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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 11

REVELATION 10:1-11

The Mighty Angel and the Little Book

BY: CHARLES D. ALEXANDER

REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART ELEVEN

THE MIGHTY ANGEL AND THE LITTLE BOOK

Revelation 10:1-11

The great vision of chapter 10 acts as an interlude between the sounding of the second “Woe” trumpet (of chapter 9) and the third and last “Woe” trumpet (of chapter 11:15) which spells out the end of the world. The vision of the Mighty Angel and the Little Book is designed to warn the church that before the last trumpet sounds a significant period of time must elapse.

Yet because it is never the purpose of God that the end of all things should be capable of being measured by inquisitive prognosticators (or even of pious and troubled saints) the time-lapse is presented in terms of long or short, which at one and the same time assure the troubled church that her trials have an appointed end and that her times are already measured and weighed in the exact time cycles of the sanctuary.

Hence in succeeding chapters (to which chapter 10 acts as a prelude or a governing principle) we find that the church’s sweet-bitter testimony is to last 1,260 “days”, or 42 “months”, or “time, times and half a time”, a favourite playground of the chronologists or prognosticators, all of whom perform the feat of setting the pyramid on its apex: that is, they interpret the last by the first instead of the first by the last. In plainer terms, the 1,260 days are to be interpreted in the indefinite measure of “time, times, and a half”, not the reverse. The “1,260 days” and the “42 months” are equivalents, and they belong to God’s foreknowledge as an exact measurement of prophetic time to assure the persecuted and the perplexed that all is well with the divine arrangements, and trial will not exceed the precise moment God has fixed for our deliverance.

The indefinite measure, “time, times and a half” belongs to us, for though it may conveniently be viewed as time (one year) times (two years) and half a time (six months), or the equivalent of 1,260 days, 42 months or 3 ½ years, it is not so intended to be measured by us. It must remain as an indefinite period - a “time” (singular) lengthened into “times” (plural) yet limited (half a time) to assure us that all is known and prepared by God though the “time” should last a thousand years -

or even 2,000, which in fact it very nearly has!

But more of this in the coming chapters. In the meantime we study this great vision of chapter 10, the prelude and key to all that remains in the Apocalypse. The vision dominates and colours all the remainder of the Book, yet Hendriksen dismisses it in barely two pages of his commentary while the Futuristic writers, preoccupied as they are with the exciting forecast of imminent horrors on the world scale (just about to burst upon the world, of course, “REVELATION FULFILLED NOW” so to speak) - say little or nothing about it. For them the vision has no practical value in terms of their religious journalism.

Having banished the church from all part either in the horrors or the benedictions of most of our Book, Futurism has placed itself in the happy condition of never being in danger of being called to account for false forecasting of coming frightfulness. Historicism on the other hand, being based almost entirely on Gibbon’s “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”, has no consequences to fear either, for all is either past or future, and what matters our little portion of contemporary time anyway?

The early readers of the Apocalypse might have been pardoned for concluding that if the first six trumpet judgments had a great deal to do with the downfall of Imperial Rome (as indeed they had, though only as a specimen judgment reserved for all evil contenders against the kingdom of Christ and of God) - then the last of the Caesars would be followed by the universal triumph of the church. How wrong they were - but no more wrong, and much more forgivable than today’s prognosticators and chartists!

Chapter 10 is designed to correct all that. The end of one tyrant would not mean the end of the world. The rule of continuous fulfillment (without which the Apocalypse cannot be interpreted) comes into play with every crisis of history. The “Little Book” of Destiny and Testimony, is passed on from generation to generation by the hand of the Mighty One whose terrible and fiery feet tread upon earth and ocean and control all the seething and tumultuous powers which these natural features symbolise. The bitter-sweet contents of the Little Book (verse 10) are to be devoured by every generation of the church in accordance with the representative character of John’s personal involvement in all the “events” of the Apocalypse. Christ’s destiny and the destiny of the church are one and inseparable. Sweet indeed to the taste that this should be so, but bitter in the consequence so far as this life is concerned.

It is the saddening feature of most of the books written about Revelation, that there is such a lack of spirituality in their interpretations. Hence the strange indifference or formality which descends upon the writers when Christ is unveiled.

Hendriksen denies that the Mighty Angel of Revelation 10 is the same person as Christ. In a footnote he says, “Christ is not called ‘an angel’ in the Apocalypse. Besides, we do not read that John worships this angel as he worships the Christ (1:17).

This is really not good enough. The argument is invalid, because it begs the question whether in fact this is Christ in the form of a Mighty Angel (as he often appears in the Old Testament). That John worships at the feet of the vision in chapter 1 and yet not in chapter 10 is equally invalid as an argument, for the circumstances are in greatest contrast. In chapter 1 the vision of Christ was personal to John and required his prostration in worship. In chapter 10 the vision is purely prophetic.

Moreover, Hendriksen is wrong in fact if (as we hope to prove later on), the Archangel Michael who appears in chapter 12, is none other than Christ in His sublime office as Lord of Angels as well as of mankind (see Rev. 12:7; 20:1-3; compare Daniel 10:21 and 12:1-3). There is only one ‘archangel’ mentioned in the Bible and He can only be the Son of God. If we succeed in making good our point, then Christ is in fact presented in Revelation as an angel - the Lord of Angels.

The Mighty Angel of Rev. 10 must be that same Person whose prerogative it is to defend His people and lead them through the trials and oppositions of this world. How gracious those words of the (ordinary) angel to Daniel – “Michael, YOUR PRINCE, who stands for the children of thy people” (Dan. 10:21). What a comfort to Daniel in his day when the people of God were in exile, enslaved and oppressed by the power of this world, and what an exact parallel with their state was that of John in the Apocalypse.

So is the meaning of our chapter. Its object is to reveal that the church must continue to encounter oppositions, trials, persecutions, more bitter and prolonged than any thus far experienced. But throughout all the mystery of trial and affliction, the witnessing church is sustained by her mighty Lord and Redeemer whose figure (as in this vision) bestrides the world, holding in His hand the Book 'of Destiny, ensuring the final glorious outcome of “the mystery of God”.

For our part we must reject the cursory and unspiritual treatment of our chapter, and approach with awe and fascination this immense wonder of Christ, the Eternal Son, the LOGOS, the Word, Life and Light.

The picture can be of none other than He. We see the descent from heaven, the terrible countenance which dims the solar light, the mystic cloud, the glorious rainbow, the trampling feet of fiery judgment; we see the upraised hand, we hear the voice of thunder, the stupendous proclamation, "There shall be time no longer, but when the last angel shall begin to sound, THE MYSTERY OF GOD WILL BE FINISHED."

We have here in the Mighty Angel the greatest figure that prophet, seer, lawgiver or king ever saw, a vision which dwarfs all poetic imagination. Mythology speaks of the giant Atlas who bore the heavens on his shoulders - a pathetic figure, bent and bowed beneath the tyranny of his burden. To hold up the sky was not his privilege and prerogative; it was the symbol of his slavery. Here, however, is one who, by His Word alone, upholds and sustains all things, the unchallenged and unchallengeable Ruler of earth and sea and sky, and all which is therein. He comes down to earth not to assume the burden and care of upholding creation, but to demonstrate in power and glory His right to rule and to inherit all created things. Not only is He the pillar around which creation revolves, He is the Arbiter of all time, who lays an arresting hand on the cycle of the ages, imposing His will on sun, moon and stars, and carving out the chapters of human history according to His sovereign purpose and pleasure.

We now proceed to consider this vision in detail.

THE DESCENT FROM HEAVEN

"I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven" (verse 1)

The adjective qualifies the noun. The angel is "mighty", not because other angels are weak, but because of superiority beyond the ordinary rank of angels. This "angel" is the bearer of a commission which no ordinary angel is qualified to convey. He "comes down from heaven" in the sight of John, and this denotes the formal character of His mission: a deliberate entry upon the affairs of earth in an aspect of authority and power which can in no way be disputed or opposed. This formal descent of the "angel" to the realm of human affairs indicates that here is One whose Word must surely prevail, and therefore those on whose behalf He descends from heaven's throne are assured that their interests are in safe keeping

and beyond challenge either by those who dwell on earth or by those demonic powers which in scripture language are sometimes described as belonging to the region “under the earth” (e.g. Philippians 2:10).

The reader must be careful in all such cases not to confuse earthly geographical terms with spiritual language symbols. Attending to these principles would prevent the gross interpretations often put upon such statements which describe Satan as “the prince of the power of the AIR”, or of the saints at the resurrection “meeting the Lord in the AIR”, or again the words of the Saviour, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from HEAVEN”. The terms are not geographical but relate to the spiritual realm.

CLOTHED WITH A CLOUD

Next in John’s description is the array of the mighty One – “clothed with a cloud”.

In scripture language the cloud is frequently associated with deity as denoting the divine glory, power, superiority and its comprehensibility. The human vision cannot penetrate this cloud. All is hidden and mysterious. Often the deity represented His presence with His people in olden times in the symbol of a cloud, which having no shape or pattern cannot be reproduced in idolatrous form. From its depths flash the fearful lightnings, and roll the awful thunders. It floats above the lower creation as that which commands and rules all below.

God sets the bow of His covenant in the cloud (Genesis 9:13). He leads His people through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Abraham sees the divine presence pass before him as “a smoking furnace” (Gen. 15:17).

“I will appear in the cloud on the mercyseat” declares God to Moses (Lev. 16:2).

Isaiah sees the Lord “riding upon a swift cloud” (Isa. 19:1). Ezekiel sees the glory of God in the form of “a great cloud and a fire infolding itself” (Ezek. 1:4).

At the transfiguration the apostles were enveloped in an impenetrable cloud, out of which the voice of God spoke saying, “This is my beloved Son, Hear him” (Luke 9:34-35).

At the ascension the disciples saw the Lord being “taken up” and “a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). How far did He “ascend?” The question is not irreverent or adventurous. That “cloud” was as the cloud on the Mount of

Transfiguration. It was of the same order as that cloud which went before the Israelites in the wilderness. At the Ascension the Lord was enveloped in the same cloudy formation to shroud the essential glory of His Godhead to which He then and there returned.

“Heaven” is not a geographical location viewed in terms of above and below, nor is the presence of God to be thought of as “here” or “there”. Heaven is a condition, and lies in another dimension of which we can have no conception here. In a sense heaven is all about us and within us. We are already “there” if we are “in Christ”, as Paul appears to teach when he writes, “He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

So at the last Christ comes again in “the clouds of heaven” and every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7). Those who are “alive and remain” to the coming of the Lord, will be “caught up” with the resurrected saints “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). Those “clouds” are not earthly clouds (thank God!) and that “air” is not the thin film of gaseous substance stretching but a few miles into space, but rather the glorious element of heaven so often figured thus in scripture language to denote that which is superior to earth, the region of power and glory; of changeless, ineffable, exalted BEING.

The gross idea propagated by otherwise intelligent men, that at Christ’s Second Coming the resurrected and the living saints will be a suspended for a period in a floating state somewhere in the upper atmosphere is so absurd that it ought not to require a refutation. The elementary principles of Bible symbolism teach us otherwise.

THE COVENANT SIGN

“A rainbow was upon his head.” This feature alone should have warned some commentators about the identity of this “angel”. The rainbow must ever be the sign of God’s covenant with man never to abandon the human race, never to surrender the control of creation to evil forces, never in any way to diminish His Lordship over the world until all His purposes are completed and His destiny consummated. So is the meaning of the original establishment of the bow in the clouds, after the flood (Genesis 9:8-17).

SOURCE OF ALL LIGHT AND TRUTH

Our earth is the only place in the solar system where life in any form exists. Nor

does life exist anywhere else in the material universe, as may easily be proved from the divine purposes (for which all things were made) having from the beginning been centred upon this glorious ball on which we live and move. Here and here alone has taken place that manifestation of God in the incarnation, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, which enshrines the 'mystery of God'.

This manifestation of deity through redemption, which is the secret of creation has taken place on this planet alone and can never be repeated anywhere in the universe. The event of Calvary endues this earth of ours with a significance transcending all creation. Here and here alone God works out the mystery of His Being.

Already in the transfiguration, and in Rev. 1, verse 16, John has seen Christ with the divine glory outshining in His countenance. Similarly Daniel sees Michael whose face was "as the appearance of lightning" (Dan. 10:6). The figure of the sun is used in Holy Scripture to symbolise perpetuity: "His name shall be continued as long as the sun" (Psalm 72:17). For His people the Lord acts as "sun and shield" (Psalm 84:11). Christ's throne will endure "as long as the sun" (Psalm 89:36) - that is, His kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:33). The preacher in Ecclesiastes says cryptically that it is "a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccl. 11:7) - by which we adjudge him to mean that to behold the face of Christ is the highest bliss of the ransomed soul.

We now understand the meaning of Isaiah when he foretells (chap. 30, verse 26): "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound". The meaning is that in the Kingdom of Christ, established in the New Testament, spiritual light and knowledge and grace are increased to perfection as compared with the lesser Old Testament revelation. The "millennial" opinion that this verse refers only to an increase of natural light in creation, is surely not to be taken seriously. It is plain that in the O.T. the people of God were taught to look forward to the day of Christ when there should be a great increase in the knowledge of God, like unto sevenfold increase in the light of the sun and moon. This took place at Christ's first advent and is realised fully in the gospel.

Likewise, to apostate Israel the Lord says in Amos 8:9 - "In that day I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day". Israel's sun and moon were the favour of God which she despised, and therefore she became exposed to the judgment of darkness, ignorance and rejection. Her sun

‘going down at noon’ has a startling connection with that mysterious darkness which overspread the earth at the crucifixion of Christ. That was when Israel’s sun went down at noon, literally as well as spiritually: “And it was about the sixth hour (the Jewish noon), and there was a darkness over all the earth (margin, “land”) until the ninth hour” (Luke 23:44).

In Malachi 4:2, Christ is “the sun of righteousness who rises with healing in his wings” - a picture of the gospel day.

The church in Rev. 12:1 appears as “a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet”. This shows her to be the same elect body which in the O.T. was illuminated by the ordinances of the Levitical Law, represented here as the light of the moon, which is the reflected light of the sun not yet risen above the horizon of time. The O.T. night being now over, she is clothed in the full glory of the knowledge of Christ (“clothed with the sun”) - the bright and full revelation of Him whose face “shineth as the sun”.

We journey to a city which has “no need of the sun” (that is, the natural sun) for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev. 21:23).

UNCHALLENGED DOMINION

“His feet as pillars of fire.” The feet enter largely into the symbolism of Holy Scripture. They are often symbolic of undisputed rule or possession, as here. The fiery appearance denotes judgment. The “angel” plants his right foot upon the sea and his left foot on the earth denoting his universal and unchallenged dominion over all created things; the sovereign ruler of the nations and the arbiter of all destinies. Yet He who thus claims all creation as His own, and marches on those glorious feet through all the chapters of history, subduing all to Himself, is the same who cries in the psalms of David - “They pierced my hands and my feet”. (Psalm 22:16) . Wonder of wonders, that He who treads alone the winepress of judgment and reddens His garments in the blood of His foes, also walks in the way of sorrows to a cross of shame (compare Isaiah 63:1-6).

Nahum tells us that “the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3 etc), and by this the prophet indicates the omnipotence of the Lord as He marches through history to subdue all to Himself and break the power of the wicked. At the end of the chapter Nahum sees those same terrible, marching feet in terms of utmost grace and gentleness – “Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace” (verse 15).

How graphic is that prophetic picture in Zechariah (yet how almost universally misunderstood): “His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives ... and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west” (Zech. 14:4 etc). This is not, as usually it is taken to be, a literal event in Palestine in a day yet future, but a symbolic prophecy of the first coming of Christ when the Mount of Olives stood as a symbol for the earthly kingdom of Israel. The “mount”, that is, the nation of Israel, was divided asunder by the Messiah who was rejected, and a way of escape from the doomed city of Jerusalem was opened up for those fugitives of hope, the election of grace, who abandoned the earthly administration (now failed and doomed), and fled for refuge to the gospel hope set before them. The gospel day is described as “one day” which shall never end (verses 6-7) and the “living waters” of the divine Word, the gospel, go forth from the mystic Zion to those seas which represent the gentile nations (verse 8).

“Thou hast put all things under his feet” writes David in Psalm 8, verse 6 - words which are echoed by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:27 and, Ephesians 1, verse 22. David repeats the theme in Psalm 110 - the most quoted psalm in the N.T. “Sit thou at my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool”. All dominions, empires, powers, whether in earth or under the earth, are His footstool upon which rest His feet. This is the divine decree, founded on the absolute merit and obedience (even unto death) of the ever blessed Son. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with that. No prerogative of man can hinder, delay or set aside the fact of it or the appointed day of the final triumph of Christ. If we did not believe that, we would have no religion, no faith, no hope, and no God.

UNHAPPY SERMONS

Yet, taking a wistful glance over our shoulder at days long past - days of our immaturity indeed, but none the less days of earnest and absolute committal to Christ - we are sad for the kind of appeal made specially at that time to young believers to urge them to a life of dedication on the score that all depended upon them and their consecration, without which God was helpless to fulfill His own destiny. We have before us a printed sermon of a good and godly man whom we heard with much acceptance in the days of our youth, but who has long since gone to a better world where no doubt he now sees things in better and surer light. In this sermon he strangely declares, “The present is a testing time for the Lord Jesus and the plans of His Father. He waits to see whether His Word is to be held fast by us; whether His truth is to prevail, His work to proceed, His name to be honoured, and His return made possible. He is counting on you, depending on you. He has the

power for work and conflict, for success and victory, but you are the channel. Will you fail Him? Are you ready to face the cost of prayer and pay the price for such an answer as Daniel received?"

We cannot reconcile such pleadings with that Sovereignty of Christ which those burning feet planted on sea and land so formidably symbolise. We would stand with any man who preaches against sin and against careless and unconsecrated living. We are committed to preaching which calls upon the Christian to forsake self and the world and consecrate life and powers and time and purpose for Christ, but to represent God as being suspended as to the outcome of all the vast merits of Christ and His glorious sacrifice, on the will and faithfulness of man, so that without the same, God is impotent and Christ cannot complete what He has begun, is a serious imputation against the wisdom and throne of God. The teaching does no honour to Christ, for it denies His all-conquering prerogative.

Imperiously He plants His burning feet on sea and land, and proclaims by oath that the Mystery of God will be infallibly fulfilled at the time appointed. Nothing can set aside this decree. We sympathise with the good man who sees the great need for stirring up Christian men and women to supreme devotion to Christ. But it is a false and self-defeating plea to ground that appeal upon the supposed divine impotence to achieve His own creative and redemptive purposes unless fallible man agrees to co-operate and make possible the outcome of the sacrifice of Christ. Unless our hope is built on Christ alone, His Person and merits, His obedience, His Gethsemane, His Golgotha, His empty tomb, His exaltation to highest glory, our faith is vain, and as we said before, we have no God, no religion, no hope.

The solitariness of Christ in achieving the goal of creation and the redemption by His own sacrifice and merit, must never be challenged, nor yet confused with the consecration of good men. Did not the Father say to the Eternal Son, "Sit thou at my right hand UNTIL I MAKE thine enemies thy footstool"? This is a region where no one else can tread, angel or man, and no other consecration will do

"I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me" (Isaiah 63:3). He of the burning feet who trod the winepress of judgment overthrowing all foes opposing His kingdom (and trod it ALONE), is also He who first trod another press on the Mount of Olives, for such is the meaning of Gethsemane – "The Oil Press" - where the precious oil was wont to be obtained to maintain the holy flame in yonder sanctuary on Zion's hill. His soul was bruised and crushed, that therefrom might flow that holy oil which is the food of the flame which never goes out in the upper sanctuary of the Father.

THE LITTLE BOOK

“And he had in his hand a little book open” (verse 2).

The object of the vision has to do with this book - a small scroll lying unsealed and ready for inspection in the hand of the Mighty One. The symbolism shows that the contents of this “little book”, were available then and there for those whom John represented - the, church. Those who are committed to historical fulfillments have seen this “little book” as a foretelling of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, breaking into time and introducing a new and glorious phase of church history. The temptation is certainly strong to identify the book with that great historic event, but in our opinion it must be steadfastly resisted. That John is called upon to “eat” the book, and that it already lay open in the hand of the “angel” must surely indicate that it had an immediate fulfillment, unlike the seven thunders (verse 4) whose message John was ordered not to write because the time was not yet come. It is hard to reconcile the open nature of this book with the fifteen centuries of delay between the time of the vision and the onset of the sixteenth century Reformation.

Some have seriously suggested that the scroll was a little one in order that John should have no difficulty in devouring it But this savours too much of interpretative convenience, and not a serious effort of exposition. An act purely prophetic and not actual, would encounter no such difficulty.

The book in our opinion was “little” because what it had to say was brief, and could be put in few words. Its message was, as we shall shortly see, that the church must continue to bear her testimony to Christ right to the end, but the time would be long, and sweet though the testimony of Christ is to the soul of the believer, it must ever bring the church into the bitterness of the world’s enmity and cruelty. More of this later.

THE LION ROARS

With “his right foot on the sea and his left upon the earth”, the mighty One “cried with a loud voice as when a lion roars: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices” (verse 3).

It is not without importance that the planting of the feet on the sea and earth (and in that order) anticipates chapter 13, the emergence from sea and earth of the two mystic beasts who come forth as enemies of the kingdom of Christ. Before these

apparitions emerge, the dominion of Christ has already been asserted, so that the permitted evil is under the control of the Mighty One who comes down for the protection of the church and the final victory of his kingdom.

The lion is the symbol of majesty, power and rule. The roaring of the lion spreads terror amongst those who have reason to tremble. Amos writes: “The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy” (Amos 3:8). Again, “The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither” (Amos 1:2). See also Joel 3:16; Hosea 11:10; and Jeremiah 25:30-38.

The prophetic meaning of the “roar” is that judgment is threatened. In the case of John’s vision, it is a warning to the world that the Lord has “come down from heaven” to save His people and pour His judgments upon their foes. The same meaning attaches to the O.T. passages referred to above.

It pleases the Lord also to present Himself frequently under the figure of the ‘King of Beasts’”. The first occurrence of the word LION in the Bible has a direct reference to Christ. When dying Jacob blesses his sons and gives each his prophetic destiny, Judah is marked out for special Messianic association. It is of Judah’s seed that Christ came. The words are “Judah is a lion’s whelp. From the prey my son, thou art gone up.... The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet till Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:9-12). Shiloh, of course is Christ - the first time a name was given to the coming Deliverer. The name comes from the same root as “Solomon”, and means “peace”. Jacob’s prophecy is very full and complete. There is a clear reference to this prophecy in Revelation where Christ appears as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (chap. 5:5).

Hengstenberg draws attention to “the hostile character of the loud voice” compared here with the roar of the lion. He points out that in the O.T. passages in which the same figure is used (see above) the roar of the lion has already been “consecrated as an expression of the wrath of God against His enemies”.

SEVEN THUNDERS

As that great cry of the mighty One echoes through all created space Seven Thunders “utter their voices”. With one exception thunder is only mentioned in the New Testament in the writings of John. The one exception, in Mark 3:17, concerns John and his brother James who (Mark records) were surnamed by the Lord,

“Boanerges - sons of thunder”. These were the two brothers whose mother besought the Lord that when He came into His Kingdom her two sons should sit with Him, one on His right hand and the other on His left (Matt. 20:21). We may be sure that the request is not recorded just to show a mother’s pride in her sons. There was a prophetic meaning in the proud mother’s plea, for there was a sense in which her request was fulfilled, but not as she could have understood then. One of the brothers, James, was the first martyr among the apostles, and the other was the last of the apostles to survive, and to him was granted the ministry of consolation to the church in his late writings - the gospel, the three epistles, and the Apocalypse. These writings prepared the church for her agelong struggle against the power of this world. These two great apostles were so named “Sons of Thunder” by the Lord because their ministry, especially that of John, was to have so much to do with the rolling of the divine thunders in history.

John is the only writer to record the voice of God speaking from heaven when, nearing the crucifixion, Christ cried out “Father, glorify thy name”. The voice of the Eternal replied “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again”. What Christ received as an intelligible voice, the people heard only as thunder: “The people that stood by said that it thundered” (John 12:28-29).

In Revelation John records thunderings in chap. 6:1; 4:5; 8:5; 10:3-4; 11:19; 14:2; and 19:6. So he fulfils his surname Boanerges, one of the “sons of thunder”.

The seven thunders whose intelligible voice John was forbidden at that time to write down are the seven last plagues introduced in the form of the vial judgments of chapter 16. The command not to write the message conveyed by the thunders is to be understood as a token of delay: in other words, a great interval was to elapse between the time of the vision and the time of full and final retribution.

THE OATH AND THE MYSTERY OF GOD

“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,
And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:
But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

It is the voice of the Creator-Redeemer which we hear. He who made all things for Himself and for His eternal glory will finish what He has begun. The precise time is fixed and sure - as all time is, with God. There never can be any doubt that all God ever set out to do in creation will be gloriously finished. This eternal purpose of God is called here, "The mystery of God," for so much of it at present lies beyond our human comprehension. The mystery of God is His eternal and immutable wisdom. Why did He make the world? Why did He not anticipate the evil and move to prevent it? Why create man knowing man would fail and the earth be filled with violence, sin and shame? Why indeed create anything at all, including angels, seeing colossal evil manifested itself in the angelic creation first? Great mystery this, and for it there is no final answer in this world - not until the processes of the divine wisdom are fully worked out and the 'mystery' is finished in the perfection of the task to which the Almighty originally dedicated Himself.

Faith awaits the final answer, for faith, knowing its Lord, does not need to know the reason why, having for its consolation already the ultimate revelation of God in the awful event of Calvary. The Incarnation of God; why God became Man; why the humiliation, the shame, the agony, the curse, the dying, the tomb? Here lies the ultimate answer to the mystery, and faith awaits with serenity the final revealing, for already it knows its God, and loves what it knows.

In the meantime faith knows that whatever the outcome may be, the end is as sure as the throne of God - a lesson of which the Church always needs to be reminded. The MYSTERY OF GOD is wrapped up in the Person of the Son. The Father loves the Son and gives all things into His hand (John 3:35). In that last Dedicatory Prayer of our Lord ere He left the Upper Room for Gethsemane, Gabbatha and Golgotha, He declares not only His own destiny, but His eternal will and purpose:

"Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the earth." John 17:24

Stupendous words! Words of deepest mystery, enshrouding the eternal purpose of God to show forth His glory and the mystery of His Being, through the Person of the Incarnate Son; making Himself visible who is the invisible God, whom no eye hath seen nor can see, yet is seen and will for evermore be seen in Him who as God and Man reigns eternally on creation's glorious throne.

The end is fixed (in terms of 1,260 prophetic "days" – see chap. 11:3) just as surely as was the beginning. Nothing can advance or retard the divine purpose. It is 'in

the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound,' that the mystery of God will be complete. This is in conformity with the predictions of the prophets "as he hath declared to his servants and prophets". That is, the entire burden of prophecy, in Old Testament or in New, has to do with this great event when the task of the Almighty God will be brought to its grand conclusion. The trumpet (of the seventh angel) will sound, and the dead shall be raised, and we shall be changed.... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:52-54). And let it be set to immortal music by Mr. Handel! Let death and the grave, them, twin evils of creation, answer for it – "O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

GOD SWEARS BY HIMSELF

It has been alleged that the Mighty Angel cannot be regarded as Christ because the swearing of the oath denotes an inferiority. God cannot swear by God, say the objectors. But this is precisely what God does in the case of Abraham when to show the immutability of His counsel in the promise He had made concerning Abraham's seed, God 'confirmed it by an oath'. "And because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself - that by two immutable things, (the promise and the oath), we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us". (Hebrews 6:13-18).

The oath of the Mighty Angel proclaiming the end of all creation and of history is of such a nature that no created angel could swear it. The very nature of this oath governs and ensures the outcome all creation, and indeed, of the eternal destiny of God Himself.

The oath of this 'angel' is of One who possesses the prerogative of Godhead, who is privy to the secrets of the Divine nature, and has access to the mystery of the divine Being.

Vitringa (1659-1722) is quoted by Hengstenberg as saying, "Does the hope of the church rest on the oath of a created angel? Is it the part of a created angel to swear that the words of prophecy and the promises given to the church shall be fulfilled? Assuredly, if the hope of the church shall stand unmoved, it cannot be sustained except by the faithfulness and oath of that very Person to whose nature failure is not incident, and which of itself is able to perform whatsoever it swears to. And this can be said only of God. Wherefore God swears by Himself (Heb. 6) when His object was to confirm the faith of His people regarding what He had promised, and

show the unchangeableness of His counsel.”

THE EATING OF THE BOOK

John at this stage receives a command from heaven to take the Little Book from the hand of the mighty One. The command is in the same voice which had just forbidden him to write down what the Seven Thunders had uttered (compare verses 4 and 8). Obediently John approaches the vision and asks for the book:

“And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.

And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings”.

The devouring of the book has an earlier example in the Old Testament, in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was sent to the rebellious house of Israel to declare the Word of God. He was warned to preach God’s message “whether they hear or whether they forbear”. The vision proceeds in Ezekiel chapter 2:8 to 3:3:

“Open thy mouth and eat that I give thee. And behold, an hand was sent unto Me, and lo, a roll of a book was therein.... So I opened my mouth and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.”

The vision is the same as that of John. Ezekiel’s testimony was against an apostate church. To bear that testimony was sweet, for sweet is the Word of God to those who love the same, as in the case of Jeremiah, a prophet in a similar situation to that of Ezekiel: “Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord of hosts”. (Jer. 15:16)

The prophet is thus identified with his message and bears the pleasure or the grief of it. One of the most startling examples of this is the prophet Hosea and his prophetic “marriage” to an adulteress (Hosea 1:2 and 3:1).

The Old Testament prophets were confronted with the same great problem - apostate religion. They witnessed against an Israel which had departed from God yet was deluded into supposing that it remained in possession of its privileges as the people of God. Likewise John, the last of the N.T. prophets and apostles, was about to contend (in the spirit) with the mystery of an apostate church which for many ages would be the principal persecutor and oppressor of the true believers in Christ. The Word of God, though sweet to the taste, brings bitterness and pain to those who faithfully proclaim it.

Those commentators therefore who see in the following chapter in Revelation (the testimony of the Two Witnesses in the streets of the mystic city of Jerusalem) the meaning of the exercise of eating the Little Book, are near to the mark.

Our Saviour makes all this plain in His parting counsel to His apostles in the Upper Room: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". (John 16:33) Significant indeed that these words of the Redeemer are only found in John's gospel. In the Apocalypse the beloved apostle experiences the inward truth of the Saviour's words - and this experience is on behalf of the suffering church for whom he always stands in the Book of Revelation.

THE CLUE TO THE VISION

It is surprising that so many commentators fail to see the clue in the last verse of the chapter: "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." This can only mean that the testimony of God's people should be extended from John's day over an immense period of time and over a worldwide area, embracing all the world and all history. The same clue makes nonsense of that interpretation which tells us that this testimony is borne by two men only, in one city, over a period not exceeding 3 ½ years! Such is the interpretation attached by Futurism and Literalism to the events of the following chapter. But John's words are for all the church covering all time.

No one knows the duration of that time - or its brevity. The "time, times and half a time" come into play continually and none can penetrate the mystery. No age can declare, "We are the last of the ages," nor can any say, "We are NOT the last".

But all may say with equal assurance, "All is well". The Lamb is in the midst of the throne. The divine oath has been sworn. There is no "delay" with God. Exactly as it has been ordained the great time clock of history will relentlessly pursue its

revolutions and when the “1,260 days” are ended the Mystery of God will be revealed and time will be no more. For time is only ordained that in it the drama of God’s great life should complete itself and creation know its God and admire and worship what it knows.

“He shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all that believe”.
(2 Thess. 1:10)

THE DOCTRINE OF THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

The identity of the “Mighty Angel” involves the highly significant O.T. doctrine of “the angel of the Lord” describing the appearances and interventions of the Son of God in the ages preceding His incarnation at Bethlehem. It pleased the Lord to assume angelic form when “appearing” in ancient times to the patriarchs and prophets. These appearances prepared the way for the full N. T. revelation of Christ as the Eternal Son, the LOGOS (WORD), the power and wisdom of God (John 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:24; Colossians 1:13-19) . The LOGOS, that is “the WORD”, is a term of profound significance. That which proceeds from God is God, and Christ as the LOGOS signifies the Eternal Begetting of the Son by the Father, and presents Him as God of God, Light of Light, the outgoing of the wisdom and power of the Godhead, by whom all things were made and without whom was not anything made that was made.

The mysterious figure of the Angel of the Lord appears throughout the he Old Testament as the One through whom God communicates His Word to mankind. “Angel” means “Messenger” and is, in itself a neutral term which in Christ is exalted to indicate not only that He is the bearer of the Father’s wisdom and “message”, but He is in fact that message and wisdom. Hence in Malachi 3:1, this “messenger” is identified with the Lord thus: “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger (angel) of the covenant whom ye delight in”

The first recorded appearance of the Lord is to Abraham (Genesis 12:7 - compare Genesis 15:1; 17:1; 18:1-3, 33). Specifically as “the angel of the Lord”, the Lord instructs Abraham to offer up Isaac his son, and arrests the hand of Abraham at the last moment with the words, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad ... for now I know that thou fearest God seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, FROM ME.” The “angel” clearly identifies Himself in unity with God. The description of Isaac as “thine only son” is deliberate, for in fact there was another son, ISHMAEL, by the Egyptian bondwoman Hagar. The Angel speaks prophetically,

anticipating His own sacrifice of Himself in accordance with those golden words recorded in John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON ...” There was no hand in heaven or earth then to arrest that sacrifice.

It was with this same mysterious Person, the Angel of the Lord, that Jacob wrestled at Peniel (so named by Jacob because the word means, “The face of God” – “I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved”. (Genesis 32:30). Hosea confirms that it was ‘the Lord’ with whom Jacob wrestled, yet at the same time describes the divine Wrestler as “the Angel”: “He (Jacob) had power over the Angel and prevailed ... even the Lord God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial”. (Hosea 12:3-5)

In the same angelic form the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife to prepare them for the birth of Samson. Manoah asks the name of the angel who mysteriously replies, “Why asketh thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret” - (margin, “Wonderful”) - Judges 13:18. The same word is used by Isaiah in the prophecy of the birth of Christ: “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace”. (Isaiah 9:6)

This remarkable ‘name’ denotes ENIGMA, and points to the incommunicable nature of God possessed by the ‘angel’ who is in fact the Son, the LOGOS, the Word, the co-equal, co-eternal, Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Jacob likewise asked the name of the One with whom he wrestled at Peniel and was met by a similar reply – “Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?” - indicating the impossibility of communicating the divine name to created beings, the INFINITE TO THE FINITE.

When Isaiah in vision sees the Lord of Hosts in the temple worshipped by the seraphim, it is Christ whom he actually sees (compare Isaiah 6, with John 12:41).

The angel of the Lord appears to Moses at the burning bush and proclaims His Name, “I am that I am” - that is, “I am the I am, Life, Being, known only to Myself, the Eternal, the Source of a things, the Wisdom, Power and Glory of the Godhead”. (Compare Exodus 3, and Acts 7:30-35)

Let this suffice. When we reach chapter 12 of Revelation with its reference to Michael we hope to prove that Michael too is the Son of God, the Amen, the Lord of angels and of all creation.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY

We live in the age of the repudiation of Christ. If ever the people of God needed to be reinforced in their faith by so comprehensive a figure of Christ as the one now before us in this chapter, this is that time. A thousand years after the final overthrow of heathenism in the continent of Europe we find Europe the centre of the world revolt against the Son of God. The enemy has with great subtlety and consummate art, turned faith into unbelief. The age of faith has passed into the age of reason (so-called). The Reformation of the sixteenth century has at last exhausted itself, abdicated its role in history, denied the Creator and repudiated the Word of God.

The world and the church face a new thing which has never been known before, no, not since the foundation of the earth.

It is the enthronement of unbelief in the very centre and heart of the Church Visible: the setting up of the last great Baal of Rationalism in the temple of the Almighty God.

Satan is waxing bold. Not since the Garden of Eden has he been in such a paradise. He has the ear of humanity, and no lie, conceit or daring blasphemy is now withheld from a generation which in other fields beside that of religion exhibits the most alarming symptoms that humanity has lost its soul. The Age of Faith had its triumphs in every field of human culture, but for over a century the Western world has been departing from the ground of faith. What Rationalism has done for religion, Materialism has done for science and culture. We have a Creation without a Creator and a universe without meaning, purpose or plan. Atheistic evolution reigns, and there is no iniquity, blasphemy or vice which is not now brazenly uttered and publicly defended.

No-one can any longer deny that the insistence upon the evolutionary origin of man has utterly destroyed the concept of man as a moral being, answerable for his deeds to an Almighty Creator.

In this central chapter of the Apocalypse we have the answer to all the efforts of man or devil to destroy the throne of God. Faith sees Christ as John sees Him elevated far above the boasting and wrangling of foolish men who contend for the vacant throne of deity by elevating their own minds above the holy Wisdom of God incarnate. God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. When in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the

foolishness of preaching (the Cross) to bring to eternal salvation those who believe. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”. (See 1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Worldly wisdom, or even opinion, is irrelevant to that divine wisdom which came down from heaven to redeem a world of sinners lost, destroying death by death and overcoming all evil by enduring all evil on the Cross. That the Creator and judge of all should in infinite love pay the price of redemption in the agony and blood of the Cross is something beyond science. The Seventeenth Chapter of John should be studied with rapt attention and deepest humility of all who would be wise. It answers all questions in heaven and earth, in time or eternity.

Our appeal is to that Word which is the written legacy of Him who is THE WORD, the LOGOS, the Eternal Son. Truth has its own voice in the spirit of man, superior to the voice of science and philosophy. It is a voice which makes all equal - the poor man and the rich, the uneducated and the philosopher, the artisan and the accomplished scientist. The moral need of each is as great as that of the whole. There is a spirit in man as well as a rational mind, and the unlearned is as competent in that field to bring in a judgment as the most sophisticated. Morality is not the exclusive property of any class or age.

He who despises the faith of the child or the untutored savage, had better be careful what he is about. There is a Word of God in the earth superior to all the arts of mankind. There is a fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.

“I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight”. (Matthew 11:25-26)