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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 2

REVELATION 1:13-17

CHRIST-HERO of the Church's Warfare

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PART TWO

REVELATION 1:13-17

CHRIST - HERO OF THE CHURCH'S WARFARE

The vision of Christ in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation is the final proof that the Book was written for the Church; it is her suffering and preservation throughout history to her final glorious triumph which is the theme of the entire Book. The vision of Christ seen by John at Patmos represents the Lord as the head of the Church, and it is in this character that He engages throughout the Book to sustain and preserve His people in their trials. He appears in the midst of the Seven Golden Candlesticks which in verse 20 are interpreted to mean the Seven Churches to which the Book is directed.

Those who maintain that the Church disappears from the record after chapter 3, and that the remainder of Revelation concerns the earthly nation of Israel, have an insoluble problem on their hands. They must find the Church's consolation exclusively in the first three chapters, and particularly in the messages to the Churches in chapters 2 and 3. But these messages are not in any sense messages of consolation but largely of warning, admonition, and a call to repentance. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only Churches spared from this judgment.

In short, the appearance of Christ in chapter 1 fails of its purpose under any theory which deprives the Church of any part in this Book after the third chapter.

The Futurist theory does violence to the unity of the Book, for as we have seen, the Book as such (not the mere introduction to it) was directed to the Church under the figure of the Seven Churches of Asia - which we intend to prove when we come to chapters 2 and 3 means the Church throughout all the ages of her testimony. The ascription of verse 4:

“JOHN, to the seven churches which are in Asia” is not withdrawn in any part of the Book, as would be required if the Futurist theory was valid.

This exclusive prerogative of the Church in her access to the entire Book is further endorsed by the contents of verses 4-8 which declare the continuous outpouring of

grace and peace from the Triune Godhead, through the atoning blood of Christ, to those who have been made “kings and priests unto God”. No-one has yet been found among the opponents of the spiritual interpretation of Revelation, bold enough to suggest that these words apply to any other institution than the Church, or that ‘after the Church is removed’ (as they speak) there will be yet another institution of kings and Priests to whom this Book may apply.

The bringing in at this point of a description of the Holy Trinity is thoroughly Johannine in its majestic conception.

GOD THE FATHER

(“from him which is and which was and which is to come”);

GOD THE HOLY GHOST

(“and from the seven Spirits” i.e., the sevenfold Spirit “which are before the throne”);

GOD THE SON

(“and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth”).

Christ in His character as ruler over all the kings and powers of this world is a suitable introduction to a Book which has to do with the age-long conflict of the Church with the opposing power of this world. Likewise, her royal and priestly character in relation to the Eternal Father (v. 6) gives the Church on earth a dignity of which no earthly power can rob her and which assures her that whatever suffering and shame she may endure at the hands of a wicked world, she is in the sight of God the most distinguished object upon earth. Her members are the kings of creation and the priests to whom God commits all worship and service of the mystic Sanctuary.

Now through the eyes of John, the Church beholds her Lord (v.13) walking in the midst of her Seven Golden Candlesticks, and holding in His right hand (the hand of omnipotence) the Seven Stars which represent the rule and authority which He has vested in the Seven Angels of the Churches -that is, the Messengers or Servants He has appointed for the rule and guidance of His Church on earth.

SEVERING THE HEAD FROM THE BODY

We now come more particularly to consider the symbolism of John's vision of Christ which is the prelude to the entire Book. The vision sets the style of interpretation for the whole of Revelation, for it is symbolic, being made up of figures designed to represent the various offices and prerogatives of Christ as the Head of the Church, the Defender of His people, and the One who restrains and overcomes the powers of evil which work for the overthrow of the Church and Kingdom of Christ.

The Book is one and indivisible. It does not and cannot have two historical subjects, first the Church and then the Jews. This artificial division of the Book as to its subject has resulted in the present disarray amongst evangelical expositors. The entire object of the vision of Christ is to reassure the Church as she was theme about to be launched on the agelong story of her trial and proving in the furnace of persecution, beginning with the exile of John on the isle of Patmos. To sever these opening chapters from the remainder of the Book and allocate them to the Church, and award the remaining chapters to the Jewish people at the end of the age to sever the head from the body, and leave the Church without the very consolation which the Book was written to supply.

The Church is assured by this great monarchical vision of Christ in the midst of His Church, holding in His right hand those symbolic stars which relate to the guidance of the Church through the dark night of her earthly trials, that it is for her, the Church, and none other, that Christ appears to John on that glorious and most notable day of the Lord on the isle of Patmos.

The appearance of Christ is symbolic, not actual. That is, Christ was there in Person, but it was not the Person of Christ which John saw, but a materialisation in symbol of what Christ is in His offices and sovereignty in relation to the Church. Hence the language of John, "I saw one LIKE UNTO the Son of man ..." As the Church to the candlesticks, and as the stars to her earthly guides and rulers, so is Christ to this symbolic representation of Himself.

THE BROKEN BRIDGE

As Daniel wrote the apocalypse of the Old Testament for the comfort and guidance of the Church of the Old Testament during the long centuries when no prophet should arise in Israel and no king reign in Jerusalem, so John, the Daniel of the New Testament, wrote the apocalypse for the guidance of the Church in the long

ages (now nearly 2,000 years in duration) during which there should be no further word from God - a bridge over which the people of God would -safely and surely pass over the chasm of time. Futurism breaks down that bridge and leaves the Church without a guiding light through the incredible suffering and darkness through which she must pass - and has passed - since the Apocalypse was written.

The symbolic vision of Christ seen by John is after the pattern described by Daniel who saw Christ in a similar appearance thus:

“A certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude”.
(Daniel 10:5-6)

It is certain that linen and gold have no place in the eternal world; only what these materials and substances represent is to be found there.

Nevertheless, the voice, the words, the presence of the Lord were so powerful a reality that John (like Daniel) falls down as one dead, the mortal frame being unable to endure the manifest presence of the Eternal One.

Prophetically this is the starting point of the great drama of the Apocalypse. After such an unendurable yet rapturous vision who can any longer fear the power of a Roman Caesar who within -another twelvemonth was fated to perish from the earth? Or Satan himself for that matter, whose existence is derived, and his power limited and only tolerated by the glorious One standing before John? Let history produce its long succession of tyrants and empires, governments and systems, rising up to destroy the Church of Christ. Let 2,000 years roll by during which the full power and malice of Satan, whether in cruel persecution or in masquerade and subtle subversion, should be turned against the Church: the end is just the same - the power of Christ must outlive and overwhelm the foe.

And let the Church return to Patmos whenever she is assailed by the powers of evil, and let her receive again from John, her brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, the words of this vision; let her see through his eyes and hear through his ears, faith's answer to all the power which may come against her, and she must always overcome.

Let Satan assail the Church with error and counterfeit 'revelation' and delusive imitations of the Bride of Christ. Let him raise up antichrist and his false church. Let a harlot church arise and let all the world acclaim her as the true Church of Christ. Let all the venom and cruelty of the great Adversary be let loose upon the weak and helpless bride as she goes out into the night to seek her Beloved - what can HE boast who can only destroy the body and after that have no more that he can do? Here is One who has conquered death and the grave and whose eyes search through all eternity to discover if there is any foe remaining or to come who can challenge His power, and who declares verily that He finds none and know not of any:

“Fear ye not neither be afraid. Have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God. I know not any.” (Isaiah 44:8)

We have maintained that the cause of most of the confusion existing in attempts to explain the Book of Revelation is that so many writers and preachers have not first established a valid principle of interpretation. We have endeavoured to prove that such a principle is found precisely where we should expect to find it - in the first chapter. The Book is written for all time, and for all readers, commencing from the very time of its first promulgation. We find in chapter 1 that the first confrontation of the Church with the full power and envy of this world, represented in the first universal persecution of the people of God by the emperor Domitian, had then begun. The time was already 'at hand', that is, the time was already upon the people of God. Christ appears to the last apostle of the Church and shows Himself symbolically as the master of creation, the arbiter of all time, the ruler of the ages, the Logos, the Word of God, the power and wisdom of God, the Second Person of the Godhead to whom was committed the task of subduing all rule, authority and power, the conqueror of hell and death and the grave, the peerless One who finds not in all creation any to compete with Him, no power which can assail Him, no kingdom which is not already vassal to His throne.

THE CHURCH IS FINAL

The New Testament Church is the full and final manifestation of the Kingdom of God in time, the means by which God's eternal purposes are realised, and through which is displayed that 'manifold wisdom' (the unveiling of His own nature and Name) which is His eternal purpose:

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known BY THE CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Ephesians 3:10-11.

There can be nothing after the Church. She is the completion of the revelation of God. In the Book of Revelation she is not supplanted by any other institution or order, Jewish or otherwise. God has said all He ever will say, in time or in eternity, in that glorious Church in which is invested the entire stock of His wisdom, love, grace and power. She IS His eternal purpose, and she occupies the scene as long as time shall last until her Beloved returns in the clouds of heaven to take her for ever into His eternal glory.

THE VISION: (1) The GARMENT and the GIRDLE

Let us see therefore who and what He is who so introduces Himself to John for the comfort and strengthening and assurance of His Church.

Verse 13: He is “clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about the paps with a golden girdle”.

This garment is the sign of His royal dignity as King of Creation, King of the Ages and Lord of all. It is the same garment as that in which He appears to Isaiah (chapter 6): “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the temple”. The ‘train’ of Christ is His royal garment and is symbolic of the divine glory which belongs to Him alone as ruler of His Church. That His glory fills the temple signifies that all worship, honour, power and blessing belong to Him. As the brightness of His Father’s glory and the express image of His Person (Hebrews 1:3) it is given to Him to receive in Himself all worship and praise due to the Godhead, and it is through Him and in Him therefore that we worship the Father. John is careful in his gospel to assure us that Isaiah’s vision was of Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. (John 12.41)

He who in Isaiah’s vision filled the temple with His train, here in Revelation fills the Church, the true temple of God, which is the temple of His body. He who in Isaiah is acclaimed by the six-winged seraphim as the Lord of Hosts who fills the whole earth with His glory, is the same who now appears to John and proclaims, “I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore”.

Christ, the defender and Lord of the Church, is therefore none other than Jehovah the Lord of Hosts. This is the One who likewise appeared to Daniel as Michael the archangel (for the scripture knows of only one archangel - the Son of God); He who rules over the Church as Jesus the Saviour is the same who rules over angels under His angelic name of Michael, which means THE LIKENESS or THE IMAGE of God. See Hebrews 1:3. Michael is the LOGOS, the eternal Word, the wisdom and power of God.

In the next word, “Girt about the paps with a golden girdle” we see again the correspondence of the vision at Patmos with that which Daniel saw by the banks of the great river Hiddekel. There the Logos was girt about the loins with a girdle of fine gold of Uphaz, here in Revelation plainly ‘a golden girdle’. We agree with Samuel Lee, that fine authority, seldom quoted, on the Hebrew, who takes Uphaz not as a place name, nor yet a modification of Ophir famous for its gold, but a simple epithet meaning refined or pure. The altered position of the girdle (round the breast in Revelation, round the loins in Daniel), signifies the difference between activity and ‘dignified repose’ (Bengel). “Loins girded” is synonymous with service to be rendered. The flowing garment down to the foot, with the girdle high upon the breast shows that His work is ended. As John sees the Saviour in this vision it is as One whose mission is accomplished, redemption’s price has been paid, suffering and humiliation are ended, the Servant’s task has been perfectly and gloriously finished to the satisfaction of the Father. Christ has pronounced upon His own works the words, “It is finished”.

Henceforth He reigns at the Father’s right hand henceforth expecting till His foes are made His footstool in accordance with David’s great prophecy in Psalm 110:

“The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool”.

The reign of Christ is not a cessation of activity for He is engaged at all times in an intense unwearied acting on behalf of His people, but His own conflict is ended; He has completed the will of the Father who sent Him into the world. There are no more foes for Him to overcome. (See Rev. 3.21)

THE VISION: (2) HIS HEAD

v.14: “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.”

In Daniel 7 the Almighty appears as “the ancient of days” whose garment is white as snow and His hair as pure wool (i.e., pure shining whiteness). What is in view is the holiness, majesty, and glory of GOD.

Majesty and eternity rest upon CHRIST. The whiteness is that of dazzling light as in the Transfiguration (Matt. 17.2), when it is recorded that “His face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light”. Mark says His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them. Luke says the fashion of His countenance was altered and His raiment was white and glistening. Luke also records that the three disciples fell into a deep sleep, unable to bear the glory of the light. This is in accordance with Daniel’s experience: “There remained no strength in me ... then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground”. John records (Rev. 1.17) “When I saw Him I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying unto me, Fear not ...” So also with Daniel, “Behold an hand touched me which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands ... Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel ...” (Dan. 10:9-12)

In his first epistle John has this in mind no doubt when he --writes, “God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth”. (1 John 1:5-6) God is pure Spirit. He clothes Himself with light as with a garment. (Psalm 104:2)

Light is the first principle of the natural creation. “God said, Let there be light. And there was light.” Light is that mysterious and indefinable force or energy without which there is no life, order or form. It is a parable of the divine glory and essence which permeates all things and is fitly presented as the garment in which the ineffable Lord envelopes Himself, in a sense entirely spiritual. That which is not of God is dark and forbidding, a symbol of death and the grave, fittingly presented in Scripture as symbolic of the eternal fate of the impenitent. Hell is a sphere from which all light is excluded and darkness reigns, yet perhaps we should be more correct if we regard that darkness of the soul as being something inherent to itself. The soul is not so much in darkness as darkness is in the soul, that is, it becomes the eternal state of the soul. Paul says of believers, “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord”. (Eph. 5:8)

Light is synonymous with truth, purity, holiness, and if we were asked to define what we mean by God, we might well answer, “He is light, life, love”.

So John saw in this vision of Christ, the dazzling splendour of the Son. The crown He wears is not of earthly treasure or substance, but His own eternity, purity, truth, love. He makes the Godhead visible in His glorified Manhood for He will for ever wear that nature which He took from man in the womb of the Virgin.

In the dazzling whiteness of His head it is not old age that we see, but eternal, unchangeable youth. Of all the sons of men, this One outshines them all, and lightens all creation by His central presence. All other light is darkness when He is there, and we shall have eyes only for His glory in that day when, fashioned anew in the likeness of His glorious body, we shall behold without fear, that light which otherwise would smite us to the ground as it did Daniel, and John, and as it did to the three disciples on the mount of transfiguration.

THE VISION: (3) HIS EYES

v.14 (cont): “His eyes were as a flame of fire”.
See Daniel 10:6: “His eyes as lamps of fire”.

Despite Hengstenberg’s caution to the contrary, we prefer to regard this description as referring to the omnipotence and the omniscience of Christ. It is true, as Hengstenberg writes, that fire in Scripture is a symbol of the holy wrath and punitive righteousness of God, but we have here the fire associated with vision, and this surely allows for a more extensive meaning. Eyes of fire search and try the hidden things of the heart and mind of man, nor can anything in heaven or earth withstand the fiery glance of omniscience which sees all and knows all for the purpose of judging all.

Omniscience - knowing and perceiving all, understanding things, vision with which there is no past or future but all things comprehensively present with the One who is eternal - this is something which belongs to God alone and can never be imparted to the creature. The omniscience of Christ is declared in His “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending”. (Rev. 1:11, 17; Chap. 22:13). All that is true of the Father as to His attributes is true of the Son and of the Spirit. “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God”. (1 Cor. 2:10) He who scrutinises and understands and comprehends the divine wisdom must be that wisdom, that mind, that Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person in the glorious Trinity, co-equal, co-eternal, and He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son (Romans 8:9). In the one Spirit therefore the Father and the Son contemplate each the other. The Father sees Himself in the Son and loves and comprehends what He sees. The Son possesses and in fact IS, the wisdom and

power of God, and in the One Spirit there is an eternal exchange of love, and a perfect subordination of the Son to the Father's will which is always and ever must be His own will also.

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”, says Solomon. (Prov. 15:2) Elihu (the Elijah of the Book of Job) declares, “He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous, but with kings are they on the throne; yea he doth establish them for ever and they are exalted”. (Job 36:7) “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men”, says David in Psalm 11:4-5, and goes on to say that though the Lord looks upon the righteous only to try them, upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a burning tempest (same psalm, see margin).

In the Song of Songs Solomon's inspiration puts into the mouth of the bride (the Church) this description of her Beloved (Christ) – “His eyes are the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set”. (Margin, sitting in fulness) (Song 5:12)

According to the object upon which they are set, the eyes of the Lord therefore behold in love or in punitive justice. In this sense Hengstenberg is right to regard the verse in Rev. 1:14 as showing Christ's fiery judgment against the enemies of the Church; yet that judgment rests upon His all-knowing, His omnipotence, and includes His tender regard for His Church in the energy of His wrath against her traducers and persecutors.

That Christ's eyes should appear to John in his vision as flames of fire develops the OT visions of the Lord so as to emphasise His care for His people. Christ sees all, in His all-knowingness. Nothing escapes His vision in His watchful care over His Church. He sees from the beginning all that the enemy will seek to do, and writes in advance the history of the conflicts of His people against all the power of this world. For the Book of Revelation is just that: the inner history of the Church in her warfare against the powers of evil. That it is written in advance of the conflict shows that all history is in the hands of Christ. The outcome is decreed just as much as the conflict itself. Through it, the Church will be refined. She will take up the cross daily to follow her Lord. She will be often cast down but never destroyed. The record of her warfare was engraven upon the everlasting marble of heaven before the world was, and as sure as the conflict must take place, so surely must the outcome be victorious. Hence Paul:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

2 Cor. 4:7-11

The enemy raises himself up in vain. He cannot escape the wrath of the Lamb, from whose flaming eyes nothing is hid. All history will prove His righteousness, and will silence all who would traduce. Kings or kingdoms, rulers or empires, Rome, Babylon, the mysterious kingdom of antichrist - whatever arises to destroy or oppose the Church must be destroyed at last before the punitive justice of Christ.

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Thess. 2:4-8

Then shall that Wicked be revealed whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming.

2 Thess. 2:8

How then say some that there is a “great tribulation” to come, through which the Church will not pass? The Church has always been passing through tribulation as part of her appointed testimony to the glory of Christ?

But (say our friends) there is a special tribulation to come eclipsing all other tribulations. And, say they, it will last no longer than three and a half years. We may be pardoned for saying that some of our forefathers in the faith would have dismissed with a gesture so short-lived a tribulation, seeing some of them endured the awful oppression of the foe sometimes for a generation - like our covenanting forefathers in Scotland; or for SIX CENTURIES as did the witnesses for Christ in the Vaudois Alps and the Waldensian valleys before, during, and after the Reformation, till the strong arm of Cromwell and his commanding voice compelled the Roman antichrist to call off his hell-hounds. Have our friends never heard of the ten persecutions of the Church by successive Caesars - of the catacombs - of the arena and the lions - of the torture chambers of the Inquisition in which countless thousands and tens of thousands suffered for Christ’s dear sake?

It is to be doubted whether some writers and preachers have ever made a serious study of Church history, or in particular of the Reformation period.

THE VISION: (4) TREADING DOWN HIS ENEMIES

v.15: ‘His feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace’.

Bengel writes, “This has respect to His great power with which He brings all under Him. Oh, how will He tread down all His enemies!”

Much comment has been expended on John’s word here translated “fine brass”. In the Greek the word is CHALKOLIBANOS which in fact is not Greek at all, but Greek-Hebrew, CHALCO being Greek for copper and LIBANOS (LIBANAH) being Hebrew for “white”. It is an enigmatical word, probably formed by John himself, for it is not found anywhere else, like his word SYCHAR for SYCHEM (John 4:5) there being no place so named as SYCHAR but John altered a letter to make the word mean “a lie”, to show the lying vanity of the Samaritan religion, and prepare us for the inner prophetic meaning of Christ’s action at the well of Samaria. As we have shown in our commentary on that chapter (in our series on

John's Gospel –Serial Number 010), the prophetic intention of the narrative was to show the lying vanity of all religion based on geographical location. Hence, “Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem ... but the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth”. (John 4:21-24). And away goes the vanity of supposing that God will some day turn back the clock of prophecy and centralise true worship once more at some new temple built at Jerusalem - a vanity which has confused the minds of good Christian men for several generations past, and deprived the Church of much wholesome instruction in the Word of God.

The prophetic play upon names appears also in the title of the traitor, Judas Iscariot. There is no such place as Iscariot, nor is the designation a surname of Judas. It is a title like the name Sychar. Both come from the same root, as is obvious from a glance at the spelling. Iscariot means “the man of lies” as Sychar means “the place of lies”.

John's word, CHALCOLIBANUS is an enigmatical term immediately explained by John in the next phrase, “as if they burned in a furnace”. It is composed by John on the pattern of Ezekiel 1:7 “Their feet sparkled like the colour of burnished brass”) and Daniel 10:6 (“His arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass”).

But why should John have made such play upon the word?

There seems no reason to doubt that Hengstenberg has correctly divined the intention: “In the formation of the word we are presented with a small image of the innermost nature of the Apocalypse”. In other words, John, as in the case of SYCHAR is giving us a key to interpretation. As his Gospel can only be understood prophetically, that is, spiritually, so the Book of Revelation. Words are but the framework of ideas, and in the prophetic books they become symbols of depths of meaning lying beneath the ordinary usages of language. Hence because the Jewish teachers did not understand that the Old Testament prophets wrote in parables, the coming of Christ was hidden from them, and the nature of His kingdom was totally mistaken. So they rejected Him and called for His crucifixion. In doing so they in fact fulfilled the Scriptures without the intention of doing so. Hence Paul proclaims in the synagogue of Antioch:

“They that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, **THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEM IN CONDEMNING HIM**”. Acts 13:27.

Isaiah had written long before,

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not;
and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their
eyes; lest they see with their ears, and understand with their heart, and
convert, and be healed. Isaiah 6:9-10

The Saviour quotes these very words from Isaiah when answering the question of the disciples, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah ...” and He proceeds to recite the very words of Isaiah as quoted above. (See Matt. 13:10-16)

It is a disquieting thought that so many good Christian men today follow the same method of prophetic interpretation as the rabbis of old - and come to the same conclusion that the Jews were after all right in their expectation that the Kingdom of God can only be a kingdom on earth, a visible empire in which the Jews will rule the world.

They have not come to terms with the enigmatical nature of prophecy which requires a spiritual mind for it to be understood.

What John sees in this enigmatical word is copper (or its alloy, brass), in a glow heat, a white heat - therefore, “as though glowing in a furnace.”

The thought is carried back to Isaiah’s vision of Christ as a majestic figure striding from Edom, His garments sprinkled with the blood of His foes, and declaring, “I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger and trample them in my fury; and their blood will be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come”. Isa. 63:1-4

The picture is one of complete and absolute triumph, achieved throughout history by our solitary champion, who in His onward march for the deliverance of His people tramples underfoot all Satanic opposition. This should be set against the over-emphasis today upon the agency of man in the promotion of the divine purposes in the gospel. Personality and method loom large in the modern evangelical world, and more is said about doing than worshipping. We shall do

better if we worship more. Belief in the divine prerogative and sovereignty does not discourage true service, but to ignore the supremacy of Christ in all things leads to the pitiful expedients so rife today when in the evangelical world it appears that man moves God and not that God moves man; that man determines whither and when the Spirit of God shall work.

“Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him?” -is the question God asks in Isaiah 40:13. Paul takes up this word in Romans 11:34-36 where he asks, “Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen”. Let that “Amen” silence all the preaching and the writing which for too long have placed man before God in the weak evangelical theology of today.

In short the triumph is Christ’s and not ours. Alone He bore the curse which lay heavy upon all creation. Alone He died and carried our condemnation with Him down to the tomb. Alone He has led and still leads His Church through the historic avenue of time. We are a passing few, here today and gone tomorrow; He alone carries on His work in the invisibility, treading down principalities and powers and dominations and oppositions, staining His garments with the blood of His foes as He marches on to the ultimate triumph when He shall have put down all rule, authority and power.

THE VISION: (5) HIS VOICE

v. 15: “His voice as the sound of many waters”.

See Daniel 10:6: "The voice of His words like the voice of a multitude”.

Ezekiel 43:2: “And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east and his voice was like a noise of many waters, and the earth shined with his glory”.

The Ezekiel quotation is of special value as it occurs in the chapter which describes the return of the glory of God to the mystical temple (the New Testament Church). There was no temple existing in Jerusalem at the time of Ezekiel’s temple vision. The earthly temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, prior to which Ezekiel had his first visions of the glory of God leaving the sanctuary at Jerusalem on account of the sin of the people. He sees the temple restored-but it is a prophetic

temple, the reality of which is the mystical temple of Christ, the Church - let all the world cry to the contrary, for God will never permit the restoring of animal sacrifices which Christ died to abolish. Nor will He centralise His kingdom in an earthly Jerusalem which Christ declared would never again be the centre of the true worship of the Father. (John 4:21-24)

Hence the return of the glory of the Lord seen by Ezekiel can only mean the establishment of the New Covenant with its kingly priests (Rev. 1:6), its mystic candlesticks, and its heavenly worshippers. The glory of the God of Israel comes from the east (that is, from the sun rising, a token of the new gospel day which was inaugurated with the death and rising again of the Saviour). Ezekiel hears His voice - as the sound of many waters. This is the sense in which the same words are used by John. Drowning all the discordant sounds of earth, asserting the divine prerogative, filling with the terror of His power the enemies of the Church, inaugurating that mystical reign of Christ described by David (Psalm 110, so oft quoted in the NT), "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool".

Here is a kingdom which cannot fail, because it is in its nature eternal, as He is eternal who proclaims it. This is the kingdom to outlast all other kingdoms and grind them to powder, and thank God the believer does not have to wait for the dawn of some earthly millennium in order to enter upon the enjoyment of it, for it is already here, its foundation the empty tomb, its King One who has conquered death and the grave and has therefore no more enemies to overcome. There are not any who can speak against that mighty voice which rolls through the heavens, proclaims salvation from sin, hell and death, and overwhelms like the noise of some stupendous water flood all the discordant sounds of earth: as though all the oceans of earth were suddenly released from their ancient bounds, and in one tumultuous, irresistible tide rolled over the kingdoms of this earth, the terrifying voice thereof shaking the firmament, so that nothing else can be heard for the majesty of it.

So is the voice of Him who bears, and who is, in Himself, the glory of the Lord -

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thundereth. The Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty". Psalm 29:3-4

THE VISION: (6) THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF THE CHURCH

v.16: “And he had in his right hand seven stars”.

This has already been explained for us in the last verse of the chapter: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches”. The Church is not a democracy; it is ruled from the throne above. All history of the Church has proven that there is no ideal form of Church government on earth. All forms of Church government have succeeded - and all have failed.

We do not propose to enter the lists, but only to observe that perhaps Martin Luther was right when he declared that the Church is wherever the Word of God is preached. God has been pleased to use robed Bishops and gowned nonconformists, men in working class attire with or without the advantages of a formal education, preachers who in unorthodox style but burning with holy passion for the glory of Christ and the souls of men have found in their independency the means of promoting the gospel, or others tramping through the bush, establishing in kraals and compounds among the uneducated and debased tribes of primitive men, living chains of primitive piety without formal order at all.

We make these observations without any intention of decrying what others see as a vital necessity, or a precise scriptural procedure. We have our own mind on the matter in any case. One thing only we would plead amongst Christian men everywhere - that the Word of Life should be preached with the maximum competency attainable; that men’s gifts of ministry should be recognised and conscientiously supported by all material means, and that the golden rule - in all things charity - should be paramount. It is possible to have what some may think to be the most scriptural procedure of all, yet ruin all for lack of love.

Let the Word of God therefore be fully preached. Let that be the first thing. Let men who preach prove themselves in the discipline of the study, spending their years in hard work at their books and at prayer and in the homes of the people. Let them labour to be examples to the flock to feed whom is their calling. Let them eschew ambition - except it be ambition to be useful just where they are. Let them not lightly flit from place to place in search of better living or higher distinction, but let humility and the interests of the sheep prevail with them.

Christ lays down no rules except the rule of love. He leaves one command only to Peter – “Feed my lambs”. It is thus He holds the Seven Stars in His hand? The Seven Churches of Asia are the universal Church of all ages. Many of them are in a

state of danger. Most of them need repentance. Some are worthy of commendation. Always, by whatever means, it is Christ who moves amongst the candlesticks. He is concerned about the decline of love, the rise of dangerous error, empty profession, pride and luxury. If we give ourselves to the encounter with these evils we shall do well. Perfection is in heaven alone, and in the imperfections of earth, Christ rules by faith, hope and love in pulpit and pew.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Paul the Apostle, Acts 20:28-32

THE VISION: (7) THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

v.16 – “and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”.

The fundamental prophecy from which this description is taken is Isaiah 11:4:

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and **HE SHALL, SMITE THE EARTH WITH THE ROD OF HIS MOUTH, AND WITH THE BREATH OF HIS LIPS SHALL HE SLAY THE WICKED**”.

Isaiah sees Christ coming in the full power and authority of His gospel kingdom. He is the rod coming forth from the stem of Jesse upon whom rests the sevenfold Spirit. His kingdom consists of ‘the poor and the meek’ whom it is His office to

defend and exalt. Christ has this prophecy in mind in the opening words of His ministry in the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the poor in spirit Blessed are the meek” His kingdom therefore is not one of national prerogative or of millennial glory imposed upon a crushed and sullen world, but one in which humility and meekness are the distinguishing features. His people are at the mercy of a cruel and persecuting world. Their defence rests upon the puissance of their redeeming Lord and Saviour who takes up their cause against their persecutors and smites the earth with the rod of His mouth, and slays with the breath of His lips.

Again, in Isaiah 49:2 Christ speaks and declares “He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword”. That the entire chapter deals with gospel times is fixed for us by Paul’s use of verse 8 in his second letter to Corinth where he quotes this verse and adds the words, “Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation”. (2 Cor. 6:2) Israel is rejected in this chapter of Isaiah (v.5) and the gentile world brought to salvation in her place (v.6).

The sharp sword therefore in Isaiah’s prophecy signifies the judgment which Christ executes upon the enemies of His kingdom, and the defence He affords to His true Church. It is in this sense that Christ appears to John in our passage in Revelation. It is a sword which is not wielded by the hand, but which proceeds from the mouth and therefore consists of the words and righteous decrees which He utters against the foe. One word from Christ can make or unmake the entire creation. One word is enough to scatter the armies of the wicked. John had already seen an example of the power of Christ’s word, when in Gethsemane the officers of the temple came with a band of armed men to arrest Him. “Whom seek ye?” He asked. “Jesus of Nazareth” was the response. “I AM HE” (“I AM” in the original) declared the Son of God. At this word they ‘went backward and fell to the ground’. (John 18:4-6) All the armed might of this world, urged on by the powers of hell, has no power over the Son of God except that which He permits to them. He imperiously cautions those who came to Gethsemane to arrest Him, “If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way” - an order which John recognised was a foreshadowing of Christ’s world-wide commission to defend and save His people in accordance with His prayer in the upper room that same night, “Those whom thou gavest me I have kept and none of them is lost save the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled”. (John 17:12)

John perceived that the action of Christ in the Garden in defence of His disciples was the token of His age-long defence of the Church for whose final deliverance He had prayed that night in that most remarkable of all prayers.

So the enemies of Christ and the Church are scattered and destroyed, restrained and humbled, by His all-commanding Word. With the breath of His lips He slays the wicked, whether they be visible or invisible.

Near the end of Revelation the sword is again seen in triumphant execution against the combined might of earth and hell arrayed against the Church. This is the so-called ARMAGEDDON about which so much noise is made nowadays (chap. 19:11-21). A caution is implied here against the literalistic and futuristic conceptions now so popular in relation to this subject. Even amongst persons well-disposed to the right view of prophecy there is much confusion concerning this 'battle'. The idea persists of an actual battle to be fought at Megiddo in northern Palestine on the site where Deborah and Barak destroyed the host of Sisera in the days of the Judges. We are even asked to believe that the army of the wicked (mainly Russians of course:!) will number 200,000,000, a figure taken from Revelation 9 and which relates not to the army which shall assail the Jews just prior to the return of Christ (as the futuristic theory runs), but to the armies of heaven, the entire company of the angels, assembled for the defence of the Lord's people and the entire destruction of the armies of the Evil One.

In Revelation the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:14) follow the Redeemer on white horses, arrayed in pure linen, and Christ smites the rebellious nations with the sword which proceeds out of His mouth (verses 15 and 21).

Our readers must make their choice between an impossible Armageddon fought in northern Palestine between the angelic host on the one side and a motley army on the other armed with ancient weaponry - shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, javelins and spears (see Ezekiel 39:9, quoted in aid, with much enthusiasm, by the sponsors of a material Armageddon) - they must choose between that, and the warfare in the spirit in which the whole Church is now and always engaged, and ever will be till He speaks the final word of victory who is the Word of God, the Eternal Logos, the Wisdom and the Power of God incarnate.

That victory will be won by one weapon only-the sword which proceeds out of the mouth of our great Champion and Hero, Christ Jesus. For Armageddon is not some afternoon battle fought somewhere in the Middle East between immense armies which could not be accommodated, supplied and fed on so limited a terrain as the tiny field of Esdraelon beside the ancient river of Kishon. It must be and is, the continual conflict now raging, and which always has raged, between the forces of light and darkness, in the invisible of the spirit. Are we not assured by Paul that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down

of satanic strongholds; that we war not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high (that is, heavenly places? (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12)

The entire Book of Revelation deals with this warfare of the Church against the powers of darkness, and the battle of chapter 19 is only the last phase of that battle which is always being waged and which we are fighting now. It is a battle of faith, and the last word is with Christ, from whose mouth proceeds that sharp sword with two edges with which He smites the nations. He rides into the unearthly conflict on His white horse of imperial and unchallengeable power, dipping His garment in the blood of His foes (and ours), and destroying them by His creative Word.

This is what John sees on our behalf on the isle of Patmos; this is the assurance the Church has of complete victory - and if ever a commentary were needed upon so magnificent a picture as this, we surely have it in the words of Martin Luther, so vigorously translated for us by Thomas Carlyle:

A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon;
Hell help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The ancient prince of hell
Hath risen with purpose fell;
Strong mail of craft and power
He weareth in this hour,
On earth is not his fellow.

With force of arms we nothing can,
Full soon were we down-ridden;
But for us fights the proper Man,
Whom God Himself hath bidden.
Ask ye, Who is this same?
Christ Jesus is His name,
The Lord Sabaoth's Son;
He, and no other one,
Shall conquer in the battle.

And were this world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;

Not they can overpower us.
And let the prince of ill
Look grim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit:
For why? His doom is writ;
A word shall quickly slay him.

God's word, for all their craft and force,
One moment will not linger,
But, spite of hell, shall have its course;
'Tis written by His finger.
And though they take our life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small;
These things shall vanish all,
The city of God remaineth.

THE VISION: (8) HIS FACE AS THE SUN

v. 16: "and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength".

These words close the vivid description which John gives of the appearance of Christ. It is the midday sun, the sun in its zenith, shining from a clear sky without interruption of cloud, to which John compares the face of Christ. It is the last word in proof of His deity, and is the complete and final assurance to the suffering Church that she is not deserted by her Lord; that He is fully capable of meeting every situation; that with unchallengeable omnipotence He is risen up to save her and to pour contempt and destruction upon her oppressors.

The apostle Paul speaks of "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" in contrast with the heavily veiled lesser light of the Law in the face of Moses. (2 Cor. 4:6)

Daniel sees His face "as the appearance of lightning" (Dan. 10:6) - a vivid impression this, of that righteous judgment which He hurls, in the hot thunderbolts of His divine indignation, against the foe. This is the face before which heaven and earth flee away, and there is no longer found any place for them (Rev. 20:11). Creation itself is dissolved when He sits for the judgment; day and night cease, every voice is stilled, hell has no word to say; earth is speechless; except in the universal confession that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father

(Philippians 2.11). As the sun is the centre of our world (so far as our natural observation is concerned) and all life is regulated by that glorious orb, and is impossible without it - so is Christ in the spiritual firmament. He is that sun of righteousness which riseth with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:1); He clothes with His splendour that mystic woman of Rev. 12 who so fitly represents His Church in Old and New Testaments.