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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 19

REVELATION 14:6 to 16:11

Preparation for Judgment

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART NINETEEN

PREPARATION FOR JUDGMENT

Revelation 14:6 to 16:11

Final judgment is the subject of the remaining chapters of our Book of Revelation, but like all the unveilings of this great Book the figures are symbolic and repetitive, so that even the pouring out of the Last Vial of the holy wrath of God (chap. 16:17-21) with its cry from the throne, "IT IS DONE", and its spectacle of every island and mountain fleeing away, leaves us with the fact of a city surviving in three parts, and men still on the earth blaspheming God for their pains.

It is not possible to venture far into prophecy without being confronted with the fact of history repeating itself, so that at no time can an exclusive fulfillment be applied to any one phase of historic time. Hence, there are 'many antichrists' (1 John 2:18). There are many crises in history when good men have seen the hand of God and the apparent fulfillment of some great prophetic word or symbol. They were not altogether wrong who saw in the downfall of Pagan Rome fifteen centuries ago, a fulfillment of the Book of Revelation. All the figures of the antichristian kingdom and its fall seemed to be appropriate to the empire of the Caesars. Those who suffered, rejoiced when they saw, or thought they saw, in the symbols of the Apocalypse, the ruin of that city which had been their cruel persecutor. Were they right or mistaken? We believe they were both. The deliverance in which they rejoiced was only the prelude to future tyrannies and similar deliverances which would succeed each other until the end of the days when the Last Judgment would crown all and bring the mystery of God to a conclusion. It will never be possible for any generation to say with certitude, "The next judgment is the last".

When Christ said to His disciples, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32), He no doubt intended His people to understand that it was never a part of that perfect wisdom of God imparted to Him in His incarnation as the God-man, the Mediator of our salvation, to make known the actual time-scale of the divine purpose. Later, after His resurrection, He warned His apostles that 'it was not for them to know the times or the seasons which the Father had placed in His own

power' (see Acts 1:7). His rebuke stands over against all the calculations and prophetic almanacs drawn by worthy men who, like the apostles before Pentecost, think that their time is the time of the end and that the Kingdom of God is about to appear in its eternal glory.

From the apostolic age onward good men have thought they detected the identity of antichrist in the successive oppressors of the people of God. And who is to say they were entirely wrong, even though their vision was only a partial one? If it is the genius of prophecy that there is a quality of continuous and repetitive fulfillment therein, is it not therefore the case that the consolation of any individual prophecy has been quite properly appropriated to present hope of deliverance, seeing the whole purpose of prophecy is to minister strength, patience, hope, and consolation in any and every age? That there is a full and final fulfillment would naturally follow, but who can tell in advance when that final moment is reached?

It is the fault both of the Historic and the Futurist interpretations that each deprives all other generations of the comfort and grace ministered by those prophecies. Our forefathers did well to see the Papal tyranny as the Antichrist against whom they had to contend, but what became of the Papal antichrist when Napoleon Bonaparte took him prisoner and locked him up in France to keep him out of mischief? Does Satan fight against Satan? The Old Tenant of the Vatican certainly earned the sympathy and even the admiration of Europe for his steadfast refusal to bargain with the tyrant, but it is well known that he and his successors were never the same again.

The papacy suffered further indignity at the hands of Garibaldi and King Victor Emmanuel in the middle of the last century when the Pope lost the last shreds of temporal power over the so-called Papal States - which certainly earned the title of "the worst governed States in Europe". The Pope became the self-styled "Prisoner in the Vatican" until, of all men, the atheistic and impious dictator Mussolini opened the gilded bars by giving him sovereignty over the house and garden where he dwelt, so satisfying His Holiness that he had gotten back his temporal dignity. The Pope seemed well satisfied that even at the discreditable hands of the 'Sawdust Caesar' he had been elevated once more to lordship over a fragment of territory where he could amuse himself and at the same time increase his revenue, by issuing his own postage stamps. It was no doubt an added consolation to him that he had a place of his own where he might entertain or receive some of the remaining European monarchs, and not a few 'Protestant' bishops and archbishops, and nonconformist dignitaries with no love for the Bible, and enjoy the pretence (surely it was no more) of being what he used to be in history.

There he reigns, a mere shadow of his former self, the ghost of his own past - but where now is antichrist? Surely this charade of an antichrist is not he who dominates all history and who must endure in significant power, 'showing himself to be God' whom the Lord will consume with the Spirit of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8). That description rather fits another who is described as 'the god of this world' - Satan himself - who reproduces on earth in a long succession of tyrants and deceivers, the characteristics of his own kingdom of darkness. So antichrist raises up for himself many antichrists to sustain his kingdom on earth.

But it is thus too, that the Lord in His sovereignty fulfils His overall designs. The prophetic Word fulfils the object of its sending. It is a perpetual guide to the people of God, and in all circumstances an assurance to 'the little flock' that the kingdom is theirs, in the good pleasure of the Father. Their kingdom is the only permanent and all-conquering empire on earth, as Luther so powerfully wrote at the end of his great hymn- "THE CITY OF GOD REMAINETH".

This is the whole purpose of the Book of Revelation. It is the book of the church's consolation in all her historic trials, and the key to all her sufferings. John expresses it all, tersely and fundamentally, in the beginning of his book: "Your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). We must ever go back to those words of John if we would understand the message of this great apocalyptic Book.

We betray all other generations of the Lord's people, past or to come, when we appropriate to ourselves, or to our own time, or to any one time, the meaning and consolation of this Book. It belongs to all, throughout the entire history of the church. The Historicist who regards Revelation as a complete history of the church, much like Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" has only a shred of the Book left for his comfort, as he discovers, or thinks he discovers, his own day described in one or other of the chapters, or verses, of the Book, having to discard all the rest as mere history, past or to come. Likewise the Futurist is similarly deprived: more so in fact, for he has not yet even begun to enjoy the triumphs and deliverances of this Book. According to his theory, he never will! His enthusiastic proclamation always is, "Not for the church - the church will not be here!" He is welcome to what personal comfort he can get out of that, but he must not be permitted to deprive the suffering church of her lawful consolation, as she stands with John, her brother, on the wave-beaten shore of Patmos.

These observations will no doubt help to the understanding of the last great vial

judgments and the solemn and deliberate preparation for them in chapters 14-15. The fact often alluded to by commentators that there is a close resemblance between these judgments and the 'trumpet' judgments of chapters 8 and 9, should put us on our guard against any 'literal' interpretations. The 'trumpets' sound whenever the church in her long history is about to be overwhelmed by her enemies, after the pattern of the ten plagues of Egypt leading to the deliverance of the earthly people in the time of Moses. The 'trumpets' and the 'vials' alike derive much of their symbol from those plagues by means of which the Lord brought down the pride of the heathen oppressors and set His people free. Here again are the 'boils and blains', the bloody waters, the drying up of the river or sea, the invasion of frogs (which turn out in chapter 16 to mean devils and demons!), thunderings and lightnings and a great hail.

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Who cannot see that the deliverance from Egypt was meant to be the pattern of the redemption of God's people, the church? As Israel under Moses triumphed gloriously over all her foes, so does the church under her great Commander. The march through the wilderness to the Promised Land was led by the Lord Himself in the 'fiery cloudy pillar' and we still sing in one of our most glorious hymns, "Let the fiery cloudy pillar, lead me all my journey through". The fire and the cloud are not visible to us as they were to the Israelites, but as symbols of the divine providential care and guidance they are well understood. So with the manna, the mysterious food of heaven of which the psalmist wrote centuries later – "Man did eat angels' food" (Psalm 78:25). Of the same did Christ speak when, lifting the whole mystery from its earthly symbol, He declared, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.... I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:33-35). He is our well of living water, our fountain in the wilderness, as the Samaritan woman discovered when she found Him at Jacob's well: "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst...it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14).

What was material and earthly in the Old Testament is spiritual and heavenly in the New. So is it with those judgments by which the enemies of the church are overwhelmed and a way opened up thereby for the deliverance of His people. Here is the great error by which good men have been beguiled in their attempts to interpret the images of the Apocalypse. We are "marching through Emmanuel's

ground to fairer worlds on high” and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4).

Revelation is a spiritual book, and only so can it be understood. It is the Book of the church’s pilgrimage and warfare, and its figures must not be interpreted carnally, but spiritually. When Euphrates is mentioned it is not the classical river so named. Jerusalem is not the earthly city, nor is the temple located on the Mount Sion dedicated by David for the purpose, but is the spiritual temple of Christ’s body, located on the heavenly Mount Sion, as Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:22: “Ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...”

There is another great difference between the type of Israel’s march through the wilderness, and the progress of the church to her final rest - the rest that remaineth unto the people of God - in the heavenly Canaan. The OT tribes under Moses marched through the wilderness as one nation over a period of forty years. The tribes crossed the Red Sea in one night. They crossed over the Jordan into Canaan in one day. Not a hoof was left behind. The pilgrimage of the church has lasted nigh on 2,000 years. Many generations have come and gone. We know not how many may still come. One by one we cross the Jordan, joining those who have gone before and leaving behind our nearest and our dearest. What is presented in prophetic language as the events of one day may in reality be spread over many generations or centuries. In the divine view, the people is one and the church moves as one, but in terms of this world the one event is spread over a thousand years - two thousand - perhaps more. Individual souls pass on to their rest. Their places are taken by others, yet the church is always to be considered as one, though consisting always of fresh generations which take the place of those who have gone before.

Hence in the prophetic language of Revelation, the experiences of God’s people seem to be those of one person (the Woman who fled into the Wilderness, for example), or 144,000 persons, or again, a great multitude which no man can number, yet always one army, one family, one people. If then the events of Revelation concern the whole church it must be obvious that those events are repetitive in the experience of the church and cannot be confined to one time or one generation. This again is the genius of prophecy and for this reason the entire history of the Christian church recapitulates itself in every generation. Appearances may change and there is an outward framework of history within which the prophecy works itself out to its ultimate fulfillment, but it concerns all the Lord’s people at all times. Prophecy simply is not history written in advance: it

is history spiritually understood in continuous fulfillment.

THE TWO HARVESTS

We now address ourselves to the double picture of the JUDGMENT in chapter 14:14-20. The figure in each case is of harvest time, but one harvest is unto life and the other unto death; one is of grain (though grain is not actually mentioned: it is implied in the word 'ripe' which, as the margin indicates means in this case 'dried' - a term which implies the nature of a grain harvest). The second harvest is a vintage- that is; it is of the grapes of the vine, here signifying the wicked, for the vintage is trodden in the 'great winepress of the wrath of God'.

The vision begins at verse 14: "And I looked, 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".

This beyond doubt is a picture of Christ presiding over the judgment. Some have objected that the description might well be of an angel appointed specially for the task, but on the strength of Rev. 1:13 where John's vision of Christ is presented as 'one like unto the Son of Man' this view cannot be entertained.

The imagery is very striking. The white cloud signifies Christ's glory and power as the executor of the divine will and the upholder of the divine righteousness. White is the symbol of glory as at the Transfiguration when His earthly garments became white and glistening as no fuller on earth could white them - a whiteness or brightness for which earth has no parallel (see Matt. 17, Mark 9, Luke 9).

"And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." - v.15.

The wheat has grown and matured (see Matthew 13:36-43) and the harvest of the earth must be gathered, when the Lord returns in the clouds of heaven with all the holy angels with Him; the dead shall be raised but with a division between the wheat and the tares. The living saints must be caught up to meet the Lord 'in the air' and the tares, the 'children of the wicked' are gathered to the judgment. There is no room in the parable for any other judgment, no room for 'millennial saints', no room for an earthly and visible kingdom, and no distinction between Jew and gentile.

It has been argued that Christ cannot receive a command from an angel (see v.15), but we are in the region of symbolism, and the symbol here does not confer some superior authority upon the angel. Rather is the figure employed to indicate the solemn and deliberate nature of the judgment. Christ does nothing of Himself, even in His glorified nature, for always He is the Son of the Father, the Only Begotten, the Word, the Wisdom, the Power of the Father in the unity of the Godhead. It is proper for the Son to receive from the Father all authority and power as it is proper for the Holy Spirit in the same mystery of the divine UNITY to be the Spirit of Communion between the Father and the Son, proceeding from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.

Thus the signal is given to Him who sits on the white cloud to begin His task of bringing to righteous and glorious conclusion, all that the Father ordained the Son to accomplish:

“And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.” - v. 16

THE VINTAGE

“And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.” - v. 17-20

Some of the best commentators, as Hengstenberg, hold that this harvest (or vintage) is identical with the first, there being only a change of figure, the one the grain harvest, the other the vintage, the harvest of the field and the harvest of the winepress. In each case say these writers; it is the final judgment of the wicked which is in view. Others including Bengel, Alford, and Bishop Wordsworth, see the harvest of the earth as ‘the gathering in of the godly’ while the vintage signifies the final judgment of the wicked.

Without hesitation we give ourselves to the latter view. It seems incongruous that in this one section of the Apocalypse it should be the harvest of the wicked which should be described twice. In the light of Matthew 13 we surely have here two separate harvests, and this conclusion is reinforced by the last parable which the Lord adds to the six preceding pictures in Matt. 13. We refer to the parable of the drag net with its full harvest of fish, 'good and bad', to be separated after the net is brought to shore. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (v. 49-50). The same angelic agency is shown in Rev. 14 as in Matt. 13.

The separate nature of this action is proven by the fact that the vintage harvest is reaped by "another angel" who emerges from the 'temple which is in heaven'. There is no temple as such in heaven, of course. The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. The temple in heaven is a symbol of the eternal holiness in which God dwells. He is the centre of all worship and adoration, and that worship is founded on what the earthly temple stood for - the way of access to God opened by the offering up of Christ through the Eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14).

That angels have a deep interest in the Atonement is an important, even a vital, truth. Being sinless they did not require an act of reconciliation, but it is also true that though the Atonement was for the sin of man, it is also the conditioning factor of the whole creation. The security and the eternal happiness of angels depends upon it for it is the means by which God unveils Himself before all creation and becomes, in the sufferings of Christ visible to the whole world in His character of just and holy and righteous LOVE.

God having, by the Incarnation, entered into His own creation and become a part of it became its guarantor. Evil cannot arise a second time to destroy the new creation vested in Himself. This is the fruit of God becoming Man, and this is the eternal effect of the Atonement.

We should note the uncommon procedure in which a succession of angels is involved. The angel from the temple is armed with a sharp sickle, but awaits the command of yet another angel who proceeds from the altar and has 'power over fire'. Here the figure carries us back to chap. 6:9: "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held". The altar is the typical altar where the atonement was made in the Old Testament. Here in chapter 14 those who comprise the world of the ungodly, because of whose enmity and hate the righteous were martyred, receive the just reward of their

unbelief and cruelty. God avenges His own at the last, and judgment, though long delayed, is finally executed. "Power over fire" points back to chapter 8 verses 1-5, where the angel fills his censer with fire from the altar and casts it into the earth, symbolising the judgments of God on the wicked.

JOEL'S PROPHECY

There is a strong connection also between this passage and the prophecy of Joel, chap. 3:13:

"Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down, for the press is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

In Joel the judgment takes place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat ("The Lord will judge"). Nowhere else in the Bible is this valley mentioned by that name. In early Christian times (the fourth century) the deep valley separating the walls of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives was given this name, but entirely without warrant. It is hardly likely that the writer of the Book of Revelation would thus have anticipated a tradition which has no basis in Hebrew history, yet many prophetists today have grown fond of using this false location to illustrate their theory concerning future events in Palestine. Joel's prophecy was well understood by the apostle John as having reference to another valley, namely that near Engedi to the West of the Dead Sea where in the days of Jehoshaphat (one of the godliest kings of Judah) the enemies of the Lord's people, the Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites, assembled in incredible numbers to destroy Jehoshaphat and his kingdom. Jehoshaphat prayed for deliverance, and God answered him through the prophet Jahaziel, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (see 2 Chron. 20).

So it came about that the three enemies of Judah set upon each other and destroyed themselves. Joel uses this history in his prophecy of God's judgment of the nations. "I will gather all nations and will bring them into the valley of Jehoshaphat and will plead with them there for my people and my heritage, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and parted my land" (Joel 3:2).

Why should the Joel prophecy have so obvious a connection with Rev. 14? Because of the prophetic principle we have been at pains to put forward, that fulfillment is continuous, and to be spiritually understood. The armies of the heathen are constantly in motion against the saints of the Lord. The valley of Jehoshaphat is always the place where the Lord judges them and brings their

assault against His church to nothing. All leads up to the Last Judgment which is the culminating point of all judgment, and the final assurance to the church that God's righteousness will prevail against her would-be destroyers.

It is of interest to note that Joel varies the name of the valley in one instance - in verse 14 (chapter 3) where he calls it "The valley of decision" – "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (margin, concision, or threshing). Not as some have used the term, in description of some evangelistic effort. Not "decision for conversion" but the place and time where the Lord's judgment comes into action and decides or settles the fate of those powers which oppose the divine work.

The range of Joel's prophecy is very great. This is shown in Peter's use of it on the Day of Pentecost when he gave a gospel interpretation to that great passage in Joel's second chapter and thereby settled the interpretation of Joel as being a prophecy of Christ, the church, with the sun going down in judgment on the old order, and the new covenant kingdom arising on the ashes of the old. "For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord will call". (Joel 2:32. See also Acts 2:16-21)

Peter's unerring inspiration which taught him that Joel's second chapter was descriptive of the church's inauguration at Pentecost is balanced with John's vision concerning Joel's third chapter which teaches that all the enemies of the Kingdom of Christ will be brought low when the Lord arises to judge the cause of His people.

TREADING THE WINEPRESS

We come to the concluding verses of our chapter 14:

"The angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs."

Clearly this is a picture of the last judgment. The "vine of the earth" must be considered in contrast with those familiar words of the Saviour – "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman" (John 15:1). In Isaiah 63, Christ is presented as the judge of all enemies of His redeemed people, and He comes from

Edom with garments dyed in the blood of the foe, declaring, "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me. I will tread them in my anger and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment". The first sentence of this verse is often taken as a picture of the crucifixion, but the remainder of the verse shows how mistaken is that view. Christ appears in this chapter of Isaiah not as the Deliverer, but as a judge, visiting vengeance upon the apostate nations who oppress the Church: "The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come".

In Rev. 19 we have a similar picture of the final judgment – "He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God". Christ appears, as in Isaiah 63, 'clothed with a vesture dipped in blood' (Rev. 19:13-15).

1600 FURLONGS

The final verse has given much difficulty to those who favour the literal interpretation of Revelation. The winepress is trodden outside the city, and Hengstenberg points out that in the Apocalypse this city, unless otherwise designated can only mean the City of God, the Church. In Rev. 20:9, we have the last view of the conflict between the city of God and the inhabitants of the world's city. There John calls the Church, "the beloved city" and views it as surrounded by the deceived nations, Gog and Magog, upon whom the fire of God's judgment descends. In the last chapter of Joel also, the judgment is against the enemies gathered against Jerusalem, and this, says Hengstenberg expresses the idea that 'hostility to the Church is the occasion of the judgment'.

"Blood came out of the winepress even unto the horse bridles, by the space of 1600 furlongs". The blood is the juice of the vine trampled in the process of the divine judgment. The tide of blood is so copious that it rises to the level of the horse bridles. The mention of horses could mean either the horses sometimes employed in the trampling of the grapes in the winepress, or as some prefer, the symbolic white horses on which 'the armies of heaven' ride forth with Christ to the destruction of the enemies of the people of God (Rev. 19:14).

The 1600 furlongs (almost equivalent in Greek, Roman and English measurement) show the limitless extent of the judgment - 200 miles in every direction and deep enough for a horse to swim. The significance of the number 1600 presents no difficulty. The Speaker's Bible points out, "Sixteen hundred is the square of 40, or the square of four multiplied by the square of ten; and thus as four is the signature

of the earth (see Rev. 7:1), and 10 is the number of completeness, this symbolic number denotes a space of vast magnitude". Hengstenberg understands "A judgment encircling the whole earth". In other words, a judgment of the world, full and final. We would include also "the square of forty" as that number always denotes probation. Justice will be perfectly measured and fulfilled.

THE FORMAL PRELUDE TO JUDGMENT (Chapter 15:1-8)

All lines begin to converge as history moves into its last phase, and the long story of God's dealings with man, from the time of his first creation in Eden, approaches its conclusion. If chapter 14 contains a description of the Last Judgment, chapter 15 goes over the ground in greater detail showing the successive blows which lead to the Judgment. If the clock struck 12 midnight at the end of chapter 14, it is now set back to the beginning of that last hour.

The first verse sees the assembling of the angelic officers, seven in number, who pour out, at the word of command, from their golden vials, those successive judgments which usher in the last great day.

Next (verses 2-4) we have a description of the people of God: in the following four particulars:

First, we have their identity- they have obtained the victory over the Beast and his image and mark. That is, the power of this world, its deceits and blasphemies, its errors and apostasies, has been trampled under their feet.

Secondly, we have the standing -on the motionless sea of God's wisdom, providence and grace. Nothing changes here. All is still, peaceful, and at rest. Here is the immutable counsel of God in the redemption and preservation of His people: they stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

Thirdly, they have a unique song: "They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and of the Lamb". The title of their song - Moses and the Lamb - indicates that Law and Gospel unite in proclaiming the deliverance of God's people.

Fourthly, we have their declaration, "Great and marvelous are thy works, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name: for all nations shall come and worship before thee: for thy judgments are made manifest".

This wonderful assessment of the works and wisdom of God is the final answer to the lie of the Serpent in the Garden impugning the integrity of Almighty God and accusing Him of a selfish intent in withholding from Man the knowledge of good and evil. But the Church knows, and declares that God's ways are just and true, and that this will be acknowledged by all creation. The Creator will be vindicated at the last, and all opposing assessments will be put to silence.

The reading in the AV, "King of saints" has been almost unanimously opposed by the commentators in favour of the reading "King of the nations". The phrase is certainly taken from Jeremiah 10:7- "Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?" No doubt it is because of this variation that the question has arisen, but our translators knew what they were doing when they put 'saints' in the text, and 'nations' in the margin, for they allowed that John also knew what he was doing when, under the impulse of divine inspiration he accepted the change of words. The variation is intentional. The sovereignty of God over His people is in view, and more than a hint is given that it is 'the nations of those who are saved' (that is, the saints) who are deliberately intended, for that is what John is led to write in chapter 21:24: "The nations of those who are saved shall walk in the light of it". Also in verse 26: "They shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (v.26). In other words, the nations in view are not the nations of the world as such, but those out of all nations who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, and who represent in themselves the glory and honour of the created world.

The character, wisdom, and justice of God are fully vindicated in the salvation of His elect. The judgments of God are assessed and approved by the total assembly of the saints, who thus celebrate the final triumph of Christ.

PREPARATION FOR JUDGMENT

The remainder of chapter 15 gives a remarkable picture of the deliberate nature of the preparation for the last events leading up to the final judgment:

"And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.” - v. 5-8.

The opening of the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven” is the full revelation or unveiling of the mystery of the righteousness of God, so that all creation understands what it is and how God upholds and vindicates that righteousness. In the earthly tabernacle the purpose of these structures was figured in the Most Holy chamber in which reposed the Ark of the Covenant, containing the two tables of the Law written with the finger of God on Mount Sinai. None had access to that place except the High Priest, and he only once a year. The rending of the veil of the temple guarding this Most Holy place from all unlawful access was a significant accompaniment of the death of the Saviour on the Cross. That death opened the way by direct access to the presence of God for every penitent soul, without intervention of any High Priest other than “Jesus the Son of God who has passed into the heavens” (Heb. 4:14).

There is no temple in heaven. The phrase is figurative of that which the temple represents - access by sacrifice to the Presence of a Holy God. Its ‘opening’ prior to the Last Judgment shows that the righteousness of God is about to be revealed to all creation for it is the righteousness of God which is the conditioning factor of the entire universe. Impugned as that righteousness was when Satan left his first estate and became the dark spirit of evil, the tempter of our first parents (and of all their posterity), creation must continue on its course until that moment when the mystery of God is finished and the divine Name fully vindicated and glorified. That great moment is hastening on. Only God knows when that point is reached when no more remains to be proved. Not a moment longer will the present creation exist. The Name of God will be exalted above all, to the rapture of angels and redeemed men and the confusion of Satan and all who are with him.

We must not anticipate the revelations of the great Judgment Day, but we must remain content with what it has pleased God to make known to us. Faith anticipates the answer to all hard questions by saying here and now, in the words of our third verse, “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” .What faith now accepts the judgment will fully reveal, in all the glorious colours of God’s matchless wisdom and grace. Christ will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied - and so shall we, for whom He suffered in the agony of the Garden and

the shame of the Cross.

For He is God - Christ is God: God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, the Word, the Power and the Wisdom of God, incarnate in our flesh, in Whom the Godhead proved Itself and showed Itself to be eternal and unqualified Love, in truth and righteousness, glorious in holiness.

The opening of -the Temple in heaven will declare the mystery of divine election, which is so profound a mystery to the elect themselves. It will answer all questions satisfactorily. We shall see then that the extent of redemption reaches to the utmost sublime limits which grace and wisdom combined have determined. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

Before the blazing light which streams from the temple of God opened in heaven, all the wisdom of men and their hard speeches against God and against His saints, will come to naught. They will dissolve for ever as they dash themselves against those ramparts which guard the holiness of God. Not one accusing mark will be left upon the white marble of the divine holiness. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth!" (Psalm 80:1). Faith waits for God to have the last word. The opening of the mystic temple will not only vindicate His Name but will demonstrate the unique glory of Christ and will vindicate the Lord's people from every charge which men or devils have made against them. Hell itself must acknowledge the righteousness of the divine judgment.

In short, at the centre of the universe is a holy Law. That Law is the transcript of God's own righteous nature. It is the signature of His Name on the document of Creation. It is the underwriting and the endorsement of His character in all that He does. It is the assurance, the warranty, the guarantee, and the pledge that all He does is perfect truth and righteousness. The opening of the mystic temple is the sign that all has been fulfilled and the Law of God finally upheld. The wicked will not escape retribution and the redeemed will be proved untouchable by the power and malice of the foe.

Man is God's greatest work, made for a little while lower than the angels, to be crowned at the last with glory and honour. Paul tells us in Hebrews (and it was Paul who wrote that treatise - who else?) that we see not yet all things put in subjection to Man, but we see Jesus (God incarnate as Man) made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. In other words, man's destiny is achieved by God becoming man and it is this that destroys Satan and

proves to be his hell. By destroying man he has only prepared the way for God to travel to His own glorious destiny, and to achieve His complete triumph through death, and thus to destroy him that had the power of death, namely the devil (see Hebrews 2).

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6) - for the Kingdom of God and His temple are established by humility, faith, poverty of spirit, worship and testimony. Noiselessly, ceaselessly, without ostentation, the Almighty travels to His glorious destiny by the road of that love which lives only to give itself in deepest self-surrender.

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

The vision of the Seven Last Plagues in chapter 16 is a clear example of how prophecy recapitulates itself in history. There can be no doubt that these seven last ‘vial’ judgments or plagues are designed to teach us of the final judgment upon the kingdom of this world, the dominion of Satan. The scene is on earth, and not in heaven, therefore the Seven Plagues must be regarded as preliminary to the last and final judgment of the world when earth and sea and sky are swept away. It is for this reason that chapter 16 must be read in conjunction with the two following chapters which relate the downfall of Babylon, the city of this world, but having seen this we must be ready for a yet further period, however short, of Satan’s last desperate assault upon the City of God. Is this what we call “The Devil's Little Season” described in chapter, 20? We shall see.

Returning to our chapter 16 we observe gathered up into the symbols of the Seven Vials the successive blows by which Satan’s power is brought down, but on the principle of prophecy which we have learned we also perceive the pattern of all other judgments which in historic time have fallen upon Satan's system of evil - going back at least as far as the plagues of Egypt which furnish the pattern of the SEVEN LAST PLAGUES.

The scene is on earth, because earth is the only field of Satan's activity, as he boastfully claimed at the Temptation in the Wilderness, when he offered to our Saviour “all the kingdoms of the world, seen in a moment of time,” claiming “for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it” (Luke 4:5-8).

We note also the close similarity of many of the vial judgments with the trumpet judgments of chapters 8 and 9. This similarity cautions us to perceive that these judgments are not to be regarded as literal descriptions of events on

earth, but entirely symbolic. Nor does the pouring out of the last vial coincide with the end of the world. We are face to face with the same problem which has so often baffled the attempts made to explain the Lord's Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). He appears to be intermingling the impending destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the World and the two events are seemingly inextricable. Let this be fearlessly recognised for it is indeed the fact.

The two events are united and considered as one and the same judgment, though separated by thousands of years, for again, this is the genius of prophecy, and because it is not recognised it has led to so much confusion down the centuries. The same principle of recapitulation obtains in the OT prophecies of the restoring of Israel. Israel WAS restored in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the prophecies embraced something far more glorious than that. Under the symbol of the earthly Israel a new Israel and a new Jerusalem were in contemplation, and because that generation of the old Israel did not perceive this, they did not recognise the Lord of glory, neither did the apostles perceive the nature of prophecy till after Pentecost. It is to be feared that few of our prophetic students have managed much better in this field than their Jewish predecessors.

Under single figures prophecy embraces a long succession of divine judgments (or blessings) throughout history so that no generation of believers, whether in OT or NT, is left without consolation - or warning.

Again, under this master-principle we see that prophecy was never intended to take the place of faith, as would be the case if prophecy were merely 'history written in advance'.

Hence our sixteenth chapter of Revelation must be linked with the two following chapters which describe the down fall of Babylon, the city of this world, and the counterfeit to the city of God. But the judgment of Babylon began long ago -as far back as Nimrod, the builder of the first Babel (Babylon). That judgment is running its course still. Babylon is always with us and always it is being destroyed, and always raised again in an endless variety of forms and deceptions. The world's city is the city of confusion (or deceit), as its name Babel indicates. Always it aspires to raise itself from its own ruins to perpetuate its career of deceit and violence. At one time it is Egypt. At another it is Nineveh. It becomes Babylon again under the reign of the Chaldees in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. It survives its own destruction and reappears as Imperial Rome in the heart of Europe, the master of the world. Again the centuries roll by, and Imperial Rome falls never to rise again - except in its ghost, Rome Papal, the Harlot of the Seven Hills reigning over the

kings of the earth. The scene changes (as it has changed in modern times) for Papal Rome has been devoured by its own children - the ten kings of Rev. 17. And this last phase must make way for what surely must be the last chapter of Babel's long history, when all disguise is thrown aside and the devil marches out from the place of his restraint to the last battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14). The Loosing of Satan (chap. 20) is the ultimate phase of the long story. Without disguise the devil leads his last campaign of atheistic revolt involving the whole earth.

His total defeat at the hands of Him who was dead but is alive for evermore is followed by the concluding two chapters of the Apocalypse showing the eternal triumph of the redeemed with their glorious Redeemer.

We read chapter 16 therefore as a prophetic principle constantly working itself out in history, but having of necessity a concluding phase which we do well to approach with caution. We proceed to a rapid survey of our chapter.

THE FIRST VIAL

The seven vials are divided into three and four, the interval being marked by the solemn voice of the angel of verse 5 and the response from the altar in verse 7. The first three vials are poured upon earth, sea and rivers of water. The last four on sun, throne (of antichrist), the mystic river Euphrates, and finally into the 'air' provoking thunders and lightnings and a great and vast earthquake, which completes the ruin of the great city Babylon.

THE POURING OUT OF THE VIALS

(Chapter 16)

In verse 1 the seven angels are commanded to pour out their vials. A great voice out of the temple signifies that the time of judgment has come, and the Lord is about to pour on the disobedient the crushing weight of His holy and just sanctions. The first vial is poured on the earth (meaning the inhabitants of the earth), and in particular the plague singles out "the men that had the mark of the Beast and who worshipped his image". This shows the specialised character of the judgment, as being confined to antichrist's kingdom. As in Egypt, the plague is only upon the wicked, not the people of God. The nature of the plague is 'a noisome and grievous sore' corresponding to the "boil breaking forth with blains" inflicted upon man and beast in Egypt (Exodus 9:10).

We have found little help among the commentators. Hengstenberg comes nearest in our view but falls short of a complete development of the figure. Rightly he says that the word earth (“he poured out his vial upon the earth”) indicates the earthly minded, “the men who shut themselves up in alienation from heaven”. The reference to “the men who have the mark of the Beast” means (says Hengstenberg) that these worshippers have “become beastlike”. This cannot but be true, for we inevitably become like that which we worship. “They that make them are like unto them” (Psalm 115:8). Again, with special meaning here, “Man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:12). The boils and blains of our text cannot mean a bodily disease and therefore can only relate to a state of soul. The wicked are given over to the sins they have chosen; to discover the torment of their souls; to restless, unsatisfied passion; to the foul and shameful state of society when its members give themselves over to lust and violence. Is there not some token of this in our society today? We are finding out that pleasure-seeking, godlessness, indecency, abandonment to passions, shameless surrender to sin in thought, word and deed, bring their own sore and painful judgment. “The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed” (Deut. 28:27).

THE SECOND AND THIRD VIALS

The second vial is poured upon the sea, which becomes “as the blood of a dead man” and all living things therein, die. This vial is after the pattern of the first Egyptian plague, and must be taken together with the third vial which turns ‘the rivers and fountains of water’ into blood. The angel of the waters cries, “Thou are righteous, O Lord because thou hast judged thus, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are worthy”. Judgment is exact and precise. People cannot of course literally drink blood instead of water. This is a figure of exact divine recompense for sin. Those who have slain the righteous and boasted of their impunity will obtain an exact recompense. The sea turned into blood is the sea of this world, the kingdom of the evil one, and as blood signifies death, so the sources of life shall be stopped. The rivers and fountains of water represent those gracious ministries of the Spirit by which alone men can live. The rejection of the Spirit must be followed by the judgment: that which was meant for life becomes death to the unbeliever. The Word of God rejected becomes the instrument of death.

v.7: “And I heard another (angel) out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.” The truth and righteousness of God will be preserved, and because of it the wicked will be condemned and put to

shame, and gnaw their tongues for pain.

THE FOURTH VIAL

The fourth vial is poured out on the sun which scorches the wicked with great heat, so that men blaspheme God rather than give Him the glory. Unprotected from the blazing heat of the sun, the world turns into a dry barren desert and wilderness, and all life withers. That which is meant for blessing is turned into a judgment for those who reject the Word of God. In contrast we are referred to what Hengstenberg describes as ‘the fundamental passage’ in Isaiah 49:10: “They (that is, the people of God), shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them”. Those who reject the shepherding care of Christ must fall victim to the scorching heat of a conscience which even in the abyss will be never so much alive. “I am tormented in this flame” said the rich man in hell (Luke 17:23).

There is a striking fulfillment of the prophetic figure of the sun, in the fate of Israel as predicted first by Joel and then by Peter on the Day of Pentecost:

“The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come” (Acts 2:20; Joel 2:28-32).

The sun is a standing prophetic figure in the Bible. Cruden states, “The sun is frequently alluded to in a great part of the noble similitudes that the sacred authors make use of. To represent a great calamity they say the sun was obscured and the moon withdrew her light (Isaiah 13:10; 24:23; Jer. 15:9; Ezek. 32:7; Amos 6:9). To express a long continuance of anything that is glorious and illustrious in scripture style, it is said, ‘It shall continue as long as the sun endures’ (Psalm 72:5, 17). Christ is called the sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2). He enlightens, quickens, and comforts His people. A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet signifies the church clothed with the righteousness of Christ, purity of doctrine, and a holy conversation, and undervaluing (i.e., depreciation) of worldly things.”

Paul writes that the Law of God, which was meant for life, he found to be unto death, and that it was his sin which turned the blessing of the Law into a curse (see Romans 7:9-13). So with the sun of God’s righteousness. The sun represents, prophetically, the favour of God. It is the source and sustainer of all natural life on the earth. Hence God is said to be our sun and shield (Ps. 84:11), and the people of God are assured, “The sun shall not smite thee by day” (Ps. 121: 6). On the other hand Joel’s words concerning the sinful nation which rejected their God and Lord

were terribly verified in AD 70, “The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood ...”

There can be but one meaning: God decrees the final end of Satan’s kingdom. The time of mercy ends. Mercies rejected become in themselves the fiery judgment of God’s holiness. They ‘blasphemed God for their pains, and repented not’.

Dr. I. Williams writes, “Light without love. The sun burns. Life itself is as death.... They are tormented in the presence of the Lamb (chap. 14:10)”. To see Christ as love and mercy condemned and rejected, is as the scorching of the sun.

THE FIFTH VIAL

“The fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness, and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”

The seat is the throne or the power of the Evil One and it is given by Satan to his regent, the antichristian kingdom, according to that word in chap. 13:2: “The dragon gave him his power and his seat, and great authority”.

Satan rules mediately, by proxy as it were, disguising himself from direct identification, and appearing as a benefactor of the human race. Yet all the time he retains the real control of his deceitful kingdom of darkness. The pouring out of the vial upon the throne of the Beast therefore denotes the beginning of the end of Satan’s reign.

Hengstenberg wisely and magnificently writes, “The throne of the Beast is situated at different places in different times; this is as certain as that the Beast has seven heads. At the period of the Chaldean dominion it was at Babylon; at the time of John it was at Rome. At the end of time, after the thousand years it will be set up again in some sort of way under Gog (Note, Gog) and Magog. But wherever it may stand it will be struck by the fifth Vial. For like all others, this has a comprehensive character; it accompanies the ungodly power through the whole of its history. The whole character of the group of the Vials is misapprehended if an exclusive application is made of it to the relations of Rome. They have all to do, not specially and exclusively with the whore Rome, but with the Beast, and ungodly world power in its collective character”.

The darkness is after the analogy of the ninth Egyptian plague (Exodus 10:21). Darkness, says Hengstenberg, is “the image of the divine wrath”. It is the opposite of light which always denotes the mercy and favour of God. Like the Egyptian darkness, this is darkness which may be felt - which fills the mind with foreboding and terror. As light was the first work of creation, so to be deprived of it is to extinguish all hope. Rightly, the Speaker’s Bible notes that the mention of pain as the result of darkness naturally leads to the symbolical interpretation of this vial - and also to the preceding vials. Natural darkness does not produce pain.

We view this vial as indicating therefore that the consolations of the divine mercy, and that beneficent preaching of the Word of God which brings peace and hope and light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, is withdrawn or all but extinguished, with consequences to the world which are incalculable in the despair and fear which must come upon the world.

Beyond all doubt, history is strewn with examples of this, but like all these plagues, the moment of final fulfillment must come. Is such a moment upon us now, when churches have lost their message and closed their Bibles; when theological colleges have given themselves over to negations, denying the veracity of the Bible, questioning the birth at Bethlehem, pouring doubt upon the integrity or even the very existence of Jesus of Nazareth, His miraculous attestation, atoning death, and literal and glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven? If the light that is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness? And how long can churches survive as a living institution when they pass, as they are doing before our eyes, into the darkness of doubt and denial, denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing upon themselves swift destruction?

Their tongues they gnaw for pain. The tongue should speak for God and truth and salvation and holiness and Christ. When it speaks in denial or doubt of that which is for the essential life and deliverance of man, what remains but the tortures of conscience and the wages of sin?

Addendum

The Pope's Helmet

A valued friend, formerly a police officer in a responsible position; and an earnest believer in Christ and in the Word, has made inquiry regarding the policeman's helmet presented by members of the Roman Catholic Police Guild (London) to the late Pope Paul VI. He has ascertained that the City of London police (as distinct from the London Metropolitan police) do in fact have their numerals on their helmets - the only force in Great Britain so far as we know, to be so identified. Our friend is able to confirm that the number on the Pope's helmet was in fact 666. We are indebted to our friend for this information. We do not of course see anything of significance to Biblical prophecy in this circumstance. It proves nothing except that the Roman Catholic Police Guild members who presented the helmet to "His Holiness" were certainly completely ignorant of the Book of Revelation. Whether Paul VI was equally ignorant is a point on which it is unlikely we will receive any information, for he has now passed from us to the judgment which awaits all - followed in dramatic circumstances (which many people in Italy and elsewhere regard as highly suspicious) by his successor Pope John-Paul I after a "reign" of but a few days.

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI

APPRECIATION

We are greatly encouraged from time to time by the kindness of friends who write to us to express their appreciation of our effort to raise the standard of Biblical exposition in our generation. We feel we must share with our friends the following letter we have received recently from a most valued and mature servant of the Lord:

Dear Brother in the Lord - Time and again you have refreshed my spirit with your God-honouring, Christ-exalting expositions of Scripture. My whole being was strongly uplifted as I meditated, with you, on "The Lamb on Mount Zion". And I looked on what John saw, with wonder and with praise. May the Lord Himself continue to maintain you in your ministry and grant you much encouragement in His Word, by His Spirit. Yours gratefully in Him....