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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 25

REVELATION 20:11 to 22:21

Paradise Regained

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART TWENTY-FIVE

PARADISE REGAINED

Revelation 20:11 to 22:21

We have now reached the end of our Book, and this last chapter must be prefaced therefore by a short review of the pathway by which we have come.

Without the Book of Revelation the Bible could not have been complete. To have left the Church of our Lord without that apostolic guidance which she needed during the two thousand years of her history, would have meant that in all her long ages of warfare and travail she would have had no guiding light to comfort her in the mystery of her suffering. It is an easy exercise for some of our latest writers on prophecy to lift the entire Book out of history and present it as a guide book to sensational forecasts of what is about to happen in the Middle East, with Russia and China as the dark villains of the play. The fact that no true spiritual end is served by these exciting labours is no deterrent either to the impulse which throws more and more of this material on to the profitable book market, or to the appetite of a large portion of the Christian public to buy and read.

We have therefore no apology to make in having devoted so much time to the elucidation of the Apocalyptic mysteries, with no other reward except the satisfaction of helping the people of God in an evil and treacherous time, stimulating their adoration of the Glorious Person who is the key to all mysteries, the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, through whom and by whom the mystery of God is completed, the Church preserved in her faith throughout the ages, and those who live in the Last Times encouraged to say, with the redeemed of all the past ages:

AMEN, EVEN SO COME LORD JESUS.

From the last chapters of our great and glorious Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we look back over the course by which we have come, through the Church's true history as it was mapped for us in advance by the Seer of Patmos, the beloved John, last of the apostles. To him was committed, ere he left this world, the last inspired Word which our Lord would utter until the time of the

consummation when He would come again. His right it was to open the pages of history over which He presides, in the long pilgrimage from The Cross to the Crown, from the Betrothal to the Marriage, the time of the restitution of all things, now surely due.

At the time of writing at Patmos, the true Bride of Christ, the Church, had at last been separated from Temple and synagogue. Nurtured in the nest of that ancient Jewish Church which read its history back 2,000 years to Abraham, the fledgling gentile Church found its wings and learned to fly alone in the open firmament of heaven. Providence, in the shape of the noble Roman general Titus, had seen to that. The fall of the Temple marked the end of all that remained of Jewish prerogative, and made way for the full glory of that Church which all along had been the ultimate goal of prophecy. The fall of the Temple ("Behold your house is left unto you desolate" - Matthew 23:38) - was an act of God's justice which marked the end of the dispensation of Law. The living Church in Jewry (to which James had for so long faithfully ministered) merged at last into the fully developed Church of the New Testament. Here is the true Bride of Christ, the King's Daughter of Psalm 45 whose robe of Ophir gold identifies her as a gentile bride. Here is that Love, that Dove, that Undeiled Bride of whom King Solomon sang in his Song of Songs. Here is the full reward of the Son of God who bought her with the supreme dowry of His own blood on the Cross, shortly to come again in glory and power to claim her as His own and lead her to heaven's marriage altar where deity will be united to redeemed humanity in which God and Man will be indissolubly joined in a Oneness which shall never end.

Ere the last apostolic voice had been silenced in the lonely grave at Patmos, the head of the Church, our Saviour Jesus Christ our Lord, gave to His servant John that last prophetic counsel which was to guard and guide and comfort the Church during the long history of 2,000 years until the great consummation.

The Book of Revelation is the history of the significant events of that long period of time between Patmos and the final realisation of the destiny of Christ and the Church. They who narrow this spiritual history of the people of God to a brief period of Jewish restoration at the end of time, deprive the Church of chart and compass during the last 2,000 years of her tremendous history. The fact that the Book of Revelation has been understood only with great difficulty during the past two millenniums of time creates no real problem of interpretation. The object of prophecy is not to delineate history in advance in such a fashion as to paralyse all initiative and deprive all intermediate hope, but to be assured in advance that God WILL preserve His people. Understanding the past experiences, the Church is

assured that just as certainly will God preserve her latest generations, and cause them to triumph over all foes.

The principle of prophecy lies in the Saviour's words to His disciples, "Now I tell you before, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he" (John 13:19); and, "Now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (John 14:29). In other words the key to the meaning lies in the fulfillment. How absurd and false therefore are the attempts to map out in detail the events which enthusiastic writers are telling us are the significant events next to be enacted in contemporary history. Never do their predictions relate to far-off events. The public would have little interest in that, and book sales would be very discouraging. Impending fulfillment: "What is the next event?" - this is what the public desires. The exercise of feeding that appetite rewards those who provide the sensations, with much notoriety and a handsome return in popular sales. The true object of prophecy is to indicate that in all ages, Christ is in control of the destiny of His people, working things out according to the master plan of redemption. Hence the Church has sought to find in the Apocalypse throughout the last twenty centuries, a comfort in her trials and an assurance that she walks (like Daniel's three friends) in the midst of the fire with One whose form is like that of the Son of God. We need that same support today (perhaps never more so) - for which purpose the Apocalypse was given to the Church at Patmos 1900 years ago, and we are determined that none shall take it from us. For we are assured that the Apocalypse is the inward and spiritual history of the Church, surfacing at every significant part of history into contemporary events affecting the welfare and witness of the Church to her Beloved Lord.

From Patmos to the Second Coming of Christ, this Book is the guide and comfort of the Church. May we not now, looking back over 2,000 years of Church History, and thinking we see in the Latter Day apostasy an Unloosing of Satan - may we not (we repeat) even now look with a new expectation of the Second Coming of our Lord, and cry aloud, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" which is John's last word in the Book of his Prophecy (Rev. 22:20)?

We have now to complete our task by endeavouring to elucidate John's vision of THE LAST THINGS - his description of the Last Judgment (chapter 20: 11-15); followed by the Marriage of Christ and His Bride, the Grand Finale to all God's glorious works of Creation. Thus is the Old Creation brought to an end and the New Creation which will never pass away appears. The mystery of God is complete in PARADISE REGAINED.

THE LAST JUDGMENT (Chapter 20:11-15)

There must be a final reckoning with sin. Men and angels were created free, and their final fate will bear witness to this. The Last Judgment is an essential part of the great life drama. It may arouse some unanswerable questions in the present state of our knowledge, but nothing that faith will not accept with patience until it pleases God finally to withdraw the veil.

In the brief description of that final scene in the concluding verses of chapter 20, we again find ourselves in the region of symbol. How else can such mysteries be held forth in our present incomplete knowledge? The Great White Throne is itself a symbol of the holiness and justice of Him who sits upon it, and is a guarantee that the judgment contains nothing which is inconsistent with the grace and truth of the One who descended as man into His own creation and bore upon the Cross the offence of it all. Impenitent man shares, with the fallen from among the angelic company, the same fate which truth and righteousness must require, and this will be fully vindicated at the judgment seat. He that is wise will reserve all judgment till then.

The description therefore of the Last Judgment is figurative. There is no actual throne. Its whiteness is symbolic of the holiness and justice of the One who sits as Judge. The “Books” which are opened are also symbolic. There are no court registers in heaven. Augustine, with his usual perspicacity (as befits one trained in the law) perceives that the “Books” are symbols of the divine memory, or as Ebrard finely puts it, “A symbolic representation of the divine omniscience”. It is a solemn thought that the Lord knows all and never forgets. When it is said that He pardons our sins and will “remember them no more for ever” we are to understand that this is a gracious promise that our sins, once forgiven, will not be recalled to our future condemnation.

INSTANT JUDGMENT

“The Great Assize” as John Wesley called it in one of the most magnificent of his sermons, takes place in the region of conscience. Mr. Wesley with his matter-of-fact mind, reckoned that it might take 1,000 of our years to complete the judgment, seeing that every idle thought must be accounted for. At least he was logical and faced the issue of judgment more resolutely than many more of whom we might speak. But he was of course mistaken. The judgment will be concluded in one tremendous moment. The individual soul will be aware at once of the true weight of its guilt. Conscience will never be so much alive as in that judgment, and every

conscience will, under the searching light of the Holy Spirit, know instantly the extent of its own apostasy and will APPROVE THE SENTENCE. Like the self-righteous Pharisees, with the stones ready in their hands to execute the law on the poor Magdalene whom they brought before the Saviour, they will be smitten in their own consciences and make haste to hide themselves from “Him who sits upon the throne” (John 8:1-11).

The story of this wretched woman is expunged from many of the new Versions which are now plaguing and confusing the minds of the Lord’s people. Sometimes this fallen lady is ‘in’ and sometimes she is ‘out’ - but the confusion originally arose because self-righteous men, who never could understand how the Lord could pardon so grievous a sinner, began from an early date to omit the story from the manuscripts, for fear it might be interpreted as excusing sin. To this day, it is a tendency amongst men to esteem others worse than themselves. But the Judgment will alter all that.

So it is our view that the judgment will be over in one unmeasurable moment. All will be revealed at one flash of the divine light upon the universal conscience, and there will be none, not even in hell, who will question the righteousness and holiness of God. That question will be settled for ever.

THE LAKE OF FIRE

“And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (20:15)

The “lake of fire” is a symbol. Natural fire has no terrors for the spirit. It is written that God has made His ministers (the angels) a ‘flame of fire’ (Hebrews 1:7). In any event there can be no natural ‘flame’ where there is not atmosphere to feed it, so the ‘flame’ which denotes the angelic nature, and the ‘fire’ which is reserved for the wicked, cannot be a material combustion. The fire of hell is the consuming righteousness of God. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). As Cruden so ably puts it, “Fire is a symbol of the holiness and justice of God”.

Proceeding, Cruden writes: “Daniel says (Daniel 7:10) that a fiery stream issued and came forth from before the Lord (noting the speedy execution of His judgments for the terror of the wicked and the comfort of the godly). Our Saviour is compared to fire. Malachi 3:2 - He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap; that is, he shall consume the wicked by his judgments and purify his people by his doctrine. The Holy Spirit likewise is compared to fire: Matthew 3:11 - He shall

baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

We must never forget that the Lord reigns as much in hell as in heaven, for Job tells us that Satan must go to God first for permission to tempt the righteous. The iron of the divine restraint is on all the activity of the Evil One, as our Book of Revelation has shown in the Binding and Loosing of Satan (chapter 20:3). Satan is moved by malice, but the sovereign restraint of God permits only so much as will prove at the last that Satan has failed in his assault against the truth. At the last, Satan will be compelled to acknowledge the righteousness and justice of his own awful fate. No discordant voice will be raised, not even in hell, against the justice and righteousness of God. All enemies of the truth will be proved to be liars, as their awakened consciences will only too readily acknowledge. Further than that we are not permitted to go, but the unanimity of creation as to the worthiness of Christ to take the throne and the glory and the crown, will prevail in the lowest depths of hell as in the highest altitudes of heaven: At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Luke 10:20: “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” Indelibly inscribed on the holy mind of God are the names of the redeemed. He knows them all. But sad is the fate of those to whom the Lord says in judgment, “I know you not.”

THE FATE OF THE WICKED

Let us pause on the threshold of this place from which so many of us believe ourselves to have been delivered by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, through His atoning death.

We do not pretend to the ability to unravel this mystery of the final state of the wicked. It has not pleased the Lord to take us very far beyond that sad boundary. Stronger and bolder minds than ours have essayed that dread passage, as did Dante whose imagination penetrated to the lowest depth of hell, where he found at last the first and greatest sinner, Satan himself, alone, embedded in a sea of perpetual ice! In that journey - designed to recall the great Florentine from a profligate life, to the holiness of one whose memory he had betrayed -Dante passed (in vision) through many circling depths of hell where he discovered that there are some who are beaten with few stripes and some with many (Luke 12: 47-48). From the Inferno, the now repentant poet ascended through the purging of Purgatorio to the

borders of his Paradiso, where he found himself passing through the concentric circles of increasing glory till he arrived at the Eternal Throne.

But perhaps this view of things was only the effect of a strong poetic mind. The human mind cannot conceive the condition of endless torment. We accept with faith what we cannot understand. The crudities of the medieval torture chamber every reasonable mind will reject out of hand. In the eternal state there is no longer any opposition to Almighty God. Even Satan is dumb. The divine Being is fully unveiled and there is unanimity in the realm of universal being as to the worthiness of Christ to rule. "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father". (Philippians 2: 10-11)

The Name of Christ will be as potent in hell as in heaven, though it brings no rest to the conscience of the lost. Yet there can be no active sin in those dark regions. The Name of Christ will prevail to silence all opposition there, as in heaven it commands the rapturous praise of the redeemed. The excellence of Christ will be known and recognised in the regions of darkness to the confusion of all who have opposed or slandered it. But there will be no discordant cry. At that Name above all names, every knee will bow and every tongue confess His glory and His worth.

So all creation at the last will be unanimous in that one great recognition that God is good and that He is Love. Satan's conscience will proclaim his terrible apostasy, and though he will not yearn for that blessedness which he has lost for ever, he will not be able to nourish one blasphemous thought. There is no active sin in hell -only silence. The glory of Christ will be acknowledged, but in sorrow everlasting. Nothing can restore that which was castaway for ever, but there will be a mute acknowledgment of truth eternal. The sorrows of a soul which has extinguished its own light and cast away its own good, cannot be remedied.

The story of the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) who in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and besought Father Abraham (on the other side of the great gulf) to send relief in the person of Lazarus to moisten his tongue with a drop of water - this remarkable story told by Christ Himself, seems to lift a corner of the veil. The man's only hope of relief lay in the ministrations of the man whom he had despised on earth. There is no way of passage between heaven and hell, however. Yet is there not something mysterious in the unhappy man's desire that his fate should not be shared by his brethren still on the earth (for time had not yet run its course)? Mystery indeed. Perhaps a token that the soul, which can never die, is tortured by the memory of those who have been injured either by its deliberation or its neglect.

The naming of Lazarus proves that we have here more than a parable. The actors were still on the earth, alive and in the region of hope, and we ought not to be surprised if the rich man is that rich pharisee Simon, the husband of Martha, who could not keep the poor man from his table seeing he was her brother. Simon was almost certainly one of the lepers who were healed and who had not returned to give thanks (see Matthew 26:6). Now in danger of finding himself in hell with a leprous soul, he received a solemn warning from the Lord. We shall not know till we get to that world, if the man gave heed to the warning. (See Luke's account in Luke 7:36-50 and compare Matt. 22:6, Mark 19:3, and John 12:4).

It has not pleased God to give further light (if further light there be) on these solemn warnings. We know in part only. When we know as we are known we shall understand and all problems will be solved. Meanwhile – “What I say unto you I say unto all – Watch” (Mark 13:37).

THE VISION OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (Chapters 21 and 22)

How incomplete would be the Bible without its last two chapters! Here is unveiled all we are given to know of that future state to which all creation has traveled so far and endured so much. Here the child of God is given a brief glimpse of the glory which is to be. Through the mists of understanding we see, shimmering bright, a new creation, a wonderful city, a heavenly marriage, a glorious hope.

Of necessity we are in the field of imagery. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the mind conceive the glories of that eternal world. When Daniel saw the vision of the Lord by the great river Hiddekel there remained no strength in him and he fell upon his face in a deep sleep. Ezekiel also fell prostrate to the ground when he saw the vision of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:28). In the last two chapters of the Bible, we see through the eyes of John the eternal world to which all are traveling, but we do not see the actuality but only as it were a parable. When in verse 1 of chapter 21 John sees a vision of the new heaven and new earth, and the holy city, New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven, we are in the region of parable. How else can the eternal glories be expressed? The city which John sees is explained later in the chapter as “the bride, the Lamb's wife” (v.9 and verses following); the vision is obviously a picture of the completed church, graphically presented to the view of the Seer with immense walls of jasper, surrounding a city of pure gold with 12 foundations each composed of a precious stone. There is no such city in heaven, as everyone knows. What we are seeing is the glory and security of the completed church, never to be any more defiled.

In the last chapter we see a picture of Paradise, an elevated and glorious version of the original paradise where the human race began, complete with heavenly river of the water of life, having on its banks the Tree of Life, apparently not a solitary growth but more like a forest. To have access to this Garden is the privilege of all believers, and the picture given is of a paradise of joy and peace which shall never end.

Life there is on a new dimension - that of Eternal Love. Christ and the Church are the parties to an eternal marriage - God and Man united, partakers each of the other's nature, as Christ bears our humanity taken from an earthly mother, and we in Him and by the Spirit of God, partakers of the divine nature.

None of these wonders can be expressed in any other terms save those of parable. What then shall be the reality? The imagination has free range here, but the reality will far exceed anticipation, for the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him.

It is important also to note the significance of the numerical references. There are twelve gates to the city, and there are twelve foundations. The wall of the city is 144 cubits high, and this most obviously denotes that the city is impregnable. Naught that defileth can enter therein. It will never be laid in ruins. No enemy can prevail against it. The height of the city itself dwarfs its walls. Length, breadth and height are equal - 12,000 furlongs (1500 miles). Clever men have calculated there would be room enough here for everyone who has ever lived upon the earth, or will live on it if the world lasts another thousand years! This curious calculation must not be allowed however to obscure the true significance of the number twelve in all this dimensional wonder. Twelve is the number of the completed church, as there were twelve tribes in the Old Testament church, so now this city is the legal successor of the OT church, or rather the completed number of all the people of God from the Garden of Eden to the end of time - for the church is one, in Old Testament and in New. Its foundations, twelve in number, have in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (v.14).

The names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel are found inscribed on the twelve gates of this fabulous city. This indicates the true continuity of the Old Testament Church with that of the New. Paul describes the Church as "The Israel of God" when writing to the Galatian Church (the most gentile of all the New Testament Churches). All this figuration is designed to show us the Church as the one body of believers, in Old Testament and in New. John's vision sees only one Church at the time of the last judgment. All the people of God are there, from all

ages, and they are a unity for there never has been, nor can there ever be, more than one Church, one Bride, one Kingdom of Christ. Dispensationalism has made havoc of Bible unity.

The New Testament Church is the lawful successor to the Jewish Church (Israel) of the Old Testament, and the two churches and the two Israels are one.

The dark shadow of those who are lost falls across this chapter. That is a terrible verse (8) which records that the fearful and unbelieving, murderers and whoremongers, sorcerers and idolaters, and all liars, have their part in the fiery burning lake, which is “the second death”. This is the death of exclusion from the holy presence of God. Naught that defileth may enter there, but “the nations of those who are saved shall walk in the light of it”. The Lamb is the light thereof (v.23) and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. The kings of the earth in this prophetic sense are believers. Christ has made us ‘kings and priests unto God’ (Rev. 1:6).

THE TWO JERUSALEMS

Hengstenberg has a valuable note on John’s use of the name Jerusalem. “John in the Gospel never calls the literal Jerusalem IEROUSALEM which is the original, Old Testament, sacred form, but always IEROSOLUMA the heathenish, Hellenised form (see John 1:19; 2:13; 4:45; 5:1-2).” Bengel writes, “It is not without a reason that John in his gospel always writes IEROSOLUMA when referring to the ancient city; in the Apocalypse always, he writes IEROUSALEM of the heavenly city; the latter is the Hebrew term, original and more sacred. Paul makes the same distinction when refuting the Judaizers in Galatians 4:26.” The inspired indication is that the earthly Jerusalem has been rejected for its unbelief, and the sacred name has been given in consequence to the Church. Those who are wedded to the view that prophecy is working towards a Jewish solution of the purposes of God, might be seriously concerned to make an assessment of this remarkable usage in the name of the City of Jerusalem. That there are two Jerusalem’s, the earthly and the heavenly, the New Testament leaves us in no doubt.

IT IS DONE

“And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst, of the fountain of the water of life freely”. (v. 6)

Three times in the Holy Scripture He who is God uses this phrase of finality - "It is done," in relation to our salvation. It occurs here, and it occurs at the Cross - "It is finished". The terminal phrase of the crucifixion psalm, Psalm 22, is "He hath done this" - the last word is an italicised word, supplied by our translators, but the Hebrew carries the same weight as the cry from the cross, "It is finished". Here in Revelation the term IT IS DONE tells us that the work of redemption is complete. God has finished all He set out to do when He created all things by the word of His power. His vast wisdom has triumphed in the task to which he set Himself. The problem of evil which first arose in heaven, and then on earth, has been solved at Calvary and in the complete triumph of Revelation 21:6, we behold the ending of the drama. The perfect dimensions of the Holy City seen descending from God out of heaven tell us of the perfection of the divine plan. All that the Lord ever set out to do reaches the point of perfect fulfillment. As in the day of creation, the Lord views all He has made and behold, it is very good (Genesis 1:31).

We are not overlooking the fate of the finally impenitent, or that of the angels who sinned. The final verdict of the Judgment Seat will show the perfection of the ways of God, to the vindication of His holy love, and we should be wise not to enter into judgment with the Almighty concerning those areas which we are not yet permitted to penetrate. "It is enough that Jesus died - and that He died for me." So runs an old fashioned hymn, and there is wisdom in it.

CHRIST'S BRIDAL DAY

The Bible closes as it begins - with a marriage scene. The Edenic marriage of the first Man and Woman (so soon to end in suffering and shame and loss) leads inevitably to that new and eternal marriage of God and Man, of Christ and the Church, which was the goal towards which the Creator was striving from the very beginning. "Come" says the angel to the Seer, "Come hither, and I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9).

John is caught up in the Spirit and sees the Bride in the form of a great city, the new Jerusalem having the glory of God, her light being like to a most precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal.... (Rev. 21:9-11). The City is the City of God, about which Augustine had so much to say when he traced the course of this wonderful city from the beginning of history to the end. The bride is one yet many. She is the whole company of the redeemed of all ages. She is the fulfillment of the object of all creation and she is in fact the wonder of all creation. A city is a dwelling place, and this is what God sought from the beginning. "The tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people and

he will be their God....and there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain because the former things are passed away and all things are made new”.
(Verses 4-5)

THE MARVEL OF WOMAN

The greatest marvel of the original creation was not the splendour of the angelic world, nor yet the creation of that First Man in whom was wrapped up the divine purpose. The greatest marvel was the creation of WOMAN. In her was vested the future of the race; she was to be the symbol of the ultimate purpose of God, a BRIDE FOR THE KING'S SON. There are no female angels. Angels are the royal splendours which surround the eternal throne, the ministers of the divine power in the vastness of creation and in the events of history. But though greater in power and glory than man, they nevertheless hold their being only in subordination to the higher purpose of God in Man. “Verily he took not on him the nature of angels but he took on him the seed of Abraham that in all things he might be made like unto his brethren”. (Hebrews 2:14-17)

Angels were created for man and not man for the angels. Woman is unique in creation. The equal of man in intellect (though not in bodily strength and vigour) she is superior in natural grace and beauty. Her yielding love is the strongest chain which binds man to her. She is the nursemaid of the human race in the mystery of birth and in her tender committal and loving patience in the nurture of her children. Nothing like this wonder is found among the angels. We think of their solemn dedication to the affairs of the human race, and of the holy amazement which enthralled all the invisibility of heaven as the entire company of heaven gathered around the stable of Bethlehem on that awesome night when a Virgin mother brought forth the incarnate God, nestling in her bosom the very redemption of the world; holding in her tender arms the key to all mysteries.

If this is not true, then there is no truth, no heaven, no God, no meaning, no hope. Let the earth vanish and all creation disappear, and with it all the hopeless misery of existence.

But creation is a reality. It makes visible the consummate wisdom of the Creator, and it enshrines a wondrous purpose (now surely nearing completion) which will be made plain when the Bride will stand beside her Beloved before the marriage altar of heaven, and all things will become new.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH AND THE FIRST BRIDE

Every step of creation is to be considered and wondered at, in the ever unfolding drama of the life of God. The creation of man was not without a very clear and mystic foreshadowing of that spiritual drama. The manner of the creation of the first Bride has wondrous significance in the prophetic foreshadowing of the spiritual marriage of Christ and the Church. The first man, Adam, sank into a deep and deathlike sleep. The Hebrew word is unique and has no equivalent in our diffuse modern language. Adam's sleep was no ordinary slumber. It is described in the Hebrew tongue as TARDEMAH (transliterated). It is a sleep akin to death. All physical powers are arrested as in death. The shadows of coming great events take form, as in the later case of Abraham when the like TARDEMAH and the horror of great darkness lay upon him. His soul passed through all the terrors of that long history which lay ahead, a history whose crowning point would be the coming of the promised Seed to suffer and to die upon the Cross (Genesis 15:12).

That same horror of great darkness through which Abraham passed was surely a foreshadowing of that "sleeping for sorrow" which fell upon the three apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane while their Lord and their God passed through the agony of prayer which preceded the crucifixion. The three hours of darkness and of silence during the crucifixion just as surely indicated the mystery of that terrible event when God suffered for Man on the accursed tree.

In the case of Adam, the Tardemah brought forth the bride, Eve; so the sufferings of Christ brought forth the redemption of the heavenly bride. The rich yet awful dowry of our salvation, was His own lifeblood.

The story of Creation and its inner mystery of the coming forth of the Bride for the Son, lifts the purpose of Creation into regions transcendental, far beyond human science which is limited to measurement and the conflict of natural forces. The object of creation was divine. It was the means by which the Eternal God must reveal and prove Himself, and bind creation to Himself in a wonder of LOVE fittingly presented to us as an eternal marriage state.

The last two chapters of the Bible make this clear and plain. The Creator cannot fail in His task, for "Love never faileth" (1 Cor. 13:8), and He is love. Whatever mystery there may be remaining, will be dissolved in that day when the marriage is complete.

Adam's exclamation "THIS is now BONE of my BONE and FLESH of my FLESH" when he awakened from that deep sleep and found beside him the lovely creature who came from his own wounded side, is likewise expressed (as was his prophetic sleep) by a unique Hebrew word – PA`AM, translated in our common version by the word "NOW". It means that, but far more than that. It expresses surprise and delight as though Adam had said, "This time" an expression of discovery: "At last. This is what I was seeking. Here is something like unto myself - bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh."

Calvin comes nearer to the mark than most, when he says, "In using the expression PA`AM, Adam indicates that something had been wanting to him; as if he had said, Now at length I have obtained a suitable companion, who is part of the substance of my flesh, and in whom I behold as it were another self. And he gives to his wife a generic name (Ishah) taken from (Ish), that by this testimony he might transmit a perpetual memorial of the wisdom of God."

This is woman, the eloquent type of the Church, the Bride of Christ, the weaker vessel who comes up from the wilderness of this world 'leaning upon her Beloved' (Song of Solomon 8:5). Later she received from ADAM her personal name, EVE, derived from the Hebrew for "Life" or "Living" (Genesis 3:20).

But from how much sin and darkness, shame and defilement, must Christ deliver His Bride ere He can present her at the last before the Father's throne, without spot or blemish? There is no more terrible sight on earth than that of a woman who has betrayed her own virtue and sold herself for sin. The Bible is full of her type, yet it is from the depths of human sin and degradation that Christ must win His bride.

The Samaritan woman of John 4 may be considered as a type of us all, who (in so many instances) have unexpectedly encountered the Bridegroom and found glorious deliverance. "Meeting strangely at some sudden goal," the soul finds itself in the presence of the King, then -

Life's long night is ended, and the way
Lies open, onward, to eternal day.

So it was with that poor Samaritan, in the mystery of the divine compassion, which found her who had been divinely loved and wrought for since the foundation of the world. The calling of the soul to Christ is the call of love, and the response of love is consecration -- consecration to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Part of the wonder of conversion is that yielding of the soul to the Beloved, under the

profound conviction that henceforth we are ‘not our own, but bought with a price.’ No conversion is true unless it has in it the element of that yielding and self-surrender to Christ, so magnificently expressed by Paul to the gentile Galatians. “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

For there is no true conversion without love, and no true marriage without that yielding of one to the other, which makes both one. Perhaps this element in conversion is little heard of these days when a formal theology without the Spirit is turning the fruitful ground into barrenness. “The Redeemer’s tears wept over lost souls” is an aspect of the gospel which many find hardly consistent with their “scheme”.

“THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH”

Nigh on two thousand years have passed since the resurrection and ascension of Christ. When will that cry be heard, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him?” Who can tell? Perhaps when these lines are being written - or read. Perhaps not yet in our own generation. But it is worthy of note that history divides itself fairly evenly into significant periods of time.

From Adam to the call of Abraham was a remarkable approximation of 2,000 years. Likewise from the Call of Abraham to Christ was approximately 2,000 years. Now from Christ to our own day is nearing 2,000 years. There may not be any special significance in this, and we must not build upon it for we are not given to know the day or hour of His return. Nevertheless 6,000 years as the duration of man’s probation was long ago looked upon as indicated by the six days of creation - then God rested from His work. It is certain that the 6,000 years of man have wellnigh run their course - and a great apostasy is upon us. “When the Son of Man cometh, will He find faith in the earth?” (Luke 18:8). “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). At least, we are not excused from that warning, “Be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh” (Matt. 24:44).

That will be a great day of gladness for the inhabitants of heaven and for those who have been redeemed from the earth. David the King saw that day from far, and wrote of it in that most exquisite of psalms, the 45th. There he drew, in inspired words, the picture he saw of the King, the bridegroom, and at His right hand – “the Queen, in gold of Ophir”. She is brought unto the King in “raiment of needlework”

- a sign of her virginity; she is reserved for Him and for Him alone to whom she has come from the ends of the earth. Gold of Ophir is from the Indies; she comes to her wedding bearing with her the true riches of creation. All that was ever worth while on earth goes into her wedding array. The sighs and the tears of believers are preserved and will be as jewels which shine for ever in the mansions of heaven. With what infinite patience and devotion have those robes of exquisite needlework been woven on the loom of a yielded life on earth? It will all be to the glory of the Redeemer who will be acclaimed as worthy of it all. In sorrow and pain some of the finest tapestries have been wrought and the Palace of the King will be adorned with these precious tokens of love and devotion to Him whose love has won for Him a Bride and whose sacrifice for her has been complete. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" will be her constant theme.

Devotion to Christ, love for Him, is of the very element of heaven and in the Song of Solomon (largely written on the basis of the 45th Psalm) there is a remarkable verse which has an unmistakable reference to that supreme devotion of Mary at Bethany when she poured out her spikenard upon her Lord. In the Song, chapter 1 and verse 12 we read, "While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof". Mary anointed the Saviour on the first day of the crucifixion week, "and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment". The connection with the Song of Solomon is beyond dispute. Mary acted for the Church - without knowing it! The perfume of her great act fills another house greater by far than the dwelling at Bethany.

Heaven is filled with the praise of the Lamb that was slain. God will have no glory which He does not earn, and no worship which He has not proved Himself worthy to receive. Heaven will be one long and endless discovery of the perfection of His love, and as the earthly bride never tires of resting in the love of her beloved, so in heaven, the theme of the love of God in Christ for the Church will never weary. To love and to be loved is the highest of all destinies and we shall rest evermore in the fulness of that love which is divine and which begets love in those who yield themselves to it. Our unworthiness to be loved only adds to the wonder of the sacrificial love of our glorious King.

THE GREATNESS OF EVE

The vision of the Church as the Bride of Christ pervades the whole of Scripture, from Eden onward, with ever increasing clearness. Eve, the mother of the human race, is the first type of this great mystery. Let us not underestimate this remarkable woman from whom the whole human race has sprung. With nothing

but her instinct to guide her, she brought forth the first child. No woman was there to assist her, no physician to give her the benefit of his skill and experience. In sorrow she brought forth her children, and under divine inspiration named them prophetically. Cain was “Acquired” from the Lord but proved a source of copious tears. Abel she named as ‘Vanity’ for she had by this time understood that all is vanity and vexation of spirit in a fallen world. The murder of Abel by Cain made her the mother of the first martyr - for Abel was the first High Priest of the human race, the leader of the Church’s worship, and by this the jealousy of the elder brother was aroused. After the murder another son was born, to whom Eve gave the name of Seth (Appointed). Behold her faith as well as her anguish. She saw in Seth the progenitor of the promised Messiah who would fulfill the dearest expectation of her heart. We must never write Eve small. She was one of the great women of all time.

SARAH

Sarah, wife of Abraham, 2,000 years later was the mother of a new generation through whom the worship of God would be raised to the highest level since Eden. Abraham’s descendants became the children of the Promise - the promise made to the human race from the beginning. Now the Church grew mightily and was rich in prophetic men and godly women. From Abraham onward, no generation was without a prophet until Malachi (who was really Ezra, Malachi being only a title, meaning “My Messenger”). Ezra wrote the closing book of the Old Testament with its promise that the next significant event would be John the Baptist, under the figure of Elijah the prophet- “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5).

Sarah reappears in the parable of “the leaven in the meal”: (Matthew 13:33) “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened”. That Christ was referring to Genesis 18:6, there can be no manner of doubt. Himself in Person had already appeared with those other two at Abraham’s tent and presided over that prelude to the parable - a Parable which gives a special eminence to the wife of Abraham, and foretells the spread of the Gospel to earth’s utmost bounds.

David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, sang of the heavenly Bridegroom and His beautiful gentile bride and wrote under inspiration that great Psalm 45, which lay at the base of the Song of Songs which David’s royal son Solomon was to write under a supreme impulse of the Spirit of God. In it Solomon described the trials and the beauty of the Bride, and the wonder of her Kingly Lover and so prepared

the way for the mystic marriage of Christ and His Church - that marriage which was the great end of all Creation and the fulfillment of the life of God.

SONG OF SOLOMON

This all-important Song of Solomon consists of two divisions, equally dividing eight poetic stanzas (which appear as the eight chapters of the Song). The first four stanzas portray the Church in her Old Testament state. The last four present her in her New Testament condition when the identity of the heavenly Lover is fully developed, and her own perfected love chimes with His.

“I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine,” she sings, and He, the glorious Prince of Heaven responds, “Thou art beautiful, my love, as Tirzah. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome Me.”

True love never reaches its goal save by the road of travail and tears, of suffering and patient waiting. He, the heavenly Lover pays her dowry in the drops of His own blood. She after the long night of waiting (symbolising the Old Testament condition of the Church) endures the cruel blows of the false watchmen of Israel in the darkened streets of the city which had no room for Him (see chapter five). That dark night of cruelty and shame proved the reality of her love for Him. Still she yearns and awaits the great moment of love’s realisation. She has waited long. So has He. Time is now running out. How long - how soon - will it be till that glorious dawn when the Twain will be finally united in the completeness of that mystic marriage state - never to part again? In the meantime she cries, long and loud, “Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountain of spices” - Song 8:14.*

Salvation is more than the forgiveness of sin. It is that, but more than that. Salvation is only complete in the final union in marriage of Christ and His bride, when she, the completed Church, is conducted by angelic courtiers through the Palace of the King to where He waits at the altar of heaven. This was always the object of creation - an object which could be realised in no other way but by tears and blood, suffering and patient endurance. This is the great secret of the life of God. He would not reign alone. Eternal Love (which He is) must reach out to widen the area of blessedness to the utmost limit. God will have no final realisation of the meaning and purpose of His own great life, for which He does not pay the supreme price. This is the wonder of all Creation. God will not be satisfied with a mere legal reckoning with a revolted creation. He Himself must pay the price of love to the utmost limit, by descending to a condition in which He becomes the

outcast of His own world. Only by this awful descent can it be known what divine love is. The Cross is the token of that giving of Himself in complete surrender to all that evil can do, hiding not His face from shame and spitting - the sin offering for His own creation.

By this means the Lord solves the problem of creation. To create a world that could not fall, He must needs create Himself (which is an absurdity). What He could do was to enter into that fallen creation and raise it from its ruin by bearing its woe, its burden and its shame, so that by death He might destroy death, and by weakness confound the mighty. Thus He raises fallen creation to the point where God and Man become one. "This is He who came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and blood..." (1 John 5:6). The Spirit of God is the water; the blood is the atonement. Both flow from the wounds of Christ. By death comes life. He who believes in Christ and comes to Him and drinks; He who believes in Christ, as the Scripture hath said, out of him flow rivers of living water (John 7:37-39). New life flows from Christ. God and Man are reunited in Him. Here is a new creation which cannot fail or fall.

This new creation is the paradise of God where God and Man become one again. Creation becomes a song of victory and joy, another Eden, a garden of delight, a paradise of eternal love where the river of Life flows down and the celestial fruits of the Tree of Life are free for all.

Here is the heavenly marriage. Here is the Bridegroom and the Bride. Here is our peace, our beauty, our home, our other self, our sweetness, our love. Here is the Bride coming up from the wilderness leaning on her Beloved - He to her and she to Him in a oneness of love, a joy, a rest, a peace, which can know no ending.

Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

(Song of Solomon 8:14)

* Our next task, having completed our study of Revelation, will be an interpretation of the Song of Solomon for which many friends have been patiently waiting.

[Our dear brother was taken into the eternal reality of Almighty God whom he loved and served before he was able to complete his interpretation of Song. The interpretation of Song extant on chapter one are serial numbers 048-1 thru 048-8]