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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 4

REVELATION 4:1-11

The Mystery of the Throne in Heaven

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART FOUR

THE MYSTERY OF THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

Chapter 4 of Revelation commences the story of the ages which from John's day were to roll on their course till the time when all Christ's work is completed in the final state of eternal glory.

The starting point is the throne of God. All proceeds from the sovereign counsel and absolute decree of the Triune God. Where else should begin such a story of conflict, of unceasing warfare with the powers of darkness, of trial of faith and patience, save at that throne, so gorgeously and graphically described in this chapter? God does not sit on a visible throne. He inhabits eternity. The symbol of the throne is the symbol of His almightiness, His authority, His all-pervading will and purpose. If the Church today has a weak doctrine of her own position in the purposes of God, this is matched by the weakness of her doctrine of God. Nourished for several generations, as she has been, on the idea of a feeble God who looks to man to carry on the work of His kingdom, waiting in self-imposed inactivity for someone to "claim" His Spirit to do His work for Him - it is small wonder that the Book of Revelation has lapsed from effective use and furnishes no help or consolation or guidance.

We do not exaggerate. We have been living too long in the era of "Man's sovereignty over God", wondrously distilled into jingles and artful sentences such as - "HE IS COUNTING ON YOU: IF YOU FAIL HIM, WHAT THEN?"

Several generations of this diet should have sufficed to have proved that the era of man's sovereignty has been one of the most disastrous and disappointing in all history. The state of the Western World where the gospel throughout history has achieved its greatest triumphs, should have proven to our generation at least, the fallacy of human prerogative in the work of God. The emphasis on Revival and (more recently) Pentecostal gifts, both of which are to be had for the claiming, God only waiting in the wings for someone to come along and do something about it - this should have alarmed many, by the frugality of the results, that there is something radically wrong with the theory.

All our day, we have been assured that 'God is waiting to pour revival on the

world' - yet though many honest men and women have dutifully put into operation the processes of consecration and 'claiming' of the power, there has been no revival. And few have even stopped to consider that the greatest revival movement in history, the Reformation, came without anyone seeking or asking for it. Indeed the spontaneity of this great movement (the Reformation) springing up at one time in many countries without any human connection between them, proves that God in His sovereignty had appointed the time, the men, and the means, in His own sovereign wisdom.

Not that we are pleading for passivity in the face of the appalling problems of today, but men will pray better, more effectively, and more intelligently, if like John they begin with the throne of God and the vision of a sovereign, all-conquering Redeemer who alone is girded with all power, authority and commission to carry through to final victory the divine programme of settling for ever, the problem of evil in a moral universe.

There would be less revival-mongering if those who speak most about it would immerse themselves for a while in the Saviour's covenant reckoning with the Eternal Father over His own atoning sacrifice, as recorded in the 17th chapter of John's gospel.

"Father I WILL that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory...."

Knowledge of the divine sovereignty will not make us idle Christians, but by making us more humble Christians it will surely make us more effectual witnesses and worshippers and preachers.

The total and absolute success of the Kingdom of Christ and of God, is assured only by the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain and by the Father's promise to Him that He should "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied". (Isaiah 53:11)

This indeed is the message of the Book of Revelation. It shines through every chapter and verse. The Book resounds with the honour, the worth, the puissance, the glory, the all-conquering merit of the Son of God "the Lamb that was slain", who has conquered sin and death, evil and Satan and whose final triumph over all foes is written large, in His own blood, and by His IMPERIOUS WORD through his servant John.

Chapters 4 to 6 of Revelation provide the complete ground of this assurance by

introducing us to the THRONE of GOD and all that is enacted there. Here we find the focal point of all the assembled powers of the universe, gathered in solemn state to approve the righteous ways of God and to bear witness to the worthiness of the LAMB to take the book of the holy judgments of God, to open its seals, and to disclose all the hidden purposes and decrees of God inscribed therein for the overcoming of all which opposes His kingdom.

The consecrated place of man in this glorious scene is entirely subordinate. This is shown in chapter 4 where the representatives of the redeemed in all ages CAST THEIR CROWNS at His feet and acknowledge that all the glory is His, and His alone.

The Sovereignty of God is the keystone of the universe. John sees it here in glorious figuration, as a throne eternal, surrounded by that covenant rainbow by which God has bound Himself to His self-appointed task of redemption. He sees it in the adoration the twenty-four elders - representative of the Church of the First Born from Adam to the end of time - signified in the double-twelve - the Church of the Old and New Testaments.

He sees it in the colossal symbols of the Four Cherubim in whom all creation gives back to its Originator the glory and the praise of His eternal wisdom, power, grace and holiness as manifested in all His works and ways.

He sees it (and hears it) in the lightnings, thunderings and voices proceeding from the throne, the judgments and threatenings of the Almighty against all powers, seen or unseen, which seek to oppose the carrying out of His holy and sovereign will.

He sees it (and hears it) in the casting down by the Elders of their golden crowns, and their unanimous verdict upon the worthiness of God to be the creator and ruler of all things (the final verdict on creation when all is over and done):

“Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”.

Christian believers today must make their choice between a sovereign Creator who knows where He is going and has ordained all means to that end so that it shall be infallibly secured no matter who or what stands in the way; and a weak and irresolute deity who has left the greatest thing in creation, THE ATONING SACRIFICE OF HIS OWN ETERNAL SON to be worked out as to its result by the initiative and resolve of the creature. We are far from minimising the agency of

consecrated men and women in the cause of God and truth: why should we be when, weary and spent oftentimes we urge ourselves on (by the grace of God) to our task which must be pursued as long as time and life are granted to us? Let us go therefore to the Bible to obtain an adequate doctrine of God, and learn from this very chapter to adore His greatness, holiness, sovereignty, wisdom, love and power, His unchangeable steadfastness in the pursuit of the great object of His Being, His glory and His grace.

A SOLEMN OPENING

v.1. “After this....”

These words with which chapter 4 begins, do not relate to historic time but to the order of the vision. It is a mistake to suppose that by these two words we are transported in history over a gap of 2,000 years to a time which has not yet begun, though this a commonly accepted theory among those who take the futuristic view of Revelation. The words simply mark the onset of a fresh series of visions, and the formal opening is in keeping with the solemnity of what is to follow.

“I LOOKED AND BEHOLD A DOOR WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN.”

We are pointed back to the experience of Ezekiel who in so many ways resembles John. “As I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God”. Divine things are a matter of revelation. Man in his natural state cannot see heavenly realities. John found himself in a prophetic state in which the wonders and glories of heavenly things were perceived by him. “The words point to the misery of our natural condition, to which we are born, and in which the heavens have no door open for us” (Hengstenberg). It is a matter of deep humility for us to recognise that sin has interrupted the communion between God and man and made us naturally incapable of apprehending the spiritual and divine. For countless ages man was debarred from clear vision of the eternal. The ministry of the prophets prepared the way in Old Testament times, but the New Testament throws the door wide open.

At his first calling to the apostleship, Nathaniel received this promise from the Lord,

“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”. (John 1:52)

That promise is not to be literally understood. It refers to the revelation to be received by Nathaniel (and all the apostles) of the full glory of Christ in the gospel. Mystic language! This is what Jacob saw in vision at Bethel. The opening of the heavens always means, prophetically, the revealing of truth in that special way reserved to prophets and apostles in their office as God's means of communication to mankind. What John sees prophetically must be interpreted spiritually, if the Book of Revelation is to achieve its purpose. To those who, after the apostles, minister the Word of God, is not given the spirit of prophecy, but the spirit of faith and of a sound mind, by which diligently to scan and to study the visions of the prophets and learn how these must be interpreted according to the principles ascertained by diligent study of the scriptures.

Prayer, patience, trial and hard work are the principal tools of the ministry of the Word. In these days of charismatic enthusiasm it should be recognised in truth and soberness that there is no "opening of the heavens" to anyone today. There is no prophetic vision, no new revelation, no apostles and prophets, no short cuts to knowledge - just a diligent, painstaking and prayerful application to the "faith once delivered to the saints", never to be added to or taken from in the minutest degree.

HEAVENS OPENED THROUGH CHRIST

To Christ, as the Prophet of the prophets, the Eternal Word incarnate, the heavens were opened at His baptism, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him, and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

This opening of the heavens to Christ was His public introduction as Mediator of His people. It marks the beginning of that full revelation through Him, of the mystery of God, and of eternal redemption. It is in that capacity from the throne of His exaltation in heaven, that Christ makes known to John that final Word of prophecy which the Church was to hear, and by which she was to be guided till the day of consummation. But as all prophecy is in parable, to be spiritually discerned and not interpreted without deep inquiry, heart-searching, repentance and faith, so is this Book of Revelation. It is to be approached in awe and reverence, that the Church might find in it the mysterious chapters of her eventful history presented in baffling paradox and symbol.

Any exposition of John's great Apocalypse which does not elevate the soul in the divine mysteries cannot be the true one. It is not surprising perhaps that in such a

day as ours we have seen this holy Book torn from the possession of the Church and accredited to some period yet future to which the Church is said to be irrelevant.

We shall not tire of reiterating that what we have before us in Revelation is not history as the human eye sees it, but as God beholds it - history in its great underlying principles and powers. The omnipotence and the judgments of God are continually at work, reducing to order the wickedness and the rebellion of mankind, governing and controlling the malevolence and craft of the Evil One, and making all things work together to serve His sublime purpose to preserve His Church in a hostile world, refining her by trial and testing, and assuring her at all times that He, her Lord and Redeemer, is always present with her, guiding, controlling and overcoming.

The endless speculations, inventions and historical coincidences by which good men in the past have interpreted from the Book of Revelation such events as the campaigns of the Saracens and Turks, the French Revolution or the Great War of 1914, have not advanced the cause of godliness. Likewise the forward-looking historians now clothing themselves in the garments of the soothsayer, projecting the message of this Book into the future, succeed only in harrowing the mind of the impressionable with forecasts of horrors yet to be, which have no conceivable relevance to life and godliness and confer no blessing or benefit such as is promised in this Book to those who read and keep its sayings.

We cannot do better than receive with humility the observation of the great Bengel, "It is not in our own will and power to handle divine things as we would. The measure, the nature, and the time, together with the thing itself, is entirely in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is shut to man, man cannot of himself discover, but where we find anything opened to us we must there make use of our eyes. To seek to ascend by one's own might is the part of Lucifer; but when one has a call as John had here, to 'come up hither' it is right to proceed. O may our minds be filled with holy admiration, that we shall withdraw ourselves from what is earthly, and direct our thoughts heavenward to apprehend that which thou shewedst to thy servant, so that we may be truly improved art edified by it".

THE DIVINE "MUST BE"

"COME UP HITHER AND I WILL SHEW THEE THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER" (verse 2).

It is the voice of God speaking of that which MUST BE. "God foreknows because

He predestinates”. How else does God know the future so as to have it under His absolute control?

The things about to be shown to John throughout this Book are essential to the working out of God’s plan and purpose, and the final happiness and redemption of His people. We are not to be alarmed at coming events if we are persuaded that God, who is always in control, has ordained that they **MUST BE**. Quietly resigned to His holy will, we know that God in the totality of His Being, power and wisdom, is working all things according to His pleasure. We accept all things, not with Islamic fatalism, but with the knowledge that God’s sovereignty is neither capricious nor blindly despotic, but is always united to the highest good of being. Always and at all times, He is holy and true, and when we reach the end of the road we shall understand that there was no other way, and no better way.

“Wist ye not that I MUST BE about my Father’s business?” demands the boy-Christ when Joseph and Mary found Him in the temple. That holy necessity of the will of the Father was implied in the wonder of the Incarnation - God becoming Man. The self-consciousness of deity was with Christ from the earliest dawn of conscious life as True Man. Who told this boy of 12 years that Joseph was not His father but that He stood in relation to the Eternal God as the Unique and Eternal Son? This sentence is the first recorded utterance of Christ, and it reveals not only His full consciousness of His own Being as God, but also the full consciousness of the reason for His being in the world – “My Father’s business”. In the temple at Jerusalem at the age of 12 years He was consciously fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 3:1: “The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

And 21 years later, not very far from that same spot, He allowed Himself to be taken by the foe, to be bound and carried away to judgment and to crucifixion, warning His disciples not to interfere, as at His command were twelve legions of angels (mystic numbering that!) who at a word from Him would be loosed upon an evil world. The full power of heaven was at His disposal to set aside the ungodly purpose of the infernal foe – “But how then shall the scripture be fulfilled THAT THUS IT MUST BE?” (Matt. 26:53)

The death of Christ was inevitable because God so ordained that it should be, for where is our redemption if Christ died other than by the will of the Father?

So in the history of God’s people. The things which befall us and befall the Church

are things which MUST BE. Every event however mysterious, however seemingly cruel, inspired by Satan himself, every hour of the Church's conflict throughout her long history - all is governed by the unfathomable wisdom of God, unalterable as the stars, yet without relieving in the slightest degree the burden of guilt lying heavy upon Satan and all his agents. These are the things which must be, because in the wisdom of God this was the only way of bringing to consummation the total divine plan for the establishment of a moral creation, perfect and complete, rising from the evils which the divine holiness tolerates in the service of a greater good than ever could otherwise be. For what would men or angels have known of God had it not been for Calvary? How impoverished would creation have been without that redemption for which in fact all things have their being? Likewise, if the Church had never suffered; if Christians had never been tried; if the believer had never been called upon to prove his faith and love by faithfulness unto death - how the glory of Christ would have been diminished!

FAITH NOT AN EMPTY CHARADE

It is essential that God's saving work in the soul of man should be proved - that the new creation should be baptised in the fire of suffering, and trial, that in the absence of His visible presence we should believe where we cannot see. Faith would be an empty charade if evil were not allowed to run its course and the evil were not allowed at large to tempt, oppose and cast down. It is only as the full power of this world (without and within) is against the saint, that love and trust can be proven and Satan given the lie direct (as in the case of Job, the type of all who believe).

But they do not suffer without a peerless, dauntless hope. They see the throne of God, through the eyes of His servant John. They know that all is well, even though many must glorify God by cruel death, as Peter to whom the Lord shewed "by what death he should glorify God".

In "the things which must be" as shown to John in his apocalyptic vision, he was really seeing in all the mysterious imagery of the Book the triumph of God in His people, through their faith and hope and love rising above the vanity and illusion of the present evil world as a prelude to that holiness and peace which is the final order of creation. God realises at length, in redeemed man, the destiny He has all along pursued.

Until the throne of God is empty of its Tenant, nothing is more sure than this - that the Divine purpose in creation and redemption will be pursued to its triumphant

conclusion.

THE OCCUPANT OF THE THRONE

“Immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” John is careful not to describe any form or shape, but just the qualities which belong to Him who eternally reigns. For God is a pure Being, without body parts or passions. He became visible only when the incarnate Son walked upon this earth and was seen of angels and men. Taking a body and a true human nature from the womb of the virgin, He became true man, of like passions as we are, subject to suffering and pain, weariness and woe, tears and sighing - or as the creed of Athanasius so effectively expresses it:

For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds: and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world: perfect God and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood One Christ, not by confusion of substance but by unity of Person.

DIVINE COLOURS AND GEMS

“And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like to an emerald.” - verse 3.

The difficulty of interpreting the meaning of the two precious stones has been recognised by a long succession of able commentators. The general consensus appears to be that the jasper represents the dazzling whiteness of God's holiness; the sardius, fiery red of judgment.

The jasper is found in a variety of colours, but that the white jasper is here preferred seems clear from the parallel passage in Rev. 21:11, “like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”.

The description must be studied together with the description of the throne of God in Ezekiel chapter 1:26-28.

And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

The two descriptions belong to each other, and it is significant that Ezekiel's vision, like that of John, was the prelude to the release of the divine judgments. The jasper therefore must stand for the aspect of the dazzling holiness of God, as the fire of the sardius represents His righteous judgments. In Ezekiel, in place of the jasper we have the Hebrew 'chasmal': in our translation, 'amber'. It appears to have the significance of a fiery, flashing brilliance which in John's vision becomes jasper. In Ezekiel's more detailed description the brilliant chasmal belongs to the upper portion of the figure on the throne ("from the loins even upward"). The sardius in John is represented in Ezekiel as the appearance of fire 'from his loins even downward'.

By colours and gems the attributes of God are made known through His servants Ezekiel and John. The gentler aspects of deity are seen in the upper part of the Theophany, and the severer in the lower. The psalmist puts it in another way. In God, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other". (Psalm 85:10)

What we see as two extremes is in fact a unity. God is holy Love. His wrath is the subordinate consequence of that holy Love which repels sin, and yet atones for it by the sacrifice of Itself.

Ezekiel and John both see the throne encircled by the radiance of the rainbow, the token in the Bible, ever since the Flood, of the returning grace of God after judgment. The cosmic rainbow is only seen as the sun bursts out and shines upon the retreating storm clouds. The fury of the storm is abated. The punitive righteousness of God is satisfied, and peace and harmony are restored.

John's rainbow is 'like unto an emerald'. The green (emerald) is of course the middle tone of the colour spectrum (red, orange, yellow, GREEN, blue, indigo, violet). The spectrum divides the white light into its parts, as the departing rainstorm does to the sun's light and flashes back to the human eye, the complete rainbow. God is light, not in the cosmic sense but in that spiritual reality of which cosmic light is the wonderful parable. Light in its energetic principle is the secret of creation, as the LIGHT WHICH GOD IS, is the source principle of all life. The rainbow round the throne is symbolic therefore of that grace of God, that eternal love, which not only creates and judges, but redeems, and the emerald colour - the most restful of all in the spectrum - dominates in John's vision because the Book of Revelation is designed as a whole to comfort, strengthen, and renew in hope, the suffering Church, who is assured in this vision, that her interests predominate in all God's judgments. God has bound Himself by eternal covenant for her salvation and preservation. The jasper stone is for her; the sardius for her oppressors; the emerald for her assurance that judgment is past for the Church, since for her Christ has fulfilled the terms of the eternal covenant, in His own blood: "Drink ye all of this, for this is the New Testament in my blood".

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHO SEE THEIR GOD AS ONE ENCIRCLED
BY HIS OWN NEW COVENANT OF GRACE, PLEDGED TO THEIR
SALVATION, AND ETERNAL PRESERVATION TO HIS GLORIOUS
KINGDOM.**

By this covenant God has hedged Himself around with gracious conditions, promises and undertakings - promises of life in Christ Jesus, undertakings to glorify the Son in the work of mercy performed through His reconciling death (John 17). The eye of the believer rests with peace and assurance on the predominating emerald, the most restful of all the colours and the central feature of God's work of redemption. In that covenant we find our rest and peace. The covenant is not with us but with Christ on our behalf, who alone has fulfilled the conditions and borne that wrath which the failure of man under the Old Covenant brought upon our race.

It follows that this fundamental vision of God in His eternal, sovereign government of the world cannot be confined in its significance to one nation upon earth to the exclusion of all others. The interpretation so common today that the earthly Israel is from chapter 4 onwards the exclusive subject of the prophecy is destructive of the entire character of this vision, and of the Book as a whole. The divine covenant of mercy is not the exclusive preserve of the Judaistic people, but covers the entire

field of redemption and belongs in consequence to the Church of Old and New Testaments: the Church of Jew and gentile believers, one indivisible body of Christ in which grace is common to all the parts, and all national distinctions and privileges are lost for ever. The attempt to restore to the exclusive possession of the Judaistic people, that which in its very nature covers the whole field of redemption in time and in eternity, dislocates the whole of Scripture and divides the body of Christ. As Noah's rainbow spread its beneficent promise over all who came with him out of the ark, and their descendants to the end of time, so the mystic rainbow of the throne of God spreads its soft and peaceful radiance over the entire range of that redemption procured in Christ at so great a cost.

THE FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS

“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.” - verse 4

That these 24 elders are representative of the whole Church is clear from chapter 5, verses 8-10 where their song is the song of the redeemed – “Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”. Here around the throne they are represented as taking part, as assessors, in the judgment of God over the enemies of His people. Hengstenberg writes, “Where the representatives of the Church sit in judgment with God there only a favourable decision for them can be expected”. Their golden crowns denote that they are reigning with God over the world. Already it had been promised in chapter 2:26-27 that the faithful who overcome should have power over the nations and should rule them with a rod of iron, ... even as Christ had ‘received of the Father’. Again in chapter 3:21, Christ declares, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne”.

These verses taken together afford a valuable token of the present state of those elsewhere described as ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’ (Heb. 12:23). The dangerous error of ‘soul sleep’ is exposed in these passages. At death the righteous go immediately to the kingdom of the Father, and are with Christ, consciously, in the affairs of His Kingdom. They await the resurrection of the body, which shall not take place till all is ended on earth and in one great moment, the whole number of the redeemed shall be reunited with their earthly bodies, glorified even as Christ's body was glorified. The body sleeps, but not the soul. The soul cannot

sleep, its nature being ‘perception’ or self-consciousness.

Hence the ‘first resurrection’ of chapter 20:4-5 is the present reign of the glorified saints with Christ in heaven during the ‘thousand years’ of the Church’s duration on the earth (that is, the whole time from Pentecost to the Judgment Day).

Their garments of white symbolise the present state of glory of the believers who have left their earthly life and now reign with Christ on the throne. White refers rather to glory than to colour, as is indicated by what took place at the Transfiguration of Christ: “His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3). Very finely Hengstenberg expresses it thus, “It is the precious privilege of the Christian that nothing comes to pass which he does not will, everything that he does will; he triumphs in God over all hostile powers, and with Him rides upon the high places of the earth, and sees the whole world lying under his feet”.

THE DOUBLE TWELVE - THE CHURCH OF O.T. AND N. T.

It follows of course that the number 24 includes the saints the Old Testament as well as of the New. Twelve has been the symbolic number of the Church ever since Jacob whose twelve sons were the patriarchs of the earthly Israel, the Church of the OT. The double twelve, the number of the elders in Revelation, show that the NT Church with its twelve apostles is one with the Church of the OT. We have seen that the names of the twelve patriarchs are united with those of the twelve apostles in the symbolism of the heavenly Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, in Rev. 21, and this figure plainly dispels the error that the OT Church has no continuity with the NT Church. The two are one. The symbolic number of the double twelve can have no other meaning especially when it is considered that on the eve of his encounter with Christ at Peniel (when he received his new name of Israel) Jacob had the vision of the angels of God at Mahanaim (Gen. 32:1-2). He called the place Mahanaim, which means “two hosts” because it was in that formation the angels appeared to him. That this was a mysterious intimation that the Church would be two armies of the living God, that of the OT and that of the NT, is made wonderfully clear in the Song of Solomon where the name Mahanaim occurs again,

“What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies (margin, Mahanaim)” - Song 6:13

“The Shulamite” (feminine of “SOLOMON”) is of course the Bride, the Church.

If we are permitted to issue our commentary on the Song of Solomon, based on that of Dr Hengstenberg, we hope to expand upon this theme which is basic to the interpretation of the Song of Solomon, as it is to the understanding of the unity of the Church and of Holy Scripture. Meantime, it must suffice here to maintain that the double-twelve in Revelation goes back to Mahanaim where the Church was formally established in her OT form in Jacob's new name given after his wrestling with Christ at Peniel.

THE TWO AGES OF THE CHURCH

These therefore are the two ages of the Church - its 'minority' under the Old Covenant and its full development to adoptive sonship (with full privileges of wealth and liberty) under the New Covenant. This is according to the Pauline interpretation of the Church in Galatians 4 where he represents the Church as being under tutors and governors (that is the ordinances of the law) while remaining a "minor". Full liberty came with Christ:

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”. (Gal. 4:1-7)

Nothing could be clearer than this passage in teaching that the Church is one and the same in OT and NT without interruption, the only difference being one of development - the entry into the full privileges of adoption through the completed work of Christ in our redemption.

In history, no break is discernible. In the providence of God the transition from the Old to the New Covenant was imperceptible. The gospel began among the Jewish people (“to the Jew first”), and the Church in Jewry continued to worship in the synagogue and observe the ordinances of Israel, even up to the time of the destruction of the nation by the Romans in AD 70. It was the attempt of false teachers to place the yoke of the law upon the necks of gentile believers which gave rise to the first great debate in the Church (Acts 15) and the powerful arguments of Paul in Galatians, Romans, and other epistles. It was largely through controversy that the Church's doctrine developed and was completed (as completed it was when John wrote his gospel, his epistles, and the Revelation).

It is important to note therefore that in the apostolic doctrine of the Church, the NT Church becomes the rightful successor to all the promises made to

the OT Church. Therefore the Church is the key to the understanding of the prophecies relating to the redemption of Israel. What was promised in Abraham is fulfilled and realised in the Church. No difficulty is experienced in so interpreting even those prophecies relating to so-called Jewish restoration - that is, those prophecies which are based on the symbolism of Israel's property rights in Palestine. The New Testament interprets these figures spiritually and not literally, and all prophecies based thereupon must be interpreted likewise. This is our ground for rejecting any question of the restoration of Israel to its ancient acres in Palestine, as though this were a fulfillment - nay, THE fulfillment, of prophecy.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS

“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God”. - verse 5

Lightnings and thunderings, in the Apocalypse, as elsewhere throughout Scripture, are symbolic of the divine judgments against the wicked. The seven lamps are symbols of the diversified operations of the Holy Spirit in the unity of the One Person. We see the works and the judgments of God in a variety of ways, but there is an essential unity in all which proceeds from God. We learn from Isaiah 11:2, of the fulness of the one Spirit resting upon Christ, in the sevenfold nature of that fulness – “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord”.

Likewise in Zechariah's vision we have the one candlestick of gold, and its seven lamps fed directly from the two olive trees (the kingly and priestly offices of Christ) the whole being symbolic of the work of Christ in whom is manifested the fulness of the Godhead in the power of the sevenfold Spirit. Hence the lesson to the prophet, “Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”. (Zech. 4:1-7) Thus would the Kingdom of Christ be realised.

There is much in common in the visions of Zechariah and of John, both of which were given after the destruction of the earthly temple. To both the reality which the earthly temple only pictorialised was revealed, as also in the case of Ezekiel whose vision of the mystic temple in his latest chapters occurred after the Chaldean destruction. Our treatise, “No Third Temple” [Serial Number 041-6] deals with the permanent abolition of the earthly temple which occurred in the lifetime of John.

The only temple revealed to John in the Apocalypse is a spiritual one - the Church - as we intend to show when we reach chapter 11. There was no temple at Jerusalem when John wrote.

THE SEA OF GLASS

“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal”. (v. 6)

In contrast with the hurricane and the tumult of the divine “lightnings and thunderings”, we now perceive the wide and ordered dominion of God - the peace and rest of the divine nature, undisturbed by earth’s changes and tumults.

The ‘sea’ illustrates the ineffable calm of the divine nature - a limitless ocean, without bank or bottom, stretching to infinity; a mighty deep of holy, divine love and purpose, upon which no wind blows, no tempest strives, no disorderly currents disturb its unfathomable depths. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17).

THE CHERUBIM

“And in the midst of the throne and round about the throne , were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” - (v. 6-8)

These ‘beasts’, so-called because their multitude of eyes, their six-winged form, and diversified aspect of lion, calf, man and eagle have no correspondence with actual creatures on earth, are elsewhere in the Bible described as the Cherubim, or Seraphim. In the confused speculations of many commentators they have stood for angels, archangels, or even preachers of the gospel: They are not any of these. They are symbols of those sublime energies and powers of living creation, visible and invisible, which unite in acclaiming the wisdom, holiness, omnipotence, and sovereign purposes of God in all His undertakings in the working out and realisation of His will, design, and determination, in the task He has set for Himself in the great drama of creation and redemption. Creation is a living thing with a

voice which perpetually declares the glory of God.

The cherubim appear first in Eden when sinful man was cast out from the presence of God, and the way of return barred by Cherubim (plural of cherub). The derivation of this term is obscure, and the name must be interpreted by its usage. That the cherubim were only hieroglyphs or symbolic representations of inward realities there can be no doubt whatever. At Eden they were accompanied by the flaming sword of divine judgment and stood guard over the divine presence forbidding the approach of anything unholy.

They are a part of the furniture of the Tabernacle and Temple, appearing as symbolic figures on the Ark of the Covenant, or traced by embroidery in the sacred curtains. God spoke to Moses by voice from between the two cherubim adorning the ark (Numbers 7:8-9). The thought is extended in David who in majestic poetic figure declares that **GOD RODE UPON A CHERUB AND DID FLY, YEA HE DID FLY UPON THE WINGS OF THE WIND** (Ps. 18:10). In Ezekiel the figure is carried further as we see the throne of God borne up by the cherubim. (Ezek 10:1 and following.) In Isaiah the figure becomes the seraphim, a word which has been considered to mean “Burning Ones”, but again, the derivation is uncertain. (See Isaiah 6:1-4.) In a parallel passage in Psalm 104:3, a psalm which is descriptive of the mighty works of God in creation, the powers exhibited by the great Creator are in view, and may convey more than a hint of the meaning of the symbolism of the seraphim whose unceasing cry is “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory”, indicates their function which is to represent the praise of all creation, visible and invisible, to the glory of the Creator.

Thus Psalm 104, verse 3, “He maketh the clouds his chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind”.

The cherubim are four in number, because that figure is the “number of creation”, denoting the universality of God’s dominion. The four aspects of the cherubim - **LION, CALF, MAN and FLYING EAGLE** - are representative of the four chief features of animate nature, denoting the majesty, strength, wisdom and providential care (Exodus 19:4 and Deut. 32:11-12) of the great Creator. In these forms they declare and proclaim the holiness of the Almighty and are therefore symbolic of the fact that Creation is a holy thing and that all God’s ways and purposes therein are absolute in holiness, righteousness and truth.

In Revelation 4 the testimony of the cherubim describes the Almighty as He “who was and is, and is to come”. This is a description of the divine attributes of eternity

and immutability (changelessness).

Their six wings (in pairs, as in Isaiah 6) are representative of Reverence, Humility, and Obedience (see Isaiah 6).

As a hieroglyph therefore they express the glory and majesty of God's throne, the reverence, humility and submission with which God should be approached, and the principles of God's government in holiness, righteousness, wisdom and power.

There are eighteen occurrences in Revelation of the term 'beasts' denoting the cherubim, and though some have imagined our translators could have done better than to use this term in preference to the more literal one of 'living creatures' we are not inclined to indulge them. No doubt our translators wished to avoid the much greater confusion of giving the impression that the cherubim were actual living creatures instead of ideas clothed in figures which have no factual existence.

We conclude therefore that the cherubim represent the energetic principles which lie behind or within all creation, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible, and which unanimously acclaim the divine wisdom, order, holiness and truth. Psalm 19 is the expression of this in the words, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world".

In John's vision, seraphim and cherubim are clearly combined in the one figure. In Ezekiel each figure combines the characteristics of man, lion, ox and eagle, whereas in John each cherub is in exclusive possession of one only of these aspects. The variation is not uncommon in prophecy and shows the prophets are independent of one another. The meaning is always the same, however - all the works of God are truth and righteousness:

"The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness." - See Psalm 111.

THE SONG MODERN SCIENCE HAS NOT HEARD

The song of the cherubim in Isaiah 6 is echoed in our passage in Revelation, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come". Modern

science does not know that song. Time was when the great Christian philosophers who laid the foundations of modern science (Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, and others) knew that verdict of creation. Haydn set it to incomparable music. Modern science however is for the most part agnostic (like modern 'theology' so-called). Hence it descends as a curse upon humanity, and by denying the fact of a holy Creator it has lost its way and opened the door to lawlessness, violence, vice, abortion, profanity and every other evil which distorts, and seems about to destroy, modern civilisation.

How significant it is today that these figurations of living creation are said to be "full of eyes before and behind". The eyes represent universal wisdom, and in the cherubim are a further token that creation exhibits the vast wisdom of the Eternal God who has fated all things for His glory - a book in which the tale of His omnipotence and His omniscience is perpetually recounted, and His holiness shines out through all His works.

The song of the cherubim is no longer heard in the Babel of earth. The ennobling, exalting conception of creation and life, full of divine meaning and holy purpose, has been supplanted by mindless creation, rising from the primeval slime without intention or plan, with no architect, no end in view, no glory to be achieved, no mystery of love. Modern science is the philosophy of despair. "The light which is in them is darkness" - and how great is that darkness.

Let the Church as the Bride ever-beloved, eternally chosen, the full and final expression of deity (creation married to her Creator) - let her echo again the timeless, endless song of the cherubim, and declare with them (the voice of creation) and with the white-robed elders and all the company of heaven, that the Lord of Hosts is holy, and all things are His from the beginning - 'and for thy pleasure they are, thrice holy Lord, and so were created' (Rev. 4:11).

In heaven the representatives of redeemed creation declare with one voice that in eternal love and unfailing wisdom God created all things, and that His holy intention will be achieved just as surely as God is and ever shall be -- and His rest shall be glorious (Rev. 4:10-11).

SCIENCE ENDING IN SONG

If the mathematical researches of Pythagoras led his exalted mind by inevitable steps to the discovery of the first principles musical harmony, is it too much for

this modern age, building on the foundations which he laid, to discover in the limitless archway of the heavens, a meaning which effloresces into the hymn whose endless theme is the triune holiness of God?

The destiny of creation is God. All came from Him and all must return to Him. In the mystic harmony of the Triune God it is Christ, the Son, begotten before all worlds, the timeless Wisdom and Word, who is the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Sabaoth. The destiny of Christ, which is the destiny of the Godhead, can only be expressed in the language of music, of song - and what other Song or better Song, than the Song of Songs which is Solomon's? That mysterious Song, so sadly mangled and misunderstood by most of its 'interpreters', is the eternal marriage song of the heavenly Solomon whose name denotes peace and rest. Christ, the Alpha and Omega of creation, in whom all began and all must find its end, realises in the redemptive marriage with the mystic bride, the Church, the summit of that Wisdom which He is, and the destiny of the glorious life of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The mystery is expressed by the mystic Bride herself, as she only can express it, in language which only He and she can understand -

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine”. - Song of Songs, chapter 1, verse 2.

ADDENDUM

Lessons from REVELATION on the CHRISTIAN LIFE

Many Christians who, through age, sickness, ill-health, or other cause of being “shut-in”, feel that their days of usefulness to the cause are ended, should find in the Book of Revelation a wonderful fount of comfort and of reassurance. There is often a false and altogether unscriptural emphasis upon activity in the Christian life, to the minimising of the true purpose of salvation. Hence, when Christians can no longer be as active as formerly, they incline to fret as though the remainder of their days could yield little of purpose to the glory of God. The Book of Revelation teaches otherwise. Therein the Child of God is taught that in the Christian life, there is no old age, no discharge from warfare, and that the chief accomplishments of our life may lie even more definitely at the end, than at the beginning; that the heaviest responsibilities and tasks are precisely at that point in the life where we commonly fancy that our day is over and done. It is true that we may not be able to go to the mission field, or speak from a platform, or testify at a street corner, but

after all, only a very few even of the young and active, are found in these fields of activity, and in any case, the main triumphs of the Christian life do not consist in these things. One can be much engaged in “service” - rightly and properly so - yet that in itself implies nothing. Gifts in public do not necessarily denote grace in private.

In the Book of Revelation, the chief emphasis in the Christian life is placed on the fundamental realities of the inner life - walking and overcoming by faith, patient endurance, the suffering of affliction, and the proving of the soul by fiery trial. Youth or age, sickness or health, have no special relevance to this aspect of things. We go on to the end.

In successive chapters in the centre of the Book, the chief characteristics and accomplishments of the Christian life are illustrated.

The Christian Life as a Pilgrim Journey

The lesson of chapter 7, with its picture of God’s children being sealed by His grace, and finally brought to glory, is that of a pilgrim journey successfully and gloriously finished. “These are they which came out of great tribulation ...” Is it not one of the greatest accomplishments of the Christian life that the good work which God began in us at conversion, is continued until it is finished in the Day of Christ? Let us not minimise to any degree the greatness or the importance of that journey which we are all pursuing for there is no Christian activity more vital than this, or which brings greater glory to our God, than the setting out each day of our lives to run with patience the race set before us. It is not the speed with which we cover the course that catches the Lord’s eye, but the WAY WE RUN. So run (says Paul) that ye may obtain. Illness, domestic ties, old age, do not relieve us of the rigours of this journey, or discharge us from the obligation to run well day by day, to endure the burning heat of the sun of trial, or the chilling cold of disappointment and discouragement. So let us run; the eye of the judge of the course is upon us, and we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, who having themselves come through tribulations great, cheer us on to the end.

Love of the Truth

This is one of the chief lessons of chapter 10, where John, as the representative of all the faithful children of God, takes and eats the Little Book, which he finds sweet to the taste, but which makes his bowels bitter. Do we so find the truth of God? Have we appetite and taste for it? Can we say, “How sweet are thy words to my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” - even though that same love for

and assimilation of the truth may bring us into the bitterness of the opposition of this world and of its satanic prince? Is this not also a thing much to the glory of God, that we should day by day, in sickness or in health, in youth or age, esteem the words of His mouth more than our necessary food?

Nonconformity to the world

This is taught in chapter 11, where the people of God are shown in a new picture as those who, clothed in sackcloth, mingle not with the world, and partake not of its vain pleasures, nor follow its fashions. It is not asceticism which is taught here, but just that in spirit, the child of God holds himself aloof from the world. His life is a silent rebuke at all times to the folly, sin, and shame, the forgetfulness, which abound where'er he walks. To keep oneself unspotted from the world - is this not an accomplishment which, in sickness or in health, in youth or age, fulfils one of the great purposes of the Christian life?