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THE BOOK OF REVELATION 
NOT A MYSTERY

FOREWORD

It is our firm conviction that the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, usually spoken of as the Revelation of John, was well understood by those to whom it was sent; and that when studied in the light of the age in which it was written, it will prove to be no more mysterious than other ancient writings. It is a prophetic book; but this does not by any means imply that it is all, or nearly all, predictive. Like all other prophetic books, the Apocalypse is mainly concerned with events occurring in its own age. The object which we have set before us is not to point out the fulfillment of its predictions, but to get as clear a view of the events of the age of John, practically of the first Christian cen-
tury, as we can, and then see whether the figurative statements of the book do not correspond with those events. Passing over the events alluded to in the Letters to the Churches as being in no wise mysterious, we regard the body of the book, from the close of the third chapter to that of the eighteenth, as almost entirely devoted to things which took place in Palestine in the lifetime of Saint John.

This view, if correct, will result in the shattering of some idols. The mysterious and terrible Armageddon will prove to be nothing more than the rendezvous of the Roman legions before the siege of Jerusalem. The Harlot-city, Babylon the great, whose fall is so pathetically mourned in the eighteenth chapter, will appear to be, not Rome, either pagan or papal, but Jerusalem. Perhaps some other dogmas based upon a misunderstanding of this book may have to be given up. But, after all, we believe we
shall find it to be an *apocalypse*—an unveiling of Jesus Christ.

**The Author of the Book**

Almost certainly this was John the son of Zebedee, who was born, probably of priestly parentage, in Bethsaida of Galilee about the beginning of the first century. He is believed to have been a cousin of the Lord Jesus, and was one of the three who formed the inner circle of the apostles, and during the first year of our Lord’s ministry, even before he had been selected as one of the twelve apostles, John was much in our Lord’s company. He seems to have been one of those whom Jesus found at the Baptist’s camp-meeting, who followed Jesus back to Galilee, and who visited Jerusalem and the temple in his company many times.

John was one of the four disciples who sat with Jesus on the mount of Olives, and listened to his prophecy
of the destruction of Jerusalem, the sign of Christ’s coming, and the consummation of the age. Students of the New Testament have noted the extraordinary similarity of this prophecy to Saint John’s Revelation. Dean Alford says that the two, corresponding as they do in order and significance, must answer to one another in detail; and the author of Parousia declares that “the Apocalypse is nothing else than a transfigured form of the prophecy on the mount of Olives.” This similarity will appear more and more as we proceed.

John was with Jesus throughout the passion week, was present at his trial, saw him crucified, dead, and buried, and was one of the first witnesses of his resurrection.

He was also one of the seven disciples to whom Jesus manifested himself at the sea of Tiberias, and it was he of whom Jesus said: “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that
to thee?” and of whom, therefore, the saying went forth among the brethren that that disciple should not die (see John 21. 22ff.). Of course John was also one of those of whom Jesus said: “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16. 28). It would, therefore, not be strange if John not only cherished the hope common to all the disciples of the speedy return of Christ, but expected that his own life would be prolonged until his coming.

John was also a witness of the ascension of Christ to heaven, when “He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight,” and they were told by angels, “This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1. 11).
After the ascension of his Lord, John for many years made Jerusalem his headquarters. While there he witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, the persecution of the church by Saul, and the murder of his own brother James by the first Agrippa, who reigned in Jerusalem as a vassal of Rome (see Acts 7. 59; 9. 1; 12. 1).

It is likely that he continued to make Jerusalem his home until he saw Jerusalem being surrounded by the armies of the Romans, when, in obedience to the warning of Jesus, he, with the whole Christian church, left the city and fled unto the mountains, taking refuge in little Pella among the foothills of Gilead.

It is likely, too, that he remained in Palestine until after the destruction of the city, and was himself an eye-witness of her destruction, standing "afar off for the fear of her torment," and crying with the merchants, and shipmasters, and sailors, when they
saw the smoke of her burning, "What city is like unto this great city?" (Rev. 18. 15-18.)

After this, doubtless with many other refugees from Palestine, John found a home in Ephesus, where a strong Christian church had already been founded by Paul and his companions. Here he labored among the churches of Asia Minor for perhaps a quarter of a century, toward the end of which persecution of the Christians broke out under Domitian, and John was banished to the isle of Patmos, in the Ægean Sea, some twenty-four miles west of Ephesus, where he saw his great vision and wrote the book of Revelation.

Some of the visions, however, bear clear evidence in themselves of having been written much earlier, some as early as the latter part of the reign of Nero, who died in the summer of 68. These earlier visions, however, were skillfully dovetailed into the great
Patmos vision, and we have the whole, rude Greek and all, substantially as it left the apostle’s own hand. Our own opinion is that the parts of the book which are marked with the number seven, the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials, were seen and written in Patmos.

On the death of Domitian in 96, John seems to have returned to Ephesus, where he resided until his own death, perhaps two years later. His life, therefore, covered nearly the entire first century, seventy years of which were spent in Palestine and something over twenty-five in Asia Minor, where he died about A. D. 98.

The World in Which John Lived

It is essential to our plan to inquire, What was going on in the world which would be likely to attract the attention of the apostle John?

Few ancient periods have clearer
light thrown upon them than this which we are studying. Besides the New Testament writers, all of whom treat of this age, Josephus, Philo, some important rabbinic writers, Tacitus, and Suetonius were all contemporaries of this age; and much of the light given by them and by later writers who had access to other contemporary records, now lost, converges upon the Holy Land, from which John looked upon the world.

First of all, then, let us glance at

**The Roman Empire**

This filled a large place in the lives of the people of that age. Its connection with the Jewish people began about one hundred and sixty years before Christ, when Judas Maccabæus, being oppressed by the Syrians, made a league offensive and defensive with the Romans. For many years this alliance was advantageous to the Jews; but nearly a century later, B. C. 63,
Pompey most unjustly deprived the Jews of their independence. This was never fully restored, although Julius Cæsar gave back many of their peculiar privileges, suffering the Jews to remain under their own laws, and under the rule of their native princes. This condition continued down to the end of the long reign of Herod the Great. On his death the kingdom was divided among his three sons, Archelaus receiving the southern and most considerable portion, including Jerusalem, which in some respects was the capital of the whole land. His rule proved to be unpopular among his subjects and unsatisfactory to the Romans. On the complaint of his subjects, he was summoned before the emperor, deposed from his principality, and banished to Vienne in Gaul.

From that time, with the exception of a brief interval, A. D. 41–44, in which the kingdom of the Jews was galvanized into seeming life under
Agrippa the first, Judæa was administered by Roman officials, while her native rulers were reduced to private life, or banished from the Land. This revolution affected only one of the three principalities into which Palestine was then divided; and when we remember that in prophetic usage a star is the emblem of a prince, and the word "heaven" is often used in a political sense to denote the supreme government of a country, it is not at all unlikely that John was thinking of this very revolution when he represented Satan, bearing the insignia of the Roman empire, being cast out of heaven: "And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth" (Rev. 12. 4).

We are the more inclined to accept this view, since from the final loss of even the shadow of independence by the Jewish nation, the empire became unfriendly, and began that series of oppressions which led on to the
revolt of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and their nation. Of the procurators of that period Schürer says, "We might readily suppose that all of them, as if by secret arrangement, so conducted themselves as most certainly to arouse the people to revolt."

We next glance at

The Parthians

This loose confederation of nations inhabiting the vast region north and east of the Euphrates River, the successors of the ancient Persian empire, had for more than a century been the successful rivals of Rome. While all other adjacent nations had yielded to Roman arms, Parthia "went forth conquering and to conquer," Thus in B. C. 53 they defeated and killed Crassus, the Roman general. Nine years later they held possession of Roman Syria, and about the same time invaded Asia Minor, defeating
and killing the general sent to oppose them. Antony the triumvir had some success against them in those outlying provinces, but having invaded Parthia with a force of one hundred thousand men, he was compelled to retreat with a loss of a third of his army. Mounted on fleet horses and led by their chieftains riding upon sacred white steeds, and armed with bows from which they shot arrows with deadly aim, and never more so than when apparently fleeing before a pursuing enemy, their cavalry was constantly victorious. They are also said to have used Greek fire with deadly and terrifying effect.

At the time of which we speak the unexpected came to pass, for under Nero the rival empires became reconciled, and even friendly, a condition which continued throughout the reigns of Vespasian and his sons. To use the poetic figure of Saint John, the water of the great river Euphrates, the boundary between the Roman and
Parthian empires, was dried up, “that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared,” as it certainly was; for not only were the Roman legions usually stationed on that frontier released, but auxiliary kings, whose dominions lay on or near the Euphrates, came with hordes of horsemen which John estimates at “twice ten thousand times ten thousand,” an impossible number, but one which he is honest enough to say he gives on hearsay.

**The Jewish Nation**

From the hour when the rulers of the Jews said of the spotless Son of man, “His blood be upon us and upon our children,” the decline and fall of the Jewish nation was swift and sure. This became the more evident after their kingdom, which, as we have said, had been galvanized into seeming life under the first Agrippa, had been replaced by the last series of procura-
tors, one result of whose misgovernment was the great increase of the Zealots, whose leading principle was a fanatical hatred of the Romans. When these had been suppressed with preposterous severity and cruelty, the Sicarii, a secret order still more fanatical, arose, adopting the assassination of their opponents as their special task.

Josephus expresses the opinion that his own generation was the wickedest the world had ever seen. These wicked revolutionists arose mainly in Galilee, and after they had inflicted the utmost cruelty upon the Romans in Palestine and upon their fellow countrymen in the attempt to force them into opposition to Rome, they followed such leaders as John of Gischala into Jerusalem, where they succeeded in getting the power into their own hands, and destroying the friends of the Romans.

This John of Gischala was first
aided and then rivaled by Simon Bar-giora, a man as enthusiastic as himself for liberty, and quite as unwilling to brook a superior. From John’s party a section broke off under Eleazar, the son of Simon, so that thenceforth there were three parties in the city; Simon holding the upper city and part of the lower, John the Temple Mount, and Eleazar the inner court of the temple. “All three continued incessantly at war with one another, so that the city from day to day presented the aspect of a battlefield” (Josephus). Thus, indeed, “the great city was divided into three parts” (Rev. 16. 19). We are convinced that it was of this very same “great city” that we read later in John’s historic tragedy, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Rev. 18. 2).
THE CHURCH AND HER ENEMIES

We are all familiar with the growth of the church in the Holy Land, how the hundred and twenty became three thousand on the day of Pentecost, and five thousand a little later. We know too how the gospel spread even more rapidly among the Gentiles, so that the pagan temples were well-nigh forsaken. We are inclined to accept Saint John's estimate as literally and substantially correct, that there were sealed "an hundred and forty and four thousand, of all the tribes of the children of Israel," that is, so many Jewish Christians; while out of "all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues," that is, out of the Gentile world, came "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Rev. 7. 4, 9).

This growth was made in the teeth of the opposition of the enemies of the church, of which we mention three:
the Jewish people, the Roman empire, and heresy.

The Jewish people were from the very first enemies of the church. Paul says of them that they “both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess. 2. 15). Jesus said to the people of Jerusalem, “Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth” (Matt. 23. 34, 35). Surely it is of the same city, Jerusalem, Babylon the great, that John says, “And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth!” (Rev. 18. 24.)

In all these persecutions Jerusalem used the power of Rome. Our Lord
died upon a Roman cross, and his martyrs suffered by Roman authority; and in return, even up to the early months of the war, Jerusalem was subservient—nay, loyal to Rome. Most appropriate it is, therefore, that John should liken Rome to "a scarlet-colored beast...having seven heads and ten horns," and Jerusalem to the "great harlot," sitting on the beast, and "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

We mention one more enemy of the church—heresy. Heresy loomed far larger in New Testament times than we are apt to think. Christ foresaw the arising of "false christs and false prophets"; Paul declared that men should arise "speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"; John lived to say, "Even now are there many antichrists....They went out from us, but they were not of us."
There was one man, well but unfavorably known to Saint John, who was emphatically a false christ and false prophet. This was Simon Magus, who in the later traditions and romances of the early church received a bad preeminence as the father of all heresies. This was probably too high praise; but Simon Magus certainly was the leader and progenitor, in the Holy Land, of that Gnosticism which in the later days of Saint John was doing more to destroy Christianity than all of its persecutors put together. The description given by Saint John of the "beast," elsewhere called "the false prophet," "coming up out of the earth," or, rather, as we prefer to translate it, "out of the Land"—that is, out of Palestine, John's own land—may truthfully be applied to this father of heresy as he is described in early Christian history and romance, "He doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire to come down from heaven
on the earth in the sight of men” (Rev. 13. 11, 13).

**The Hope of Christ's Speedy Return**

There is one other matter which, at this point, demands attention, namely, the church's hope of the speedy return of Christ. There is no book of the New Testament in which this is not mentioned. Rev. Eli Pittman said recently in the Sunday School Journal, “The return of the Lord is mentioned three hundred and eighteen times in the two hundred and sixty chapters that make up the New Testament—an average of one out of every twenty-five verses.”

Quite as emphatic is the conviction expressed in the New Testament, that the Lord’s coming was *very near*. This conviction rested upon the assertion of our Lord himself, that his apostles should “not have gone over the cities of Israel,” that some standing in the
circle of his disciples should not "taste of death," and that that generation should "not pass away," until "all these things"—including his coming—should "be accomplished." This expectation of the speedy coming of Christ was current in the apostolic church. Paul expected to be "alive and remain" till his coming; Peter declared, "The end of all things is at hand"; James says, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh," "The judge standeth before the door" (Matt. 10. 23; 16. 28; 24. 33, 34; 1 Thess. 4. 17; 1 Pet. 4. 7; James 5. 8, 9).

Were it not for this expectation of the speedy coming of the Lord, the Apocalypse would never have been written. It was the answer to the long-deferred hope of the church—yes, and to the doubts of those who were saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from
the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3. 4). It really was what in its opening words it professes to be.

"THE UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST"

We do not now use the ordinary English title, the “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” since there might be some question whether it was a revelation given by Christ, or a revelation concerning Christ; but the title given above, which is as nearly an exact translation of the original as we know how to make it, is not equivocal. It is not the revelation by Christ of heavenly wonders, or of future events: it is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is he who is unveiled in the book.

In answer to the hope and doubt of the church, John, from the mount of vision, where, with his spiritual senses wide open, he sees things as they really are, shouts back, “Behold, he cometh with clouds!” “With clouds”—what does that mean? It is,
of course, easy to say, “It means exactly what it says”; but to me the idea that this often-mentioned feature of our Lord’s coming means only that he shall come with masses of watery vapor that we call clouds, like a Zeppelin in its screen of fog, seems childish. “O, now you are spiritualizing!” exclaims some one. Not at all, these clouds with which the Lord comes are ten thousand times more real than any that ever floated in the sky. They are those of which Cowper sings, “The clouds we so much dread are big with mercy.” Hengstenburg, one of the ablest of commentators on the Apocalypse, says that these clouds are “the shadow of judgment.” “The Lord appears surrounded by dark clouds, which announce his anger, and beget the expectation of thunder and lightning breaking forth.” “These are to his enemies a sign of his anger and a proclamation of his judgment.”

It is the purpose of the book of
Revelation to so remove these clouds of mystery and doubt, to so explain the frightful calamities which had over-taken the chosen people, and their faithful remnant, the Church of Christ, that Jesus Christ should shine forth “as the sun shineth in his strength.”

JOHN IN PATMOS

Exiled from his loved employment, John was in Patmos, a prisoner. Standing upon the heights of his island-prison and looking eastward, past and over the islands of Icaria, Samos, and Naxos, he could trace the blue skyline of the mountains of Asia Minor, in whose valleys nestled the churches among which he had ministered for years; but four and twenty miles of water separated him from the friends and from the work he loved so well.

He had not forgotten either. He was still the “brother and companion in tribulation” of those from whom he was separated. He knew that his
old friend Antipas of Pergamum had already sealed his testimony with his blood, and that in Smyrna imprisonment, and trial, and perhaps violent death, awaited the saints. But what doubtless troubled him even more was that some of his churches were not doing well religiously. One had fallen away altogether—had a name to live, but was dead; another had fallen into a lukewarm state—neither cold nor hot; another, his home church, had lost its first love. False doctrine and immorality were creeping in here and there, threatening to undo his work.

To do them justice, his churches had not forgotten their exiled apostle. Seven messengers, or, as we say, angels, of the churches were with him, doubtless selected from their leading officers, and perhaps bearing with them messages of cheer, and supplies for his bodily needs. It is almost certain that John had many more than
seven churches in his diocese; but on that memorable Lord's day only seven of them were represented in Patmos by their messengers, or angels.

The messengers of the churches were about to return home; and the aged apostle would send messages to those who had sent the messengers to him. But what shall he say to them?

Suddenly a change passes over him. His bodily senses close to earthly things. He is in the spirit. A mighty voice tells him that there is a message for his churches from One mightier than he; and turning, he sees Jesus, clad in the robe and with the ornaments of a High Priest, and standing, as John had doubtless often seen the high priest stand—for we believe that John had himself been a priest—with the lights of the sevenfold golden lamp glowing about him. Thus, with the clouds gone, these clouds of unbelief which had been hiding Christ from his people, if not from the apostle
himself, Jesus Christ stands unveiled, watching over his churches, knowing their works, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, encouraging them.

THE SEEER IN HEAVEN

But there were other clouds. How was it possible to reconcile the frightful suffering of God's ancient people, and the persecution of his church, with the wisdom, love, and power of God? Earth had no satisfactory answer. It has none now.

Then the seer is called up into heaven; but if he expected to find an answer there to that fearful question, he was at first disappointed. True the seraphim were singing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come." But we are much mistaken if their song did not rather seem an indictment of Him who sat upon the throne. If God, indeed, was almighty, and if he had been present throughout
that holocaust of suffering, why did he permit it? Men are asking the same question to-day, and some are finding no answer but the answer of atheism. Even in heaven John for a time finds no answer. There was a book of mystery lying in the hand of God, "and no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon." It was sealed with seven seals—a mystery inscrutable. We do not wonder that the seer "wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon." (Rev. 5. 3.)

Then One, strangely bearing the appearance of a lamb newly slain, is acclaimed as worthy to take the book and open the seals. And why worthy? The heavenly choristers proclaim why he is worthy. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out
of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5. 9). He had endured suffering to the uttermost, and with the most glorious results, and, therefore, he was both able and worthy to interpret all suffering.

THE SEVEN SEALS

As he opens the successive seals, a stately pageant passes over the crystal floor: the white horse with its rider bearing a bow, crowned and going forth conquering and to conquer; the red horse with its rider, bearing a great sword and to whom it was given to take away peace from the land; the black horse with its rider bearing the insignia of famine; the pale horse bestrode by Death and followed by Hades. John had no difficulty in interpreting these: the Parthian invasions; the Roman butcheries; famine, pestilence, hell following in the wake of war. But these were the very things that demanded explanation.
With the opening of the next seals the mystery deepens. “And when he opened the fifth seal,” says the prophet, “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6. 9). We may understand why a wicked and perverse nation should suffer chastisement, and even annihilation at the hand of a righteous God; but why should the almighty and ever-living God, who therefore was present, and could have prevented it, not interpose to save the faithful Daniels of that age from the lions, and the stainless children from the fire?

The opening of the sixth seal introduces a scene so terrible that most readers take it to be the awful Day of Judgment: “There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, even as
THE BOOK OF REVELATION

a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind” (Rev. 6. 12, 13).

They fail to remember that John is a prophet, that he himself speaks of his book as a prophecy, and that therefore he may be expected to use prophetic terms. Isaiah in speaking of the fall of Babylon says: “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine” (Isa. 13. 9, 10). Such imagery was often applied by prophets to earthly events. It is not, therefore, the Day of Judgment, as we usually understand that term, but the day of wrath against rebellious Israel. It is God’s answer to the prayer of his martyred saints, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6. 10.) Here, and in many other places
where we find the word "earth" in the English versions, we greatly prefer to substitute the word "Land."

As we pass from the sixth chapter to the seventh we exchange clouds and storms for calm and sunshine. Vengeance has done its work. Strong angels now hold the winds, "that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree," while other angels gather the harvest from the seed sown in blood. It came from two great fields: from the blood-stained field of Israel came a "remnant"—"a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of the children of Israel"; and from the Gentile world came "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." As we behold them, standing "before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands," and hear them crying, "Salvation unto our God who sitteth upon
the throne, and unto the Lamb”; and when we learn that these pure and victorious ones, who came out of the great tribulation, “shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7. 16, 17), we understand the mystery of the sealed book. Earth had no sorrow that heaven did not heal. The “great tribulation” was the seed-time; the “great multitude” is the harvest; and, even on earth, the death pang of Judaism was the birth pang of Christianity.

The opening of the seventh seal introduces the sounding of the seven trumpets; and these, after an interval, are followed by the pouring of the seven vials, or bowls, “full of the wrath of God.”
THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

We have already noticed the extraordinary connection between our Lord’s prophecy on the Mount of Olives, contained in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew, and elsewhere in the Gospels, and the Revelation written by Saint John. This is indeed a key which unlocks the mystery of the book. If our Lord’s prophecy refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the winding up of the Jewish age, and the coming of Jesus to establish Christianity as a world-religion, the book of Revelation pictures the same.

Accepting this view, we believe that the events following the blasts of the trumpets, which are instruments of warning, are nothing else than the earlier, more remote, and less severe events, called by our Lord “the beginning of travail,” the first labor pains. Of these our Lord says to his Apostles:
“See that ye be not troubled, for all these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet” (Matt. 24. 6), while the events following the pouring of the bowls, including the judgment of the Harlot-city, which, you will remember, was shown to John by “one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls,” are the final calamities which overwhelmed the Jewish people, and of which our Lord says: “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24. 21).

It will be well right here to insist upon a single verbal criticism. It is that the Greek words τῆ οὐσία, invariably rendered “the earth” in the book of Revelation, should almost as unvaryingly be rendered “the Land.” This is the actual rendering in more than fifty places in the rest of the New Testament, while the corresponding Hebrew word, הָאָרֶץ, is so rendered in the Old
Testament more than seventeen hundred times. It is of the Land, the Holy Land, John's own Land, that John is speaking.

The events following the seven trumpets, then, are those which preceded by some months the siege of Jerusalem. The first a tempest of hail, fire, and blood, affecting a third part of the Land; the second a burning mountain cast into the sea, destroying a third part of the living creatures and ships therein; the third a burning star falling upon a third part of the rivers and fountains, causing them to become bitter; the fourth the darkening of the third part of the sun, moon, and stars. Then there was heard the cry of a lone eagle flying in mid-heaven, Woe, woe, woe, to those who inhabit the land! The sounding of the fifth trumpet heralded "a star from heaven fallen upon the earth," to whom was given a key wherewith to open the pit of the abyss, and from the smoke
which poured forth came horrible locusts, which had power, not to kill, but to torture men five months. At the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the four angels bound at the River Euphrates were loosed, and with them, empowered to destroy a third part of the men, came a host of cavalry which John estimated on hearsay at two hundred millions. When the seventh angel sounded, "There followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11. 15).¹

The careful student will notice that all but two of these trumpet-woes affected the third part. A third of the

¹ In this passage the word "kingdoms" should certainly be rendered in the singular—"kingdom"—the thought being, not that the civil divisions of the world called kingdoms have been taken up into the hands of the Lord and his Christ, which is not, and never has been true, but that the kingdom, the sovereignty, the rule of the world, has passed into divine hands, which is gloriously true.
Land can hardly mean anything but one of the three portions into which Palestine was then divided, namely, Judæa, Samaria, and Galilee; in this instance unquestionably Galilee, since that was the first part of the land to be attacked by the Romans and their Parthian allies.

The question, then, narrows itself down to this: Did any events take place in Galilee, shortly before the fall of Jerusalem, corresponding to the symbols which followed the trumpet-blasts? Without the slightest hesitation we answer that such events did occur there and then.

The invasion of Galilee by Vespasian assisted by forty thousand Parthian horsemen, in the spring of 67, may well be compared to "a tempest of hail and fire mingled with blood"; the sea fight on the sea of Galilee, in which sixty-five hundred Jews who took refuge from the Romans on the lake were all slaughtered and their
boats captured or sunk, may well be poetically represented by the flaming mountain cast into the sea; the star falling from heaven upon the rivers and fountains of waters, poisoning and embittering them, may represent the career of the Zealots under John of Gischala, since the Jews certainly were accused by the Romans of poisoning the streams, and no one was more likely to commit such an outrage than John and his followers, who certainly were operating in Galilee at that time; the smiting of the third parts of sun, moon, and stars almost certainly denotes the total overthrow of Jewish rule in Galilee, which took place at that time; the cry of the lone eagle flying mid-heavens, was it not the warning issued by Vespasian, raised to the sole rule of the empire, that though he was called away from Palestine to the throne, nevertheless greater woes were impending over the Land? The fifth trumpet we are inclined to inter-
pret literally. Satan, the "star fallen from heaven unto the earth," opened "the pit of the abyss," from the smoke of which issued forth hosts of demons like locusts. Human beings were so actuated by these hellish spirits, that, as Josephus says, "No generation ever existed more prolific of crime than this." Rudolph Stier says that "at this period the nation showed itself as if possessed by seven thousand devils." The human and visible result of all this was the deviltry of the Zealots and Sicarii.

The blast of the sixth trumpet, followed as it was by the slaughter of "the third part of men," recalls us to Galilee. A voice "from the horns of the golden altar that is before God," that is, a voice directly from God, commands the sixth angel, God's own messenger, to "Loose the four angels which are bound in the great River Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed" (Rev. 9. 14, 15). This is doubtless an allusion to the forty thousand Parthian
archers, four bands of ten thousand each, for so the Parthians were in the habit of marshaling their armies, which Vologesus, king of Parthia, at that time tendered to Vespasian (Suetonius).

The seventh trumpet heralded the establishment of Christianity as a world-religion. The kingdom of this world became the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

Great events doubtless also took place at the same time in the spirit-world, "The time of the dead to be judged," the prophets and saints to be rewarded, the destroyers of the Land to be destroyed, and the opening of the temple in heaven which was closing on earth, had come. We do not, however, look for earthly counterparts to these heavenly events.

**The Vials of Wrath**

The careful student will have noticed the great similarity of the events
following the trumpets to those following the vials. This suggests that the events of both series were much alike. They were, but with this difference: none of the events under the vials were confined to the third part, that is to Galilee; and they were more terrible and final than those under the trumpets. The former series were warnings, so spoken of by our Lord, so understood by the Romans, so described by John. The latter series leads on to the utter destruction of "the great city." "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth....And the great city was divided into three parts; and the cities of the nations fell" (Rev. 16. 18, 19). All these as preludes to the fall of Jerusalem, are history.

The bowls containing the wrath of God were commanded to be poured out upon the Land, that is, upon
Palestine. The first caused "a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and that worshiped his image," that is, upon Romans and Roman sympathizers, who were at this time treated with great cruelty by the Zealots. The second was poured into the sea, causing it to become as the blood of a dead man, and causing the death of every living soul in it. This unquestionably refers to the total destruction of the Jewish navy on the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, a third part of which had already been destroyed on the sea of Galilee. The third bowl turned all the rivers and fountains of water into blood, namely, by a slaughter extending over the whole Land. "The fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire." The "sun," or supreme government, became so severe at that time as to be intolerable. The fifth "poured out his bowl upon the throne of the
beast," that is, upon Rome, the capital of the empire, or possibly Cæsarea, the capital of the province, both of which were in turmoil at that time. The sixth, the drying up of the Euphrates, we have already considered, and also the seventh, which clearly refers to the fall of Jerusalem.

We have called attention to the fact that the vision of the seven vials is connected by the author himself with the vision of the Judgment of the great harlot. It was one of the angels who had the seven vials that showed John the latter vision. We have slowly but surely reached the conclusion, that the destruction of Jerusalem, the fall of Babylon the great, and the judgment of the Harlot-city were one and the same event.

THE HARLOT-CITY NOT ROME

So general, however, has been the belief that the Harlot-city is Rome, that a few words in defense of our
position are necessary. It is said of the "seven heads and ten horns" mentioned in this vision, "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; and these are seven kings" (Rev. 17. 9), unquestionably referring to Rome, the *urbs septicollis*, the city of seven hills and her seven emperors. Very true; but all these figures pertain not to the woman, but to the beast on which she sits. If the beast be Rome—and it is—the woman who sits upon the beast cannot be Rome.

With regard to the eighteenth verse of the seventeenth chapter: "And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth," which is so confidently cited in proof that Rome and no other is the Harlot-city, we may say, that the phrase, "the kings of the earth," or, rather, "of the Land," does not, and indeed cannot, refer to the vassal kings, or provincial governors of
Rome, but is to be understood—precisely as John himself understood it as it occurs in Acts 4. 26, "The kings of the earth set themselves in array"—as referring to the rulers of the Jewish people, in that case to "Herod and Pontius Pilate." The great city which reigneth over the kings of the Land, then, is not Rome, but Jerusalem.

We need hardly say that the relation of Jerusalem to Rome is very aptly symbolized by the figure of the woman—Jerusalem—seated upon the beast—Rome. Up to a few years before its destruction Jerusalem was strongly pro-Roman. People and rulers united in the cry, "We have no king but Cæsar." On the other hand the Harlot-city used the power of Rome, as a rider uses the power of his horse, in persecuting the church. She was drunken with blood shed by the Roman sword. Jesus Christ died on a Roman cross.
The eighteenth chapter, read in the light of what we have been saying, needs little comment. We have in it a dirge or elegy over fallen Babylon, which would sound turgid and hollow enough if pronounced over the fall of Rome by one who never loved her; but pronounced over Jerusalem by one of her own sons, is as pathetic as it is true. Indeed, the dirge does not fit Rome at all. For instance, Dean Alford says of the lament of the merchants, "This mercantile lamentation far more nearly suits London than Rome at any assignable period of her history." This is true, but it suits Jerusalem to a dot. Josephus gives a list of precious things carried away from Jerusalem by Titus, every one of which is named by John in his dirge over Jerusalem.
THE SUBSIDIARY VISIONS

We have already expressed our belief that, while the entire Apocalypse was unquestionably put into the shape in which it has come down to us by the hand of John, and probably in Patmos, and that the main sections, which are complete in themselves, the Seven Letters, the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, the Seven Vials of Wrath, and perhaps some others, were seen then and there; that other visions had been seen by John long before, and were now by his hand dovetailed into their place in the book.

One of these subsidiary visions was that of the mighty angel, perhaps the glorified Christ himself, who, standing with one foot upon the sea and the other upon the land, swears that delay shall be no longer. In his hand is a little book which the prophet takes and eats. In his mouth it is sweet, that is to say, it was delightful for the
prophet to declare the wisdom, power, and love of God fully vindicated; but in his stomach it is bitter, his nation is desolate and his church persecuted.

In another vision the prophet is commanded to rise and measure the temple of God. He is to retain, as the prophet Ezekiel did centuries before, a memento of the temple, so soon to be destroyed. This measurement was not, we think, with a view either to its destruction or its preservation, but with a view to its reproduction. The temple about to be closed on earth is to be opened in heaven (see Rev. 11. 1, 19).

In the same vision we have the episode of the Two Witnesses. Of this we have no other historic record. We hold that the prophet is giving us, not a forecast of some vague future event, but a bit of otherwise unwritten history; that in the forty and two months of the reign of terror which culminated in the Roman siege, two witnesses, not
apostles, but men of high rank in the church, bore witness of the city's approaching doom, and sealed their testimony with their blood, in the street of that great city, where also their Lord was crucified. If it be asked who these witnesses might be, we would say that it is something more than a guess that one of them was James, the Lord's brother, whose monument is said to have stood near the temple site, bearing this inscription: "HE HATH BEEN A TRUE WITNESS, BOTH TO JEWS AND GREEKS, THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST"; and that the other may have been the only other man, not an apostle, whose epistle is counted worthy of a place in the sacred canon of the New Testament, Judas the brother of James.

If it be asked how we are to understand the account of the resurrection of the dead bodies of these witnesses, and their ascension to heaven, we reply, that it may be a
poetic account of the survival of the Christian Church; but we prefer to think of it as actual history, that as a unique honor granted to these brethren of the Lord, “After three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet.... And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (Rev. 11. 11, 12).

The vision of the woman and the Dragon we consider to be a poetic picture of the conflict of the mother church with Satan, in which he seeks to devour her offspring, both the Man-child who is to “rule the nations with a rod of iron”—that is, the Christ—and “the rest of her seed that keep the commandments of God”—devout Jews; and those who “hold the testimonies of Jesus”—Christians.

The escape of the woman from the
NOT A MYSTERY

dragon, "into the wilderness, unto her place where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time," that is, for three years and a half, "from the face of the serpent," seems to be a poetic, but highly circumstantial, account of the escape of the church from beleaguered Jerusalem, her journey over the mountains and through the Jordan valley, in time of high water and earthquake, to little Pella in the foothills of Gilead.

The slow, unrelenting advance of the Roman armies toward Jerusalem, the terrible grip of the ring of steel cast about the doomed city, and the frightful vengeance wreaked upon the Jewish nation, could hardly be better pictured than as a leopardlike beast with the claws of a bear and the teeth of a lion. The beast coming up out of the Land, we believe to be heresy, in the person of its Palestinian father and founder Simon Magus.

The best interpretation of the num-
ber of the beast is, in my judgment, one of the oldest, of which Irenæus says: "The name 'Lateinos' has the number 666, and it is very probable since the last kingdom has that name, for the Latins are they who now rule." John gives a hint as to the interpretation of this mystic number, the very simplicity of which has caused it to be overlooked, when he says, "It is the number of a man," the meaning seeming clearly to be that Lateinos is not only the name of the great nation and empire, but a man's name as well, Lateinos being a very common name when John wrote.

The vision of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with "a hundred and forty-four thousand" followers, having the name of the Lamb and of his Father written on their foreheads, followed by the rustle of angel wings and proclamations by angelic heralds, being heavenly, has no earthly counterpart;
but when the prophet says (Rev. 14. 14), "And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.... And he that sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth," or as we feel fully justified in rendering it, "on the Land," "and the earth"—the Land—"was reaped" (Rev. 14. 14, 16), we cannot resist the conviction, that, explain it how we will, we have here the fulfillment of the solemn words of the Lord Jesus, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26. 64).

This statement will give rise to many questions. Is this the only coming of the Lord Jesus? No, we agree with the universal church, "I believe that he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." This is the promise of our Lord (Matt. 25. 31ff.); and
John himself, looking out over the future, sees "a great white throne" of judgment. But it will be asked, "Do we not read at the very close of the book of Revelation, 'He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus'?" (Rev. 22. 20.) Do not these words imply that, after he had seen his last vision, and long after the destruction of Jerusalem, John still is looking for the coming? They do, if John wrote them, and they are not the pious wish of some devout transcriber, whose interjected remarks we find scattered throughout the book. But, granting that they are John's words, we must not forget that his case was exceptional. Like Zachariah of old, it had been revealed to John that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He was the last leaf on the apostolic tree. The rest had gone home, most of them by the blood-stained way of martyrdom;
others, perhaps, like the two witnesses, had heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, "Come up hither," and had been "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," as Paul expected to be. John was left, among other things, to write for us this glorious book. Note its name: the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The rest had been expecting Christ, John reveals him "coming with the clouds." His task is done, and now he asks his Lord to come, to receive his beloved disciple to himself, as Jesus had promised to do so long ago.

PROPHECIES AND VISIONS

While the prophet was dealing with events which had taken place in his own age and his own land, we were able to interpret his book in the light of these events, so far as they were known to us; but in the nineteenth and following chapters he takes his stand in heaven, and there, amid the
rustling of angel wings and the sound of angelic proclamations, looks out over the distant future. In interpreting this part of the book, therefore, we do not pretend to any special insight, and have neither the desire nor the ability to assume the role of the prophet.

In this section we have first of all

A GALA DAY IN HEAVEN

The prophet hears a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, “Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God” (Rev. 19. 1). The occasion of this rejoicing was the just judgment of the great harlot (see Isa. 1. 21), who corrupted the land with her fornications, and the avenging upon her of the blood of God’s servants which she had spilled. It is the passing of the corrupt and cruel Jewish church as a world-religion.

Then there comes a still greater shout of praise.
The waster seemed the builder too;  
Upspringing from the ruined Old,  
Behold, the New!

"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second" (Heb. 10. 9). In the place of Judaism, which had proved untrue to her marriage vows to God, comes Christianity, the Bride, "arrayed in fine linen, bright and pure," for her marriage with the Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom.

Of this Bride-church we have two views: in the nineteenth chapter as the church militant; in the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters as the church triumphant. In the former view the Bridegroom and Bride are resolved into the King upon his white horse, followed by the armies which are in heaven "upon white horses" and "clothed in fine linen, white and pure"; a militant company indeed, but the weapons of their warfare were not carnal. And yet it is to be a real warfare, compared by the author to a
terrible slaughter, after which "the birds which fly in mid-heaven" may "eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and of the flesh of horses and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great"; and it is to result in a real victory. The "beast," that is, the Roman empire, and the "false prophet," that is, the gnostic heresy, were taken, and "they two were cast alive into the lake of fire." That is to say, Rome as a false religious system and civil power hostile to the church, and Gnosticism, which in John's day was the dryrot of the church, were to be destroyed, not absolutely, for they two were cast alive into the lake of fire, but so that they would not stand in the way of the progress of the militant church. Then, "the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse"; not, however, a sword in his hand inflicting physical
slaughter, but the sword which proceeded out of his mouth, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6. 17).

Need we say that all this was completely fulfilled, so that within a few centuries not a worshiper of the Roman gods nor an adherent of Gnosticism remained upon earth. The sword which the empire had drawn upon the church was sheathed, and the "remnant," the people inhabiting the world known to Saint John, the Roman world, received the word and bowed to the rule of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Moreover "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan," was bound for a thousand years, and cast into the abyss, which was shut and sealed over him, "that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be fulfilled." And then is added the curious prediction, "After this he must be loosed for a little time" (Rev. 20.3).
Now, if we are right in thinking that the dragon is the spiritual power which stirred up the empire, and has since stirred up other nations to make war and persecute the church, the binding of Satan for a thousand years may mean the ceasing of persecution for about that period. It is often asked, Why was the binding for a thousand years? Why not forever? We answer that the prophet is not depicting the ideal, but foretelling that which should actually come to pass, namely, that, barring sporadic persecutions, the church would be free from organized persecution by dominant nations inspired with satanic hatred and cruelty, so long as the empire, won over to Christianity, retained its power. But the empire was even then in its decline; and when it fell, as it did not far from a thousand years after it had ceased persecuting the church, the Saracen power arose, with the determination to destroy Christianity,
and the church again suffered persecution. (See Rev. 20. 1–4.)

**Great Events in the Spirit World**

Meanwhile the prophet sees great events taking place in the spirit world. He saw "thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (Rev. 20. 4). These, doubtless, were those of whom our Lord says, "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19. 28). One of the first acts of these enthroned judges seems to have been to admit their fellow sufferers, whose bodies had fallen under the stroke of the Roman headsman, to the high privilege of reigning with Christ a thousand years. A unique honor this, for "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years should be finished."
"This," says the prophet, "is the first resurrection." We are expressly told that this high honor was granted to the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. In this case, then, the first resurrection was the resurrection of souls; and we are rather inclined to believe that it is always so, the second resurrection being that of soul and body which will come to all the dead, when, as our Lord declares, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5. 29). Professor Moses Stuart says, "As to the notion of a descent to earth by Christ and the martyrs, and their visible reign here, there is not a word in the text, nor even an implication; at least I find none." To base the teachings of premillennialism upon this text is surely to add "unto the
words of the prophecy of this book” (see Rev. 22. 18).

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go forth to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth”—here unquestionably the better translation is “the Land”—“Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle.... And they went up on the breadth of the earth”—of the Land—“and compassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them” (Rev. 20. 7–9).

**Gog and Magog**

And who or what are Gog and Magog? The curious reader will find much in the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of Ezekiel concerning Gog and Magog, Gog being a king, and Magog his nation, who are represented as coming out of the north
against Israel. Gesenius, the Hebrew lexicographer, says that "Magog is a region and also a powerful people dwelling in the extreme recesses of the north, who are to invade the Holy Land at a future time, nearly the same people as were comprehended by the Greeks under the name Scythian." Jerome says that Magog includes Scythian nations, fierce and innumerable, who live beyond the Caucasus and near the Caspian sea. Duesterdieck claims that "all etymological and geographical marks show that we are to recognize the actual people of Gog in the inhabitants of the Caucasus."

It is interesting to inquire whether such a people invaded Palestine and threatened Christendom about the time foretold by John, namely, not less than a thousand years after his prophecy. The question must be answered in the affirmative. The Turks, a Scythian nation, then inhabiting both sides of
the Caspian, and therefore found in the immediate neighborhood of the Caucasus, under the influence of Sultan Seljuk, embraced Mohammedanism about the middle of the tenth century, adopting the principle of enslaving or destroying all who refused to submit to their prophet. In the latter part of the eleventh century, not far from a thousand years from the date of the Apocalypse, they overran Syria and Asia Minor, both lands of Saint John’s residence. In 1077 they captured Jerusalem, but twenty-two years later lost it to the crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon, who established the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, which lasted until it was overthrown by Saladin in 1187, from which time Jerusalem and the Holy Land has been in the hands of the Turks. It is extremely likely that in our own day we may see the complete and final fulfillment of Saint John’s prophecy.
The sublime description of the Judgment of the Great White Throne, answers so closely to our Saviour's forecast of the Judgment (Matt. 25. 31ff.) that there need be little doubt that both refer to the same thing. The fact that this is mentioned after the thousand years, would seem to imply that John regarded it as future. It may, indeed, even now be absolutely in the future. Certainly the Judgment is in the future to us who are still in the body; although we know no reason why we may not regard it as having been in session throughout the centuries. However that may be, we believe that Christ "shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." The first thing that the inspired exile in his
sea-girt isle notes in the new earth is, "There was no more sea." No bitter, briny waves separate the worker from his work, or friend from friend.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." This is the dwelling place of the church triumphant; and we believe the heart of the church is right when it calls it heaven. There may, indeed, be a higher heaven from which it comes down, but this is heaven for us, the home of the soul. The glory of it is, God dwelling with men. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Rev. 21. 4). Language falters to tell its beauty and its glory. Gems and gold are weak and imperfect images. Life, eternal life, rolls in its river and hangs like fruit upon its trees. "And there shall be no more
curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22. 3–5).

Jerusalem, the golden!
With milk and honey blest,
Beneath thy contemplation,
Sink heart and voice oppressed.
I know not, O, I know not
What joys await me there,
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.