the face of the document. To those with spiritual discernment every page of the Scriptures reveals its divine Author.

The Old Testament reveals Christ in promise and prophecy; the Gospels unveil Him in His earthly life, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Acts and the epistles disclose the early triumphs of the church under His Spirit's ministry; but the unveiling would be incomplete without the revelation of the closing book. This is the crowning revelation of the entire Scripture. One writer calls it, "A panorama of the glory of Christ." Gregory Nussen terms it "the last book of grace." In it Christ is pictured in heavenly glory at the right hand of God as the High Priest and Mediator of the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." He is also described as the supreme Judge, at whose tribunal all men and nations must appear. The final scenes picture Him as the "King of kings, and Lord of Lords," reigning forever over the saints in Paradise restored. The Revelation is the final act in the unveiling ceremony which began at the gates of Eden with the first gospel promise. It makes possible an unobstructed vision of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Genesis begins with Paradise lost and the fall of man, and Revelation ends with man redeemed and Paradise restored.

Not only is the Apocalypse a revelation of Christ in person; it also discloses Him in the "things," or events, "which must shortly come to pass." All prophetic events focus on Christ, and we should be able to discover His stately stepplings in the history of mankind. In one sense He is in all the events that fulfill His word and lead to the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. William A. Sunday said: "I ascended to the observatory of the prophets, where appeared photographs of far-off events and stars all focused upon the great Star which was to arise as an atonement for sin." In a special sense the Revelation is a photograph gallery of the events that reveal and unveil the Son of God. He speaks to mankind through events and judgments. They are His messengers, and their mission is to reveal Him. Thus a knowledge of the prophetic word makes it possible to see Jesus in the happenings of the past, and in the news items of the daily press. To see Him is the supreme need of all men, and to make Him more clearly visible is the purpose of the Apocalypse.

4. THE SALUTATION

REVELATION 1:4-8 is known as the salutation, and is therefore not strictly a part of the Apocalypse proper. Since the book is written in the form of an epistle, it is appropriate that it begin with an apostolic salutation, or greeting. The introduction and salutation together constitute the prologue of the book. Revelation 22:8-21 is the epilogue. The salutation begins with an invocation of divine grace and peace upon those who read, hear, and obey what is about to be revealed. Grace is the unmerited favor of God expressed in manifold ways, and peace is the state of security and tranquillity that comes to those who enjoy the smiles of divine approval. Both grace and peace are said to come from the Triune Godhead.

Through the prophet, the Holy Trinity salutes the church and seals the message to be delivered. This is indeed a marvelous salutation. In all literature there cannot be found a more sublime and appropriate opening for a book, nor a message backed with such complete authority. Such salutations were customary in Bible times. (See Daniel 4:1; 6:25; 2 Corinthians 13:13, 14; Jude 1, 2.) Sometimes the greetings appeared at the beginning and sometimes at the close of a

book or epistle, and sometimes both. But none is more complete and full of meaning than that with which the Apocalypse begins.

There can be no real peace without the favor of God. Because God cannot extend grace to the wicked, they have no peace. The prophet said: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked." Isaiah 57:20, 21. Webster defines grace as follows: "Clemency; mercy, forbearance. A dispensation, privilege or pardon, granted not by right but by favor. In English law, a general and free pardon by act of Parliament; called also 'act of grace.' In a theological sense, (a) the free unmerited love and favor of God; (b) divine influence or the influence of the Spirit in renewing the heart and restraining from sin. (c) A state of reconciliation to God; (d) virtuous and religious affection or disposition, as faith, meekness, humility, patience, etc., proceeding from divine influence; (e) spiritual instruction, improvement and edification."

The Revelation, the promised blessing, and grace and peace, come from all three members of the Godhead, but like the book itself they have their origin with the Eternal Father, with a no beginning to His past and an endless future. He is identified as the One "which is, and which was, and which is to Come." He is "the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity" Isaiah 57:15. His existence is "so limitless that we imagine nothing as either before or after it." (E. H. Plumptre, A Popular Exposition of the Epistles to the Eastern Churches of Asia, Page 28.) "Such a title of the Eternal Father stands fitly among the first words of a book which reveals the present in the light both of the past and of the future." (Swete, Page 5.)

In Revelation 1:8, 11 Christ is also described as being eternal. He declares Himself to be the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending, the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." The eternal existence of the Son with the Father is beautifully set forth in Proverbs 8:22-30. In Isaiah 9:6 Christ is called "The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." He is the great "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, 15. In the song of Moses the Lord thus described Himself: "Behold, now, I am He who Am and Was, and Will be." Deuteronomy 32:39, Targum of Palestine. To the Jews, Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (See John 8:56-59.) In Revelation 3:14 He declares Himself to be "the beginning and Lord of God's creation." (Weymouth.) Christ is set forth in the Scriptures as the Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer. He also survives all changes and is the end. All beginnings were made by Him, and He will bring about all consummations. He is "the Author and Finisher of our faith."

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is described as "the seven Spirits which are before His throne." Seven represents the fullness and perfection of His power and the diversity of His operations. He is known in the Scriptures as (1) "the Spirit of God," (2) "the Spirit of His Son," (3) "the Spirit of holiness," (4) "the Spirit of wisdom," (5) "the Spirit of love," (6) "the Spirit of grace," and (7) "the Spirit of glory." See Isaiah 11:1 and 21 for a description of the sevenfold nature of the operations Of the Holy Spirit through the Messiah.

Although we are told that there is but "one Spirit" Ephesians 4:4), His being designated here in Revelation as "the seven Spirits of God" does not constitute a contradiction. It is a symbolic representation of the many aspects of His work in the plan of redemption. This is the position of the rest of the apocalyptic students. Philip Mauro, in his book, Of Things Which Soon Must Come to Pass, page 52, quotes the following: "The seven fold nature does no violence to

the trinity. It merely points to the fullness and variety of the powers that are embraced in the unity,” and Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explain the statement as “the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold is (i.e. perfect, complete, and universal) energy.” (Vol. 2, page 551.) A.T. Robertson says: “A difficult symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit here on a par with God and Christ, a conclusion borne out by the symbolic use of the seven spirits in 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 (from Zechariah 4:2-10). There is one Holy Spirit with seven manifestations here to seven churches, unity in diversity.” (page 286.)

There are those who claim that this statement has reference to seven angels, but this is not possible. “The seven Spirits” could not be created beings, for they are coupled with the Father and Son as the source of blessings, grace, and peace, and are here placed between the first and third Persons of the Godhead. Since seven different times the admonition is given for the churches to whom the Apocalypse is sent to “hear what the Spirit said unto the churches, “ it would hardly seem possible that He should be left out of the picture. The text without doubt refers to the Holy Spirit who “does His sevenfold gifts impart.”

In verse 14 Christ is said to have eyes like “a flame of fire, and in Revelation 5:6 He is described with “seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Through the Holy Spirit, who directs the work of the angels, or “ministering spirits,” the Father and the Son see all that takes place on earth (See 2 Chronicles 16:9.) In Zechariah 4:6, 10-14, Christ and the holy Spirit are called “the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” The “seven Spirits” in our text are said to stand “before his throne.” Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” (John 15:26; Ephesians 2:15.) We are also admonished to do our praying “in the Holy Ghost,” for we have the assurance that “the Holy Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses; for we do not know what prayers to offer nor in what way to offer them. But the Spirit himself pleads for us in yearnings that can find no words, and the Searcher of hearts knows what the Spirit’s meaning is, because His intercessions for God’s people are in harmony with God’s will.” (Jude 1:20; Romans 8:26-27, Weymouth.) From the Holy Spirit, pictured as “the seven Spirits of God” before the throne, the “seven golden candlesticks” or “lamps” symbolic of the “seven churches,” receive their light that makes them “the light of the world.”

Revelation of Christ

Since Jesus Christ is the immediate source of the revelation, blessings, grace and peace, and the purpose of the Apocalypse is to reveal Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit are placed before Him in this description of the Trinity. He is mentioned last because it is of Him that the writer is about to speak at length. This makes it possible for the description of Him whom the book especially reveals to be more complete. Though all three members of the Godhead cooperate in the work of redemption, as they did in the work of creation, the chief purpose of this last gospel message is to reveal or unveil Jesus Christ. He is the first cause and the last effect; the origin of all and the goal of all; the first to seek the sinner and the last to forsake him. True to the title and design of the book, we are given a revelation of his eternity, divinity, ministry, character, love, and final universal dominion. He stamps the Apocalypse with the authority of His threefold office of prophet, priest and king.

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and who washed us from our sins in His own ‘blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory

and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” Revelation 1:5,6. Here is a beautiful sevenfold ascription of honor and glory to Jesus Christ

Jesus is first described as the ”faithful witness” or the ”truthful witness.” (Weymouth) In Revelation 3:14 he is called “the faithful and true witness.” In chapter 1 verse 10 the “two witnesses” are also called the “two prophets.” In a special sense God’s prophets have been His witnesses, and since Jesus was the greatest of all prophets He was also the chief of all witnesses. The Apocalypse is called “the testimony of Jesus” in Revelation 1:2 and 19:10. Christ and the Holy Spirit are the two chief witnesses for God to man and for man before God. “The testimony of Jesus,” who is the “faithful witness,” is absolutely dependable, for it is “impossible for Him “to lie.” What a contrast is His testimony to that of the majority in this age of “false accusers” and “trucebreakers,” when perjury on the witness stand has become one of the universal crimes of mankind.

He is also “the first begotten of the dead,” or “the chief born of the dead,” according to the Emphatic Diaglott. This expression and similar ones are used five times in the New Testament. “First” as use here must be in point of quality rather than time. The “first fruits” were also called the “chief fruits.” Christ was not the first to be resurrected in point of time. Moses was raised from the dead a millennium and a half before, and others were raised during Christ’s earthly ministry. However, all other resurrections depended on the raising of Him who is “the resurrection, and the life.” Moses was awakened from his death sleep only on condition that Christ would be raised from the dead.

The resurrection of Moses was a pledge that the Son of God would die for the sins of the world and be raised again to life. This was the reason for the dispute between Christ and Satan over the body of Moses, as pictured in Jude 9. Satan doubtless contended that the Son of God had no right to resurrect anyone from the dead until after His own resurrection, provided He succeeded in His earthly mission. This also explains why Moses and Elijah came down to meet Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration “and encouraged Him concerning His death.” If He failed, death could be their only portion, because they were in heaven by means of a resurrection and a translation on condition He would not fail. The resurrection of Christ was the crowning and overwhelming proof and demonstration of His divinity and messiah ship. It was the event also that sealed His priesthood. He could not be priest till He had become the God-Man, Emmanuel. After His resurrection He entered upon His mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary. His triumph over death and the grave was the assurance of a new creation, the fruition of a new hope.

Jesus is also “the Prince of the kings of the earth,,” or “the Prince over the kings of earth.” (Moffatt.) The psalmist reports the Father as saying of the Son: “Also I will make Him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” Psalm 89:27. Ruler ship over kings is the result of His triumph over death. It was by His resurrection that Jesus won sovereignty over principalities and kingly powers, the very position the devil offered Him on the basis of surrender, and which He rejected. His office as king will be occupied in its fullness only when redemption is complete. The title here is at least partly prophetic of the time Christ occupies the throne of His glory and reigns as “King of kings” over the twelve apostolic kings and the twelve nations of the saved in the new earth state.

But in one sense Christ is now the Prince, or Ruler, “over” or above the kings of the earth. To Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, He declared that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of

men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the basest of men.” Daniel 4:17. The proud king had to learn by a tragic experience that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will.” (See verses 30-36.) In Ephesians 1:20-21, we are told that after His resurrection and ascension the Father placed Jesus “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.”

This is a hard lesson for kings and rulers to learn. The ten plagues of Egypt failed to fully teach Pharaoh that God’s sovereignty is complete and supreme. Belshazzar, if he learned the lesson at all, learned it too late to profit by it. The handwriting on the wall of the banqueting room was an irrevocable decree: “Thy kingdom is finished and given to the Medes and Persians.” Napoleon while in exile on the island of St. Helena is reported to have said: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself, have founded great empires: but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus, alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. Jesus Christ was more than man.” (Bertrand’s Memoirs, cited in Liddon’s Bampton Lectures, 1866.) “Thus, in these three epithets of Christ, are briefly set forth His life on earth, His glorious resurrection, His present and eternal universal dominion.” (A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 11.)

“Unto Him that loved us,” or “loves us.” (RV) The love of Christ is not past only, but continuous. The supreme act of (lying for us did not extinguish His affection. Of course Calvary was the greatest of all demonstrations of that undying divine love. The cross alone measures the height and depth and breadth of His affection. By that means only are we “able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.” (Ephesians 3:17-19.) According to Isaiah 49:15,16, the marks of the crucifixion will be the visible evidence of that love throughout all eternity. Love is the very essence of God’s character and the foundation principle of His government. The apostle says that “he that loves not knows not God; for God is love.” 1 John 4:8. We should more fervently love Him, for we are the supreme objects of His love, and He craves our love in return. It is a tragedy to love and not have affection reciprocated. No wonder Christ is grieved when the objects of His love relax their love for Him. Not the love of power but the power of love controls the supreme Lover of mankind.

“And washed us from our sins in His own blood.” “Loosed us,” says the American Revised Version. The past tense indicates an accomplished fact. The love is ever present and continuous, but the washing was done when the crimson flow was loosed on the cross of Calvary and a fountain was opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. “Christ loosed us once for all, but loves us always.” (Robertson, Page 287.) On this point Joseph A. Seiss says: “As God’s great love, in all its fullness, is a present love; so our absolution through the blood of Christ is a past absolution. We have not to wait and work to be forgiven. The work has long since been done. The decree went forth, the releasing word was spoken, the forgiveness was declared, when Jesus left His tomb; and all that any man has to do on that subject is to believe it, and to appropriate to himself the glorious reprieve.”-The Apocalypse, Volume 1, Page 50.

A happy man answered the question as to when he had been cleansed from sin by saying, “It happened two thousand years ago, but I only found it out yesterday.” Through Christ we are not merely pardoned from sin but we are delivered from its power and dominion. “The snare is broken and we are escaped.” The chains of Satan have been snapped asunder, and we are free. Sinners are represented as captives of Satan, in bondage to his will and slaves to vicious habits.

In fact we are told that men “are taken captive by him at his will.” (Isaiah 49:24, 25; 2 Timothy 2:26.) The purpose of the gospel is to free us from these fetters. (Isaiah 61:1-3.) Pardon alone is not enough. We must be both pardoned and loosed from captivity. It would be useless to pardon a man and then leave him in prison. That would completely nullify the pardon. The deliverance from bondage is a necessary part of the transaction. So Christ both loved us” and “loosed us from our sins.”

To be washed from the stains made by sin is an important part of the gospel. Under the terrible guilt of sin, David Cried out: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:2, 7. To disobedient Israel the Lord pleaded: “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil.” “Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:16, 18.

Scarlet, the symbol of sin, is one of the hardest colors to remove from cloth without destroying the fiber. Satan’s government is symbolized by a great red dragon, and his church by a harlot clothed in scarlet. The blood of Christ is the great sin remover. It is the only means of removing the scarlet stains of sin on our character garments so that they are left clean and white. We are told that those who pass through the final great tribulation will “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14. We could not be redeemed with such “corruptible things, as silver and gold,” but only “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” 1 Peter 1:18, 19. Only the Creator could redeem or re-create, and only the Lawgiver could save from the curse of the law and remit the death penalty for transgression. Although Christ paid an enormous price to redeem us, we should rejoice in the knowledge that He will never regret it, for when the work of redemption is finished, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11.

And last but not least, Christ “bath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father.” “A kingdom, to be priests,” is the American Revised Version, and “kingdom of priests for God,” is the Twentieth Century New Testament rendering. In 1 Peter 2:9 Christians are called “a royal priesthood,” which is an exact quotation from the Septuagint of Exodus 19:6. They are doubtless kings in their relation to the world and priests in their relation to God. The royal and sacerdotal dignities are the highest that can be bestowed on man. “Hath made us kings and priests,” indicates a present experience, but according to Revelation 5:10 and 20:6 it also has an application to a future state. In God’s eternal purpose the church is commissioned to present all individuals and nations before the throne of grace in intercession and mediatorial ministry. The knowledge of the fact that every genuine Christian has been divinely appointed as a priest of the kingdom of God with direct access to Him at all times should have a profound effect on his life and conduct.

The First Doxology

“To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen,” is the first of the many doxologies that are offered to Christ in the Revelation. The following is an appropriate summary of the identification given Christ, and the doxology with which it closes: “The glory brightens as the account proceeds. That we should have a place in the affectionate regard, and tender, effective love of the great Lord, is much. That we should have forgiveness for all our sins, made perfect by His free grace at the cost of His own life’s blood, is almost too much for belief. But, to

affection is added honor, and to salvation, official dignities. We are not only loved, and freed from our sins, but, if indeed we are Christians, we are princes and priests, named and anointed for immortal regencies and eternal priest hoods. Let men despise and condemn religion as they may, there is empire connecting with lowly discipleship, royalty with penitence and prayers, and sublime priesthood with piety. There is not a believer, however obscure or humble, who may not rejoice in princely blood, who does not already wield a power which the potencies of hell cannot withstand, and who is not on the way to possess eternal priesthood and dominion.” (Seiss, Page 51, 52.)

The prophet John was enraptured with the prospect of a ruler ship and dominion under King Jesus, whom he had known and loved. After declaring that His glory and dominion will continue forever, he adds, “Amen,” which means “so be it.” Because the kingdoms of this earth are transitory and oppressive, and their rulers are often corrupt, haughty, arrogant, and cruel, every saint should join the apostle with a hearty “Amen.” The rule of Christ will ‘be in justice and equity, and will be permanent. His throne “is for ever and ever,” because righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom.

The prophet Daniel declared that in the days of the present kings and nations “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” Daniel 2:44. The prophet Isaiah said that when the government of this world rests on the shoulders of the Prince of Peace, “of the increase of His government and peace there shall be -no end.” (Isaiah 9:6, 7.) An ever-increasing peace will characterize the reign of the Prince of Peace. No wonder John was enthusiastic in anticipation of such a King and dominion.

5. THE DEDICATION

JOHN to the seven churches which are in Asia.” “What thou sees, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.” Revelation 1:4, 11. This is known as the dedication of the book of Revelation. All books are dedicated to some person or persons; to an organization or an institution; or to the general public. Law books are dedicated to attorneys, medical books to physicians, music books to musicians, and so forth. Some religious books are dedicated to the church only, and others to the general public.

The Apocalypse is dedicated to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia. “In Roman Asia,” and “in the province of Asia,” are other translations. This was only a small part even of Asia Minor, about the size of the State of Pennsylvania. This book is not dedicated to cities, provinces, or nations, but to the church and its members. Only children of the kingdom can therefore grasp its secrets, for to them it was written and dedicated. To those who have spiritual discernment the Revelation becomes “a land full of fountains and springs and wells, out of which flows the river which makes glad the city of God.”

The question is often asked as to why the Apocalypse was sent to only seven of the many Christian churches of that period. At Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Corinth, and in many other places throughout the Roman Empire there were scores if not hundreds of Christian churches, many of which were much larger in membership than the seven named. Even in the Roman province of Asia there were many others besides the seven. We read of churches in Troas, Assos,

Miletus, Colossae, Hierapolis, Tralles, Magnesia, and in the home of Nymphas. There must have been others in the many cities and villages of the province.

It is evident that the seven named were chosen as representatives of all the churches of that generation, and in fact of all Christendom. Seven is the sacred number of the Scriptures, and especially of the Apocalypse. Numbers in the Scriptures are as significant and important as words. The Bible contains a divine arithmetic as well as a divine message. Since the creation, when the weekly cycle of seven days was instituted to divide time and safeguard the Sabbath, seven has been a sacred number. Trench declares that “the evidence of this reaches back to the very beginning. We meet it first in the hallowing of the seventh day in pledge and token of the covenant of God with man.” (Page 63.)

The number seven is prominent throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It seems to be the sign of God’s covenant relation to His people. The Hebrew word seven is bound up in the word which signifies an oath, or a covenant confirmed with an oath. It is the number of sacrifice, by which the covenant is maintained in vitality and strength. All the typical feasts were ordered by seven, or seven times seven. The Passover was followed by “the feast of weeks.” The Israelites compassed Jericho seven days and seven times on the seventh day of their investment of the city, that they might know that God had given them the city as the result of their covenant relation with Him. There were seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in Egypt. Naaman was instructed to dip seven times in the river Jordan as a recognition that the God of Israel was his healer.

King Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity continued seven years that he might know that the judgment came from the God of Daniel. Examples of the use of the sacred number seven are scattered through both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures. Seven is the combination of the numbers three and four, which are also prominent in the Bible and especially in the Revelation.

To a striking degree the Apocalypse is the book of sevens and its divisible numbers three and four. This is doubtless because it is the culmination and climax of all the Scriptures. It contains seven great visions, many of which are divided into seven parts. There are seven epistles, addressed to seven churches, and each of these is divided into seven parts. The seven churches are symbolized by seven golden candlesticks, and the seven angels, or ministers, by seven stars. Christ is pictured as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes representing the seven Spirits of God. There are seven angels, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, seven thunders, seven heads, seven crowns, seven mountains, seven kings, and a sevenfold ascription of praise to God and the Lamb. Most of these sevens are divided naturally into four’s and three’s, as is especially emphasized in the seven epistles, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues. The number seven is used at least fifty times in the Revelation.

The chief reason for the prominence of the number seven is the fact that it signifies fullness, completeness, and perfection. It stands for universality and unity in variety. Trench says, “The Seven, must be regarded as constituting a complex whole, as representing an ideal completeness.” (Page 29.) Just as the seven spirits before the throne are used to represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness and completeness of His character and office, His power and operations, so the seven churches are used to represent the one universal church in its complete being and history from the time of the apocalyptic visions to the Second Advent of Christ. The seven churches to which the Apocalypse was sent were therefore representative of the whole

church in all ages. The Revelation is for this reason applicable to the church universal and is as up to date as any of the other epistles of the New Testament.

Covers Christian Era

A few quotations will suffice to show that the position here taken is in harmony with the teachings of many students of the Revelation. "The Seven Churches represent 'the Holy Church throughout all the world.' . . . The letters to the seven churches, it is obvious, are full of moral and spiritual instruction to the church of all ages." (Cambridge Bible.) "These seven represent the universal Church of all times and places." (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Volume 2, Page 551.) "Seven churches are selected, the condition of which appeared most suitable to the purpose which the Apostle has in view; and these seven represent the Church of Christ in every country of the world, down to the very end of time. The universal Church spreads itself out beneath His gaze; and before He instructs He blesses it."-WILLIAM MILLIGAN, *The Book of Revelation* (The Expositor's Bible), Page 5, 6. "The seven churches stand for the entire Church, the complete society of professing Christians, the Church universal, in the whole of its membership and the entirety of its earthly condition and career." (Seiss, Page 130.) This is the view of most commentators, and it is sound in its reasons and conclusions. In fact, no other position would harmonize with the message and purpose of the book.

Not only do the seven churches represent the universal church between the two ad-vents of Christ, but they divide the Christian Era into seven parts, or Periods. The seven churches represent seven phases of Christian history, reaching between apostolic days and the return of our Lord. In the names of the seven churches and the letters addressed to them is set forth the main features of the condition of the church universal during the different periods. One of the earlier students of the Revelation said: "May it not seem that these seven Churches, besides their literal respect, were intended to be as patterns and types of the several ages of the Catholic Church a principio ad finem [from the beginning thereof unto the end] according to the several ages thereof, answering the pattern of the seven churches here." - JOSEPH MEDE, *Works*, book 5, Chapter 10, Page 905.

The following are samples of scores of excellent quotations showing that this is well-nigh the universal view of Biblical scholars:

"The epistles to the seven churches we hold, with many of the best commentators, to be a prophetic setting forth of the successive stages of the church's history-its declines and its recoveries, its failures and its repentances, from ascension to advent." - A. J. GORDON, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, Page 132, 133.

"These seven letters are prophetic. The churches addressed are not necessarily the outstanding churches of the first century, but churches with certain dominant characteristics, the description of which makes a prophetic picture of seven periods of collective earthly church history. While describing church conditions and characteristics as a whole in the first century, they also describe church conditions and characteristics in every period of church history. Each letter also describes dominant church conditions of [sic] characteristics of a particular period." - WILLIAM McCARRELL, *Christ's Seven Letters to His Church*, Page 8.

This was the view of Victorinus and Tichaenius of the fourth century; Arethas and Primasius of the sixth; Girdstone and many others of later periods. "It is the opinion of very learned writers upon this book, that our Lord, by these seven churches, signifies all the churches of Christ to the end of the world. And by what He said to them, designs to show what shall be the

state of the churches in all ages, and what their duty is.” - MATTHEW POOL, Annotations Upon the Holy Bible, Volume 3, Page 952.

The seven epistles of Christ are therefore of as universal application as the epistles of Paul to the seven churches of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. All agree that these are universal in their application, and are still up to date, even though they were addressed to local churches of the first century. Why should the seven letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia be localized and confined to the first century any more than the epistles of Paul to local churches of the same period?

The Order Named

Why are the seven churches always named in the same exact order? Every detail of Scripture has an important meaning. Nothing in divine revelation is thrown together in a careless or haphazard manner. The churches are named in the order in which a messenger from Patmos would deliver a message or letter to them. The seven churches formed a circle with Ephesus as the imperial gateway to the province. Along the coast of the Aegean Sea was a great Roman highway which was built between the years 133 and 130 BC. It passed through Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos. An imperial post road ran east from Pergamos, the capital of the province, through Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, where it joined another post road direct from Ephesus on the coast. This was a recognized circuit of imperial, provincial, and commercial postmen. This was the order in which John had often visited these churches from his home in Ephesus.

At the time this book was written there were three ways of sending letters. First by private messengers employed by those who could afford them, or by volunteer carriers. Most of Paul's letters were sent to the churches by private messengers, Christian helpers who volunteered to deliver them. The second method was by messengers of commercial organizations which carried on commerce between the cities and provinces and nations of the world. These postmen could be hired to carry private messages if such service did not interfere with their regular work or take them off their regular route. The third method was by imperial and provincial postmen. Roman officials were constantly sending letters to all parts of the province or the empire. This was doubtless the method used by John in getting the Apocalypse to Ephesus, as all other avenues were naturally closed to him. This may be one of the reasons why only the seven located directly on the circuit were named. It is evident that each of these seven represented the center of a small group of other and smaller churches which doubtless also received the Apocalypse. Sir William Ramsay, in *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, says: “You can trace the outline of a complicated and elaborate system of symbolism, which is very characteristic of this book [the Revelation]. There are seven groups of Churches in Asia: each group is represented by one outstanding and conspicuous member: these representatives are the Seven Churches. These Seven representative Churches stand for the Church of the Province; and the Church of the Province, in its turn, stands for the entire Church of Christ.” (Page 177.) Of course after the church of Ephesus received the Apocalypse, the members there may have seen that it reached the church of Smyrna, and so on around the circle.

Although this last book was dedicated to all seven of the churches representing the seven periods of the Christian Era, the evidence is conclusive that it was written especially for the church of the last period. Its chief purpose is to prepare the remnant of the church for the revealing of Christ at His Second Advent. This is well stated by another: “The importance of

studying the Apocalypse increases with the lapse of time. Every revolving century, every closing year, adds to the urgency with which attention is challenged to the concluding portion of Holy Writ. And does not that intensity of devotion to the present, which characterizes our times and our country, enhance the reasonableness of this claim? Never, surely, was there a period when some mighty counteracting power was more needed. The Revelation of Jesus Christ duly studied supplies an appropriate corrective influence. Would that all Christians might in fullest measure receive the blessing of "them that hear the words of this prophecy, and that keep the things which are written therein; for the time is at hand." AUGUSTUS C. THOMPSON, Morning Hours in Patmos, Page 28, 29.

6. THE GOAL OF BIBLE PROPHECY

BEHOLD, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen." Revelation 1:7.

The return of Christ is the ultimate goal of all Bible prophecy, and this is especially true of the Revelation. The final revealing of our Lord in His Second Advent is the goal and focal point of all the contents of the Apocalypse. It is the most outstanding event of the book; the keynote of its messages; and the hub around which its apocalyptic visions revolve. Each scene in this prophetic drama climaxes with the coming Christ. The Old Testament prophecies place the chief emphasis on His first advent, while those of the New Testament emphasize His second coming.

It has been estimated that one verse in every eleven in the New Testament refers to the Second Advent of Christ. But in no other part of the Scriptures is this subject so prominently set forth as in the Apocalypse. Its very name implies that this is the chief subject of its contents. Of the eighteen times the word apocalypse appears in the Greek New Testament, six of them refer to the Second Advent, or revealing, of Christ. Near the beginning of this last book is the exclamation, "Behold, He Comes"; and in the closing chapter "I come quickly" is three times repeated. His return is also the dominant note of all between. It is mentioned in five of the seven letters. It is the grand theme of the book.

W. C. Stevens writes: "Abruptly verse 7 throws upon the screen the objective of the book, 'Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of Him.' The visibility to this earth of the returning Jesus while it is not here flashed upon the reader's first attention as the theme of Revelation-is yet presented as the great focal event of all the contents of the book. It gives the reader his proper position and attitude in confronting the whole book. This is the event which, next after Calvary, focalizes all rays of Scriptural prediction from Genesis 3:15 onward. The annunciation of this august event will evoke from the sanctified heart a fervent 'Even so. Amen.' " -Revelation, the Crown-Jewel of Biblical Prophecy, Volume 2, Pages 36, 37.

One writer has said that in the word behold it seems as if the prophet were pointing to the frontispiece of his book and therefore to the chief object of its publication. This first announcement of the coming King of kings and Lord of Lords closes with divine attestation of certainty and validity, "Even so, Amen," and the book itself closes with the testimony of its divine Author, "Surely I come quickly. Amen." The doctrine of the Second Advent is no myth or fable. It is dependable truth.

The coming of Christ is the climax not only of the last book of the Bible but also of each of its visions. Like the prophecies of Daniel, they all focus on the same great event. The closing chapters of the Revelation describe the coming King and His re-established kingdom of glory. The exiled apostle was so enraptured by the prospect of such a Ruler, whose glory and dominion would continue forever, that he cried out, Behold, He comes.” Who comes? The One he had just been describing in the previous verses. Behold is an expression or exclamation used to arrest attention and prepare the way for an important announcement. It is used twenty-six times in the Revelation. John recognized the fact that man has failed in his ruler ship of the world and that Christ alone is able and qualified to take its government upon His shoulder and rule with justice and equity. He only can restore the throne and dominion of the first Adam. This event will bring rejoicing to the entire universe, which is waiting and longing for the end of the reign of sin in this rebel world. (Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 11:15-17; 19:5, 6.)

John was thrilled with the thought that the same Jesus he had known and loved, and for whose return he had looked and prayed, was to come again to reign as King on the throne of David. He could never forget Christ’s first announcement of His departure and the effect it had on him and the other disciples. Nor could he forget the wonderful promise Jesus made on that occasion, which he himself recorded. (John 14:1-3.) The parting scene was also still fresh in his memory. He had heard the final message of the Master and had witnessed the ascension from the summit of Olivet. He saw the two angels and heard their assurance that the Jesus they loved would return again in the same manner they had seen Him depart. (Acts 1:9-11.) The disciples had watched the cloud dwindle into invisibility. The Advent hope became the comfort and inspiration of the apostolic church, and all who truly love Him now will long for His return.

Most Public Event

At the time of His ascension the angels told the disciples that Jesus would return “in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.” When He was taken up, “a cloud received Him out of their sight,” and our text says, “Behold, He comes with clouds.” (Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27; Revelation 14:14.) This is not the ordinary cloud that we see in the heavens, but the cloud or group of angels that make up the celestial chariot. In Isaiah 19:1 we are told that “the Lord rides upon a swift cloud,” and in Psalms 104:3, 4, that He “makes the clouds His chariot” and “walks upon the wings of the wind.” He also “makes His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire.”

In Psalms 68:17 it is said that “the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels,” and that “the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.” In other words the cloud covering Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the law and the cloud of glory over the Mosaic sanctuary were composed of the group of mighty angels that constitute the chariot of God. In Psalms 18:10 and Ezekiel 1:1-14; 10:9, 13-15, we are told that these chariot angels are the cherubim and seraphim who surround the throne and are the special ministers and messengers of the Almighty. In Daniel’s vision of the judgment scene he said that “His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire.” (Daniel 7:9, 10, RV) This was doubtless the “chariot of fire” that came to escort Elijah to heaven at the time of his translation.

That the Second Advent of Christ will be the most public event of all human history is evident from the fact that “every eye shall see Him.” The most important event of all time will not take place secretly, as many contend. There will be no secret or private “rapture” known only to the favored few. It seems to be God’s plan that every descendant of Adam shall have at least

one look at the Christ, the second Adam. This opportunity will be given all the living at the Second Advent of Christ, and to all others at the close of the millennium, when “the-dead, small and great, stand before God” to receive their rewards.

That the favored few who love and serve Him are not the only ones who will witness the return of Christ is evident from the fact that “every eye shall see Him” come in the clouds of heaven, and this will include the eyes of those “also which pierced Him.” This must include the Jews, who demanded His death and were responsible for His crucifixion; Pilate, who issued the sentence that sent Him to the cross; and the Roman soldiers who drove the nails through His hands and feet and pierced His side with the spear. It also embraces those living in the last generation who by their defiant attitude and willful sins “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” Hebrews 6:6.

Speaking of the last-day teachings that His return would take place secretly, Jesus said: “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Matthew 24:26, 27. From this most public and spectacular of all events none can hide. From Psalms 50:3-5 and Habakkuk 3:3-5 it is evident that Christ does not touch the earth at His Second Advent, but as the earth turns on its axis His people are gathered to Him by the angel reapers. (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.)

Includes His Enemies

Jesus told Caiaphas, the high priest who presided at His trial before the Sanhedrin, that he would witness His return and see Him “sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:62-64; Zechariah 12:9, 10.) This is possible only by means of a special resurrection just before Christ returns, and this special and partial resurrection of many of both the righteous and the wicked is foretold in Daniel 12:1, 2. There was a partial resurrection of saints at the time Christ came triumphantly from the tomb. (Matthew 27:51-53.) These special resurrections must not be confused with the two general resurrections at the beginning and close of the millennium, known as the resurrections of “the just” and of “the unjust,” and “the resurrection of life” and “the resurrection of damnation.”

The wailing and mourning of “all kingdoms” at the second coming of Christ indicates that the world will not be converted and ready for the event. Their rejection of His last warning message under the power of the Holy Spirit leaves them without excuse. That they have heard the warning is evident from the fact that they recognize the event when it comes. (Isaiah 13:6-8; Luke 13:28; Revelation 6:14-17.) There are two kinds of sorrow and mourning—the sorrow of the world at the results of sin, and godly sorrow that leads to repentance and reformation of life. (Joel 2:12-17; 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.) The mourning described in our text is not that of penitence, but of anguish and dismay. It is not the sort of mourning mentioned in one of the beatitudes, that brings comfort and divine blessing. All who do not experience the godly sorrow for sin that leads to repentance and reformation will in the day of God’s wrath cry bitterly. (Zephaniah 1:14-15.) This will include “the mighty men” who trusted in their own wisdom and strength. Jesus said: “Woe unto you that laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.” Luke 6:25.

The Righteous Rejoice

At the return of Christ when “He will swallow up death in victory” and “the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces,” the righteous will say of their returning Lord, “Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord. We have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Isaiah 25:8,9. All who mourn over their sins in this life will rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” when Jesus returns to make their salvation complete. Those who laugh at sin and find pleasure in unrighteousness now, will weep, wail, and mourn then with an anguish that will be unspeakable and full of bitterness. We must take our choice between a silly, giddy, foolish, and hilarious life now and bitter wailing then, or a serious, sober, godly life now and “exceeding joy” then. When the dark night of sin and sorrow ends in the blazing light of our returning Lord, the righteous will celebrate the event with joy and singing.

Is it any wonder that Paul speaks of the Second Advent of Christ as the “blessed hope” that leads those who embrace it to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”? (Titus 2:11-14.) This has been the hope of God’s people in all ages. It was the hope of Enoch and Job and David; of Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and all the prophets and apostles “since the world began.” (Acts 3:20, 21.) The Second Advent is mentioned more than three hundred times in the New Testament. Moody declared that there are two thousand five hundred texts in the Bible mentioning this topic. At one time he was asked the secret of his success and untiring effort in soul winning. With tears in his eyes he replied, “The secret of my work has been my looking for the coming of Jesus Christ.”

Many great religious leaders have testified of the transforming power of belief in the Second Advent of Christ in their own lives and ministry. J. Wilbur Chapman said: “Long years ago I came to see this wonderful truth, and I have no hesitation at all in saying that it completely transformed my ministry. If I have had any success in soul winning, if I have had any ability to turn men to righteousness, I think I must attribute it all to the influence of this wonderful truth. It has kept me with my eyes fixed on His coming, it has kept me with my heart longing for His return.” Dr. R. J. Torrey said there were four marked epochs in his Christian experience, the fourth being “when I came to see the truth concerning the second coming of Christ. The latter truth transformed my whole idea of life, it broke the power of the world and its ambitions over me, and filled my life with the most radiant optimism even under the most discouraging circumstances.”

This is the result of the Advent hope as set forth in the Scriptures. The apostle Peter, after speaking of the coming of the day of the Lord “as a thief in the night” and the destruction of the works and results of sin, says: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” 2 Peter 3:10, 11-14. John declared that “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” He then added, “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2, 3.

Christian Fundamental

Belief in the return of Christ is one of the fundamentals of the Christian religion. Dr. Joseph A. Seiss says of the importance of this doctrine: “He comes. Few believe this, and still fewer lay it to heart. Many sneer at the very ideal and would faint laugh down the people who are so simple as to entertain it. But it is nevertheless the immutable truth of God, predicted by all His

prophets, promised by Christ Himself, confirmed by the testimony of angels, proclaimed by all the apostles, believed by all the early Christians, acknowledged in all the Church Creeds, sung of in all the Church Hymn-books, prayed about in all the Church Liturgies, and entering so essentially into the very life and substance of Christianity, that without it there is no Christianity, except a few maimed and mutilated relies too powerless to be worth the trouble or expense of preservation. That religion that does not look for a returning Savior, or locate its highest hopes and triumphs in the judgment scenes for which the Son of man must reappear, is not the religion of this book, and is without authority to promise salvation to its devotees.” (Page 55.) Another well-known church leader says:

“If a man tells me he believes in God, I don’t know what he believes; I don’t know - whether he believes in the Pantheistic view of God, or in the Deistic view of God, or in the personal God. If a man tells me he believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures, I still don’t know what he believes. He might claim universal inspiration, and say the Bible was inspired in the same way that Shakespeare was inspired. If a man tells me that he believes in the divinity of Christ, I still don’t know what he believes: he might say he believes all men are divine.

“But when a man tells me he believes in the literal, personal, bodily, visible, imminent return of the Lord to this earth as king, I know what he believes on every other question. I know that he believes the Bible literally. I know what he believes concerning the Godhead, I know what he believes concerning the Virgin Birth, I know what he believes concerning the Atonement, I know what he believes concerning the Resurrection. I know that he is not a modernist, and I know that he does not believe in the evolutionary hypothesis.” - J. FICANK NORRIS, quoted in *The World’s Work*, September, 1923, Page 469.

Response of the Godly

John was so thrilled with the prospect of his returning Lord that he cried out, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Others who have learned to love Him and His appearing have responded in like manner. The Scotch preacher, Samuel Rutherford, said: “O, that Christ would remove the covering, draw aside the curtain of time, and come down! O, that the shadows and the night were gone”; and Richard Baxter exclaimed, “Hasten, O my Savior, the time of Thy return! Send forth Your angels, and let that dreadful, joyful trumpet sound. Thy desolate bride said, Come. The whole creation said, Come. ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus.’”

John Calvin wrote: “We must hunger after Christ till the dawning of that great day when our Lord will fully manifest the glory of His kingdom. The whole family of the faithful will keep in view that day.” And John Milton, the blind poet, cried out, “Come forth out of Thy royal chambers, O prince of all the kings of the earth! Put on the visible robes of Thy imperial majesty; take up that unlimited scepter which Thy Almighty Father have bequeathed Thee. For now the voice of Thy bride calls Thee, and all creatures sigh to be reviewed.” Uriah Smith thus expresses his anticipation of the blessed hope: “O day of rest and triumph, and every good, delay not thy dawning. Let the angels be quickly sent to gather the elect. Let the promise be fulfilled which bears in its train these matchless glories. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” A great galaxy of godly men and women in these troublous times join wholeheartedly in the response of these noble men in saying, “Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly.”

7. THE INTRODUCTORY VISION

HAVE completed our study of the prologue, which contains the introduction, the salutation, the dedication, the purpose, and the goal of the Revelation. We now come to the introductory vision, which is the first scene in the great prophetic drama of Jesus Christ. This is found in Revelation 1:9 to 20. This vision is introductory not only to the messages of Christ to the seven churches 'but also the entire book. "All its following visions depend for their significance upon what these letters disclose. They give a picture of the Universal Church, with the trials and triumphs of which the rest of the book is concerned.... It is for this reason that the letters are preceded and the whole book is opened by an introductory vision in which Christ is pictured as abiding in the midst of the Church." - CHARLES R. ERDMAN, *The Revelation of John*, Page 38, 39.

It is interesting to note that the messages to the seven churches, the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven vials are each preceded by an introductory vision of the mediatorial work of Christ in His sanctuary in heaven and of His church on earth. The entire book therefore centers in the atoning ministration of our great High Priest. Through a beautiful symbolism this introductory vision reveals the relationship between the priestly service of Christ before the Father in the heavenly temple, and His constant watch care over and supervision of His people in the church-temple on earth through His Vicegerent, the Holy Spirit. It shows that the connection between God and His people is close and decided. In one sense this vision constitutes the portal of the Apocalypse, the key to all that follows.

Before proceeding to write what had been shown him in vision, the prophet reveals the circumstances under which the Apocalypse was given him., He was sharing with Christians everywhere the baptism of blood that was their lot under the bitter persecutions of Domitian. He reminded the members of the seven churches that he was a partner with them in their afflictions. Written during the dark days of suffering, the book "breathes throughout the very air of martyrdom." (Trench, Page 24.) Speaking of the circumstances under which the Apocalypse was written, one commentator says: "Its revelations, like the stars in the sky, shine most brightly in the cold, dark night."

John also tells his brethren that Christ is also identified with them in their tribulations. Patience as used here has the meaning of endurance or steadfast endurance, and is sometimes so translated. Chrysostom declared that endurance is "the queen of graces." Christ's followers were entering into the "fellowship of His sufferings." He was being persecuted in the person of His people. John's steadfastness under tribulation was twofold. He was on Patmos because of his obedient hearing of "the word of God," and for his courageous speaking of "the testimony of Jesus Christ." He had been banished because he was the spokesman of "the true Witness." We are told that "tribulation works patience" and produces perfection, and that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The remnant of the church will pass through "great tribulation" just before they enter the kingdom of glory.

Through the pagan Roman persecutions Satan attempted to destroy Christianity, but all his efforts resulted only in its advancement. It was demonstrated that even the wrath of man praises God, and the remainder He restrains, and that the enemies of God "can do nothing against the truth, 'but for the truth.'" (Psalm 76:10; 2 Corinthians 13:8.) Judaism was hated by the pagans above all other religions, and Christianity was looked upon as the most hateful form of the Jewish religion, because it was the most active and fruitful. Domitian thought he had forever

silenced the testimony of John, but during his banishment the apostle accomplished far more for the church than would have otherwise been possible.

We are told that “the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,” “but the name of the wicked shall rot.” Psalm 112:6; Proverbs 10:7. The emperor Domitian has been virtually forgotten except as the persecutor of Christians and the one who banished John to Patmos, but John is better known with each passing year. His writings are read in more than a thousand languages, and his name is emblazoned on one of the twelve foundations of the celestial city. He will be one of the twelve kings of the ransomed, and his ruler ship and kingdom will never end. Daniel’s fame increases with each passing generation, whereas the names of his enemies have decayed and disappeared from history. The same is true of John Bunyan and his foes.

Vision Given on Sabbath

That this introductory vision was given to John on the Sabbath is evident from the statement, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.” This text has been greatly misused and misunderstood. It has often been used as evidence of the observance of Sunday in the apostolic church. Such claims, however, are without the authority of Scripture. Milligan remarks, “The Lord’s day here referred to may have been Sunday. But it seems doubtful if this is the true interpretation. Proof is wanting that the first day of the week had yet received the name of ‘The Lord’s Day.’ ” - The Book of Revelation, Page 13.

“The Lord’s day” could not possibly have been Sunday, for the first day of the week was never observed as the Sabbath until several centuries after the ascension of Christ. In the Scriptures only one day was ever known or designated the Lord’s Day, namely the seventh day, or Sabbath. In the fourth commandment of the Decalogue the seventh day is called “the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,” and the day that is the Sabbath of the Lord must be the Lord’s Day. In Isaiah 58:13 God calls the Sabbath, “My holy day,” and in Mark 2:28 is recorded the statement of Jesus, “Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath day.” Of course the day He is Lord of is the Lord’s Day.

Some have attempted to apply the statement “the Lord’s day” to “the day of the Lord,” or the second coming of Christ. This is also unreasonable. It must have been on a definite day when John was “in the Spirit” and Christ appeared to him in vision. That day must have been the day the apostle had observed as the Sabbath all his life. While in exile he followed a lifelong custom and retired on the Sabbath to a quiet place for study, meditation, and prayer. While he was thus engaged, Jesus visited him and he was taken off in vision.

Only men and women of prayer are given heavenly visions. Those who know how to intercede with God in fervent and effectual prayer have made the deepest and most lasting impressions on this world. Abraham prayed, and angels visited his habitation; Jacob was in prayer when his brother’s heart was softened, and his own character so changed that he became a “prince of God,” who prevailed, with both God and man. Joseph prayed, and the prison doors were opened and he was invited to become the second ruler of the kingdom of Egypt. Moses was a man of prayer, with whom God communicated as with a friend. Elijah’s prayers closed and opened the heavens and finally called down the fiery chariot of Jehovah to escort him to glory land. Daniel prayed three times a day, and the angel Gabriel visited him with visions of future events. He was on his knees when the angel arrived to tell him that he was greatly beloved in heaven.

Christ was the Man of prayer. He was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father claimed Him as His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. He was also in prayer when He was transfigured with heavenly glory. The disciples were gathered for prayer in the upper room when the Pentecostal blessings came. Cornelius was praying when angels of God visited him; and Peter was praying when he was given a vision to prepare him to answer the prayer of the Roman centurion. Paul and Silas were praying in the Philippian jail when deliverance came and the jailer and his family were converted. Stephen was praying at the time of his martyrdom, when he was given a vision of the Son of God at the right hand of the Father, and John was in prayer when he was given the wonderful visions of the Apocalypse. The book of Revelation was not given without prayer; nor without prayer can it be appreciated and understood.

John declared that while he was in the Spirit he heard behind him a great voice “like the blast* of a trumpet.” Voice is used more than sixty times in the Apocalypse. By the blasts of a trumpet Moses and the Israelites were prepared to hear the voice of God in the giving of the law from Mount Sinai. The trumpet was used in connection with important announcements all through Old Testament times. The temple door was opened and the morning service begun at the sound of the trumpet. The year of jubilee was ushered in by the blasts of the silver trumpet. The solemn Day of Atonement was announced by the blowing of trumpets. The dead will be called forth and the silence of the tomb broken by the “voice of the Archangel” and “the trump of God,” for “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” “A great voice, as of a trumpet” summoned the apostle to witness and write the visions of the Apocalypse, and the same voice summons us to hear and lay to heart the things revealed. The loud voice doubtless startled the prophet, for he thought he was alone in his meditations.

The Speaker introduced Himself as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and correspond to A and Z in the English. It was a Jewish custom to use the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to represent the whole of a matter from beginning to end. “From aleph to tau” was a well-known expression. Alpha and Omega leaves no room for any other. Jesus is the “all, and in all”; the first as well as the last in both time and rank. He is eternal in His existence. He virtually announced Himself as the Eternal, who exists through all eternity.

Genesis is the Alpha of divine revelation, and the Apocalypse is the Omega. In this last book all the revelations which compose the Biblical canon and of which He is the author are finished. Christ is “the author and finisher of our faith.” Just as letters are the units of word and words are the medium of thought and wisdom, so Christ is both the letter and the Word by which God reveals His will to man. The command to “write in a book” what he was about to see and hear indicates, first, that the apocalyptic visions were to be acted out before the prophet and, second, that the entire book was to be delivered to each of the seven churches and is therefore for the benefit of the universal church.

The Vision of Christ

“And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the chest with a golden girdle.” Revelation 1:12,13.

After introducing Himself as the eternal Son of God, Jesus reveals Himself in person to John. "I turned to see who it was that was speaking to me." (Weymouth.) The description of the heavenly visitor as given in verses 13 to 18 identifies the speaker beyond a shadow of doubt. It was Jesus, whom John had known and loved during His earthly ministry. Jesus reveals Himself in this introductory vision as the very center of the heavenly sanctuary service in behalf of His people on earth, the One of whom the visions of the book are a revelation.

If we would understand the Apocalypse, like the Seer of Patmos, we must turn from all other interests and attractions and behold its Subject and Author. Our attention should focus on the Portrayer of the events of the book rather than on the events portrayed. For the time being we shall pass by the seven golden candlesticks, or lamp stands, and their significance, and center our attention on the description John attempts to give of the Christ as he sees Him in His glorified state. The language is highly figurative, yet it is the best word picture ever written of the supernal glory of the person of our ascended Lord, and doubtless is the way He will appear in His Second Advent.

Jesus had prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Your own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." John 17:5. Before the incarnation of Christ He had the glory of the Father, "being in the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." But when He came to this earth, the Son of God veiled His divine glory in human flesh so that sinful man could behold Him. "He stripped Himself of His glory, and took on Him the nature of a bondservant by becoming a man like other men." Philippians 2:7, Weymouth. He was thus "Emmanuel," or "God with us." He was God "manifest in the flesh" which is "the mystery of godliness." The prophetic description given of Jesus in His humiliation indicates that there was nothing strikingly attractive about His physical appearance. "He had no beauty to attract our eyes, no charm to make us choose Him." Isaiah 53:2, Moffatt. From His position as Michael, which means "like unto God," the Son of God humbled Himself to become "like unto His brethren," or "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

It would be impossible to paint a true picture of Christ in His earthly state. The pictures we have of Him are of very doubtful origin, and probably bear but little resemblance to Him. In most of them He is made altogether too effeminate. It is doubtless in the providence of God that no picture of Jesus has been preserved, inasmuch as men are prone to worship the likeness in place of the reality. Such worship is the very essence of idolatry. In order to fulfill His divine mission Jesus could not present a striking physical appearance, but must draw men and women to Himself because of His matchless character and appealing message. The world is altogether too ready to be attracted and blinded by physical beauty.

In this vision we have the first view of Christ after His ascension, and it indicates that His prayer to the Father had been fully answered. He had been glorified with even more glory than He had before His incarnation. His glorification took place on the day of Pentecost. In John 7:39 we are told that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." It is also said that Jesus "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11.) We should study this apocalyptic description of the glorified Savior, because it is a photograph of the way He will look when He returns in glory and the redeemed "see the King in His beauty," or "in all His splendor." (Isaiah 33:17, Moffatt.)

John thus describes His glorified Lord: “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire. And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.” Revelation 1:14-16. This vision of the glory of Christ is almost identical with the one given the prophet Daniel more than six hundred years before. (Daniel 10:5-12.) One of these word pictures describes Him before His humiliation, and the other after He had received back the glory He voluntarily released in order that fallen man might be elevated and glorified.

The effect of the vision was the same on both prophets. Blinded by the effulgent glory, they fall to the ground faint and helpless. Such a vision had the same effect on Saul of Tarsus at the gate of Damascus. No wonder the wicked cannot look upon Christ when He returns “in His own glory, and in His Father’s” and the glory of all “the holy angels.” These are the only two authentic pictures of our glorified Lord ever given by eyewitnesses. Is it any wonder that Jesus had to introduce Himself to His beloved disciple?

But the glorified Son of God is still “like unto the Son of man.” Though glorified, He is still the God-man, Emmanuel, forever linked with humanity as our “Elder Brother.” He ministers in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary as “the Son of man,” doing a work that He could not do when only the Son of God. Being made “in the likeness of men,” He is able to intercede for mankind, because while on earth He was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” Because of this new relationship to the human family Jesus requested the Father that He never be separated from His earthly brethren. (John 17:24.) For this reason He will take with Him wherever He goes a group of the redeemed out of the last and most wicked generation. (Revelation 14:1-5.) In harmony with the general plan of the book this description of the glorified Christ is divided into seven parts, representing the fullness of His beauty and the completeness of His authority to minister to the spiritual needs of the seven churches, and thus to the universal church.

“A Crown of Glory”

“His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.” In Daniel 7:9 the Father, “the Ancient of Days,” is described as clothed in a garment “white as snow,” with “the hair of His head like the pure wool.” Since Jesus is “the express image of His person,” He too has snowy white hair, representing His age, beauty, glory, and wisdom. The Scriptures declare that “the beauty of old men is the gray head,” because “with the ancient is wisdom”; therefore, “the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” (Proverbs 20:29; 16:31.) Venerable age should indicate increased wisdom and experience. Old age for counsel is a Scriptural principle. Because of His age, wisdom, and experience the Lord is “great in counsel.” He is vested with the attributes of eternity. “His understanding is infinite” because His age is infinite. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” He is the Alpha and Omega of wisdom. In Him is the accumulated wisdom of the eternal ages. Also Jesus “ever lives to make intercession” for His people, because He is without ancestral beginning or end of days. In this life white hair may represent feeble health and declining strength, but with the members of the Godhead it is the emblem of wisdom, glory, and antiquity. In this first vision of the Apocalypse the One whom the book reveals is pictured as crowned with the immaculate wisdom and glory of eternity. It was thus that, Jesus appeared during His brief glorification on the mount

of transfiguration, when the three disciples saw Him in His glorified state as His divinity flashed through His humanity.

His Flashing Eyes

“His eyes were as a flame of fire,” or like 9amps of fire,” as described in Daniel’s vision. “Like flaming fire,” is another translation, and “His eyes flashed like fire” is the rendering by James Moffatt. Later Jesus said, “I am He which searches the reins and hearts.” Revelation 2:23. The penetrating gaze of Jesus discerns the thoughts and motives that give birth to words and deeds. He knows all men and what is in man. He is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” He is omniscient. He has all-penetrating intelligence and knowledge. He has the power to read all secrets, and nothing can be concealed from His searching, piercing, penetrating gaze. His flaming eyes search all hearts and bring all secret and hidden things to light. They penetrate the darkest and uttermost depths of the soul and light up sin’s most secret hiding places.

Christ’s eyes flash fire as He beholds iniquity in the churches for whom He ministers. They burn with holy indignation against all wrong. “For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Job 34:21, 22. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” Hebrews 4:13.

It was said that one of the marks of Caesar’s power over men was his fiery eyes-his penetrating and revealing gaze, before which his enemies could not stand without quailing. The blazing eyes of Christ represent not only His infinite wisdom and penetrating knowledge but also “the indignation of the Holy One at the discoveries of evil which He thus makes. These ‘eyes of fire’ do not merely look through the hypocrite and sinner, but consume him, him and his sins together.” (Trench, Page 38.) His eyes also light up with pleasure as He beholds the development of godly character: “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.” 2 Chronicles 16:9.

His Glowing Feet

“And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” Like “polished brass,” is Daniel’s description. In other translations of our text we read that “His feet glowed like burnished bronze,” or “like fine brass glowing with fire,” or “like silver-bronze when it is white-hot in a furnace.” Brass is considered the most enduring of all metals. Brass or bronze is used here to denote unwearied endurance and stability-irresistible strength and power. Christ is able to uphold all who put their trust in Him. His faithfulness endures forever. The feet of Jesus were doubtless bare, as were the feet of the priests as they ministered in the sanctuary.

The original Greek word for brass as used in our text, according to Suidas, refers to the famous metal made by the Greeks and Romans from a mixture of gold, silver, and copper. It is spoken of in Ezra 8:27 as “yellow, or shining brass” which was as “desirable” or “precious as gold.” (Margin.) It was sometimes called Corinthian brass, and is thought by some to be “of far higher value than even gold.” It is said that during the refining process of this metal the furnace threw off flames of indescribable glory. It is now an unknown metal.

This vision of Christ makes more meaningful the description of the messengers of God in Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that said unto Zion,

Thy God reigns!” This description of the feet of those who preach the gospel must have special application to Christ, “the Messenger of the covenant.” How beautiful are His feet as He walks about among the churches, ministering to the spiritual needs of His people. They are beautiful to those who love Him, but terrible and consuming to those who are to be trampled underfoot. The altar of burnt offering in the court of the tabernacle was made of brass. At that altar the wrath of God was appeased, the guilt of man expiated, and the judgments against sin were executed.

His Majestic Voice

“And His voice as the sound of many waters.” “Many waves” and “many streams” are other translations. Daniel spoke of His words as “the voice of a multitude,” and Ezekiel as “the voice of an host” and “a noise of many waters.” (Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2.) The symbol represents volume, majesty, and musical harmony. “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty,” declared the psalmist, and another prophet spoke of “His glorious voice.” (Psalm 29:4; Isaiah 30:30.) It is “voice,” and not “voices.” Jesus is the spokesman not only of the Godhead but also of the hosts of heaven. When He speaks it is the voice of the universe.

When the Son of God speaks, His messages have the beauty, harmony, and majesty of the united notes of an orchestra, the harmonious voices of a well-trained choir, or the symphonic melody of the waves of the sea or a mighty waterfall. On Patmos, John was accustomed to the melody of the waves of the Aegean Sea. These roaring waves and foaming billows spoke with a united voice. The voice of Jesus is multitudinous in its majesty, comprehensive in its fullness, far reaching in its effects with a message that is deep, beautiful, and harmonious.

The Seven Stars

“And He had in His right hand seven stars,” which are interpreted in verse 20 as symbolic of the “angels of the seven churches,” or “the ministers of the seven churches.” (Weymouth.) Here is a wonderful lesson as to the holiness of the office and the solemnity of the responsibility of the ministers of Christ. The figure indicates that the power and authority to minister to the spiritual needs of God’s people have their origin not with the church but with Christ, the head of the church. Jesus upholds the ministers who, as His spokesmen, preach His Word. The right hand is the symbol of power, authority, and honor. The stars in the right hand of Christ indicate the high honor bestowed upon His ambassadors as well as His absolute control over them. It also indicates their safety amid the dangers that surround them because of the continuous attacks of the enemy. Christ is their possessor, upholder, and protector. The symbolic picture demands unswerving fidelity and unquestioned loyalty on the part of the ministers of Christ in their service in His stead among the churches.

His Cutting Messages

“And out of His mouth went a sharp two edged sword.” It is a “broad Sword” (Emphatic Diaglott), or “a sharp sword with a double edge” (Moffatt). The illustration is doubtless taken from the Greek Thracian broadsword or the Roman double-bladed sword. It represents “the sword of the Spirit” that cuts its way even to the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God in the hands of the Spirit does a double service. It convicts and converts the righteous, and it condemns and destroys the wicked. In Revelation 19:15 is a description of Christ at His Second Advent, when “out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations.”

“He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword” is a prophecy of Christ in Isaiah 49:2, and in Isaiah 11:4 we are told that when Christ comes the second time “He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 it is said that at His Second Advent “the Lord shall consume” the wicked “with the spirit of His mouth,” and “shall destroy” them “with the brightness of His coming.” The symbol is an appropriate representation of the all-penetrating word of Christ by which the secrets of the heart are revealed. He goes about among His churches speaking His word, and His messages are cutting and penetrating. He smites to wound that He may bind up and heal, as on the day of Pentecost.

How appropriate is the appeal: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.” Hosea 6:1.

His Brilliant Countenance

“And His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.” “The sun shining with his full strength,” or “in the fullness of his power,” are other translations. In Daniel’s vision of Michael he said that His face had “the appearance of lightning.” The sun is the symbol of divine majesty. It is the best illustration of glory and brightness known to man. The churches are symbolized by lamps, the ministers of Christ by stars, but Christ by the glory of the sun shining in the fullness of its noonday power. Such was the appearance of Christ at His transfiguration, and when Paul saw Him near the gate of Damascus he was blinded by the light that shined “above the brightness of the sun.”

Although the sun is so bright it is terrible to look upon, it is nevertheless the source of life and light and power. Christ declared that He was “the light of the world,” and the prophet Malachi called Him “the Sun of Righteousness” because He is the supreme Life-giver and Light-giver of the spiritual world. No man in his sinful state can behold the face of the glorified Christ and live. Only those who behold His character and become like Him now, can look upon His countenance and live when He returns. Then the wicked will call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon and hide them “from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” Revelation 6:16.

Two recent writers thus sum up in a beautiful way the vision of the glorified Christ we have just been considering: “His eyes emit shafts of spiritual intelligence, love and omniscience. His countenance radiates beams of spiritual power like the midday sun. His voice is resonant with the majesty of many distant Niagaras, and out of His mouth proceeds utterance penetrating and dividing like a two edged sword.” (Stevens, Page 53.)

“The white hair, like sunlight gleaming on snow, pictures divine purity. The eyes flashing with fire picture divine knowledge piercing to the innermost secrets of the heart. The feet of burnished brass represent the ability to tread down all opposition. The Voice was, to John, like the sound of the surf roaring on the shore of his rocky isle, a symbol of irresistible power. The right hand holding the seven stars shows the angels of the churches to be under the absolute control of Christ and under His protecting care. The sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth is an image of His word of judgment which can punish and destroy, which none can resist or escape. The countenance like the unclouded sun symbolizes the heavenly glory and majesty of Him upon whom, with unveiled face, none could dare to gaze.” (Erdman, Page 41.)

Effect on the Prophet

“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Revelation 1:17, 18. This was the same effect the vision of Michael had on the prophet Daniel. (Daniel 10:7-12.) Moses, Job, Isaiah, Paul, and the Roman guard at the tomb of Christ all had similar experiences when they beheld the glory of God or of the angel Gabriel. This glory will slay the wicked at the Second Advent. If we do not permit the two-edged sword of the Spirit to destroy sin in us now it will slay us then.

When one contemplates this beautiful portraiture of the great High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary walking majestically amid the symbolic blazing lamps, clothed and girded for mediation ministry. Crowned with snow-white locks, and reflecting the light and purity of His character, treading a conqueror on feet glowing like silver-bronze, a voice so majestic and terrible that it shakes the heavens and earth. His right hand holding fast His shining messenger jewels, His mouth uttering words that penetrate and divide, and His countenance blazing with the light of the sun in the meridian of his power. He is almost overwhelmed with the supernal splendor of the scene and gladly bends the knee in humble submission to His sovereign will, or falls prostrate at the feet of Him who has been exalted “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.”

Jesus tenderly placed His right hand—the hand of power, with which He upholds His ministers—upon the stricken apostle, and reminded him that He is the One who is vested with the attributes of eternity, the One whose existence is not temporary even though He had died on the cross. As the first and the last He upholds all things through the endless interval between the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future. With a beginningless past and an endless future, the temporary break of Joseph’s tomb does not interfere with His eternal purpose but rather confirms and assures its complete fulfillment.

“I am the first and the last, and the Living one.” (RV) All mere creatures in this rebel world are dying ones. Christ’s announcement to John indicated that since His resurrection He again is vested with the fullness of His pre-existing glory. John was nearing the century mark in age and must soon die and enter the prison house of the tomb. Christ’s words brought a comforting assurance that the power of the grave had been broken by His resurrection victory. Because I live, you also shall live, was His message. Jesus reminded the exiled prophet that He too had been condemned by a Roman court and sentenced by a Roman judge. He had been placed in a tomb secured by a Roman seal and guarded by Roman soldiers. But all the power of the iron monarchy of Rome could not hold Him captive. Moreover, He brought with Him from the tomb the keys of death and the grave. The keys that unlock the prison house of death were in the keeping of a friend.

“The keys of the gates of death” is the Weymouth translation. “The gates of death” and “the gates of hell” are Old Testament expressions. The key is the symbol of authority to open and shut. (Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19.) In the Targums and Talmud the key to the grave is declared to be one of the four keys which God does not entrust to a ministering angel but reserves for His own use. Jesus tells John that He possesses supreme authority over the dominion of death and the grave. In the Scriptures death is reckoned as a prison house. (Job 3:18.) Satan claims the dead as his captives, but does not have the power to release them. (Isaiah 14:17, margin.)

Death is a mighty power which locks up and holds fast all who come under its cruel sway. It has been estimated that more than one hundred and forty billions of people have lived on the earth and all but two billions have died and returned to the dust. The earth is a vast cemetery, and every-where death's victims lie in fetters of silence and darkness, awaiting the call of the Life-giver, into whose keeping has been delivered the keys of death and the grave. With the breaking of the fetters of death and the unlocking of the doors of the tomb, the righteous will come forth to life eternal, and death, "the last enemy," will meet its eternal doom. Because of His resurrection victory, the power over death is now in the exclusive and permanent possession of Him who is "the resurrection and the life."

John was instructed to write what he had already seen in the introductory vision, the conditions that then prevailed in the seven churches, and what was yet to be revealed in apocalyptic vision concerning future events to the end of the reign of sin. These disclosures were to be made by the divine Author of the Revelation by virtue of His office as the Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, as "the first and the last," the "ever living One," and the possessor of the keys of death and the grave. "It is in view of such divine power, and as the agent of such a divine Person, that John is commissioned to compose his prophecy." (Erdman, Page 42.) The importance of the first vision is emphasized by the fact that in it the entire Apocalypse is wrapped up in embryo, for the whole plan of redemption centers on the mediation work of Christ.