

Serial Number 047-05

REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 5

REVELATION 5 & 6:1-8

The Mystery of the Seven Sealed Book

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART FIVE

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN SEALED BOOK

Revelation 5 & 6

The blessing pronounced upon all who read the Book of the Revelation (to read, in spiritual language, is to understand and “keep its sayings” - Rev. 1:1-3, etc), is annexed because of all books in the Bible this one, in the fullest sense, shows forth, and is intended to show forth, in a series of magnificent figures, the triumph of the Redeemer and the certainty of the realisation of the holy purposes of the Godhead in Him. No wonder therefore that Satan hates the Book and does all in his power to confuse its message by delusive theories which either confine its meaning to the historic past or relegate it to the irrelevant future.

Of all chapters in this Book none is superior to chapter 5 in its showing forth of the glory and the worth of Christ. Four times the word “worthy” occurs in singling out the only One with qualification to execute the holy purpose of the Father in the mystery of creation: Who is worthy? (v.2); No man was found worthy (4); Thou art worthy (9); Worthy is the Lamb that was slain (12).

The scene is set in heaven. The eternal throne of God is the centre of the picture. Around the throne are the purest and loftiest intelligences, and in the immediate vicinity of the throne are the representatives of the redeemed Church under the figure of the four and twenty elders. In the right hand of the Occupant of the throne (not otherwise described as to His appearance, in deference to the divine mystery of the Eternal Being), is a book (a scroll) written within and without and sealed with seven seals. The problem of heaven at that moment was, “Who is worthy to open the Book and loose the seals thereof?”

The scene is purely figurative. God never sat on a throne. He never held a book in His right hand. These are but hieroglyphs to be interpreted. The book is the symbol of governmental and executive authority in the universe. What is written so profusely and completely on both its sides is the course of the age in relation to the Church, as determined in the unsearchable depths of the divine foreknowledge and wisdom.

This book is God's reply to the insolence and bitter hostility of the Church's enemies. The fact that it is written all over on both its sides indicates the fulness of the consolation which God has reserved for His afflicted people. Dean Alford: "It betokens the completeness of the contents as containing the divine counsels".

It is a 'strong angel' who demands to know who in all creation is worthy to take the Book and open the seals, and this shows the importance of the message which is sealed in the Book, and the finality of that divine counsel which it contains.

The tears of John who wept much because no-one in all creation was found worthy to take the Book and open the seals, thus to reveal and to execute the counsel of God on behalf of the afflicted Church, shows that the interest of the Church is wrapped up in this Book - a sure indication of the folly of those systems of interpretation which exclude the Church from all part or interest in the consolations and deliverances contained therein. We never tire of repeating that throughout Revelation, John acts as the representative of the Church for whom he was at that time suffering exile in Patmos at the hands of the power of this world.

John is next exhorted to cease his weeping, for One has been found who is worthy and able to open the Book and loose its seven seals. This One is the uncreated Son, now introduced under the designation, "The lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David". John looks, and in contrast to the angelic description, sees not a lion but a lamb - as it had been slain.

The contrasting description of this divine Champion who, comes forward for the defence of His Church, is based upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. The Lion of Judah rises from Jacob's dying words to his son Judah (Gen. 49:9): "Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey my son, thou art gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" This fundamental prophecy was first realised in David, the type of the King who was to reign for ever and ever. The prophecy rolls on magnificently from Jacob's dying lips, as though he saw - as indeed he did see - heaven's eternal king bestriding all creation as He comes to establish His eternal kingdom: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his Feet UNTIL SHILOH COME; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be". Shiloh (from which the name Solomon is derived), means PEACE. Christ is the Prince of Peace. The gathering of the people unto Him is descriptive of the world-wide nature of His Kingdom as He gathers His redeemed from all nations and languages to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The phrase, 'the root of David' is taken from the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah

11:1: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots”. Later in the chapter the prediction is developed: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people. To it shall the gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious”. (v.10) See Paul’s quotation of this prophecy in Romans 15:12.

The importance of this prophecy is marked in the allusions to it in other writings of the prophets: Jer. 23:5-6; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13. The meaning is clear. The dynasty of David had an eternal destiny which could only be realised in One who was at one and the same time David’s son and David’s Lord. The enigmatic nature of this prophecy which stems from David’s wondering and prophetic words in 2 Sam. 7:12-19, always baffled the earthly minded Jewish teachers (see the riddle propounded by the Lord Himself to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:41-46). They never could, or would understand that Messiah was to be both God and Man in One Person. The historic truth lying in the prophecy of Messiah as being root, branch, sprout or offspring of the Davidic stock, is seen in the decay and fall of the Davidic tree, so that for six centuries before Christ (from the Captivity under Nebuchadnezzar, till the Incarnation at Bethlehem) no king of David’s line ever mounted the throne. Yet unseen, unrecognised, a bud swelled from the old stock, a shoot appeared, a rod developed which was to rule not merely over a small earthly tribe but over the entire universe, on a throne which was eternal, which would never pass away.

In this Root so frail in its beginning, was the hope of all creation. Creation’s Lord would appear and become creation’s Victim in order that a new creation should emerge with Him from the shades of death and become a kingdom which would outlast all time and fill all eternity.

It is the realisation of this fundamental prophecy which is brought before John by the words of the Elder, as the antidote to his tears. He looks and sees “a Lamb as it had been slain, standing in the midst of the throne” - the centre of the scene. The designation, “a Lamb as it had been slain” is taken from the fundamental sacrifice offered by the first of the prophets, Abel (Genesis 4:4), and then by Abraham (Gen. 22:8). Thereafter the type was embodied in the Mosaic code, and mysteriously incorporated in Isaiah’s prophecy of the crucifixion – “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth”. (Isa. 53:7) Finally, John the Baptist points Him out to his disciples, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”. (John 1:29)

PROBLEM OF CREATION SOLVED

It is in this dual capacity, lion and lamb, King and Victim, that Christ attests His qualification to be the bearer of omnipotent power and prerogative wielded on behalf of His people, who are His kingdom. How different is this King from all earthly conceptions of kingship! The secret of the Godhead is not in power, but in humility, meekness, mercy and love. THIS is 'sovereign grace'. Divine sovereignty is not a mighty engine rolling down the avenue of history like some monstrous juggernaut crushing and mangling all in its ruthless path. The Lord God overcomes not by strength but by humility and weakness. He submits to death and shame and suffering. He rides to His enthronement, on an ass. "Behold, thy king cometh," cries the prophet, "riding upon an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass". Behold therefore your God! This is the absent page from most theologies - the meekness and humility of God. "I am meek and lowly in heart - therefore, learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls"

Herein lies the problem of the moral creation. This is what John sees in our chapter of the Seven Sealed Book. Behind the appearance of Christ as both Lion and Lamb, we see the answer to the great question which is suspended over the name, the goodness and the selflessness of God. Here is the Fall of Lucifer, and the intrusion of evil into creation. Satan attributes to God the prick and independence of his own darkened, fallen spirit. Written over Lucifer's history are the words, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself". (Psalm 50:21)

The slander of Satan is that God's rule is coercive and unjust, that it overrides the will of the creature and that God is therefore the sole creator of evil. The Lord repels the lie and destroys Satan not by almighty power (which would only have proven that Satan's theology was correct) but by submitting Himself to Satan's power so as to overcome by weakness, suffering the penalty of death (which Satan has brought into the universe) and paying the debt of suffering earned by the disobedience of others.

Thus the Lord establishes the law of creation on His own unchangeable nature of holy love, and raises a new creation out of the grave of the old - a moral creation which can never be altered or fail because in it a unity is created of God and man, in the divine Spirit, through God having become Man.

Satan's sin sprang from his revolt against his fate: his repulsion of his subordination to the creature man, who though created after the angels was

destined to rule over all as the regent of the Invisible God. What Satan did not know was that through his own act of rebellion he would bring about that very situation in which man's destiny would be realised by God becoming Man and proving by suffering and death and humble obedience, His own worthiness to be Creator and King over all.

HOW CHRIST "PREVAILS"

Special attention must be paid to the peculiar statement of the Elder (verse 5) that Christ has 'prevailed' to open the Book and to loose the seals. "The standing use of the Greek verb 'to conquer' in John's writings occurs more frequently than in any other N.T. writings" (Hengstenberg). This is the word here translated, "prevailed". It is the same word used in the next chapter "conquering and to conquer" used (as we hope to prove) of Christ in His all-conquering career of judgment against the foes of His kingdom. It is the same word used so frequently in the sense of 'to overcome' in chaps. 2 and 3 at the termination of each of the messages to the Seven Churches ("To him that overcometh"). We should note its use in John 16:33, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"; 1 John 5:4, "Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh, even our faith". Paul uses the same root word in Romans 8:37, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us".

Christ 'prevails to open the Book' in the sense in which He is presented as the Lion, the Root of David, and the Lamb of sacrifice. The lion of Judah indicates the all-conquering nature of this royal tribe; the mention of David brings into view the royal line which culminated in Christ 'in whom the race of David lived anew' (Hengstenberg). The designation of Christ as the Lamb occurs only in John among the four gospel writers. In Revelation it occurs 26 times. To 'prevail to open the Book' therefore means that Christ obtains the right to execute the divine judgments and carry the purposes of God through to final victory, in virtue of His absolute and filial obedience unto death as the sacrificial Victim who lays down His life that He might destroy the kingdom of sin and death and hell.

Thus has Christ prevailed by sorrow, submission, suffering, death and the grave to be the Revealer and Executor of the holy and sovereign purpose of the Godhead in the redemption of the Church and the subduing of all things to the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of holiness, truth, love, submission, and sacrificial obedience, that the Kingdom is won and the Victor is crowned.

Hence in John's vision, Christ is the Lamb who was slain, and He bears in heaven, and must bear everlastingly in His glorious body, the sweet memorial marks of His obedient love. Sovereignty must be safe in such hands as His - hands which are pierced:

Those dear tokens of His passion
Still His dazzling body bears –
Cause of endless exultation
To His ransomed worshippers.
With what rapture,
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

John's tears are ours. He sees, hears and feels on our behalf. These apostolic tears represent the age-long suffering of the people of God, while the exhortation of the angel – “Weep not, the lion of Judah, has prevailed ...” assures us that all is well. Christ is the origin, the goal, the REASON for all creation. Everything centres in Him who by His own submission to curse and death, proved Himself worthy to rule over all things - and so He must reign till all His foes are made His footstool.

UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM OF CHRIST

John's vision of 'the Lamb' is completed in the description, “Having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth”. Horns in Scripture represent kingdoms, powers, dominions. Seven horns denote completeness and fulness of power - omnipotence. Christ is God. None can wield omnipotence but He who is omnipotent. Likewise the seven eyes are the sevenfold completeness of the Divine Spirit. He in whom the fulness of the Divine Spirit is manifest is and must be God, for none can possess the Spirit of God but God. The description of “the Lamb” therefore is complete. He is God manifest in the flesh. The Second Person receives from the Godhead the symbolic Book of the divine counsel for the purpose of executing the same and establishing thereby the righteousness of God in the universe. All creation awakens at the sight. The Cherubim personifying the powers of divine creation, with the Elders, the representatives of redeemed creation, bow down before God and worship the Lamb. The redeemed sing a 'new song' never before heard in creation: it is the song of redemption,

“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; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”. - vv. 9-10.

Never heard before, because only now accomplished and understood: Now is creation’s task ended when there is brought forth by the worth and sacrificial obedience of the Son, that new creation of saints who are the priests and kings of creation, in whom all the meaning and purpose of creation, all the vast wisdom of God, finds its fulfillment.

As to the last clause, “and we shall reign on the earth” (or over the earth, as Scofield concedes) there is no ground for supposing this to mean an actual visible reign of resurrected saints on the cosmic earth. We quote with approval Alford’s note, “The whole aspect of this heavenly vision is not future, but present: the world and Church are now existing. The Church even now, in Christ her Head, reigns on the earth: all things are being put under her feet as under His: and even if this meaning be questioned, we have her kingly rank and office asserted in the present, even in the midst of persecution and contempt”. Alford refers us to Ephesians 2:6 – “He hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”. In other words, the Church is now reigning over her foes by reason of her position in Christ who, having overcome, is set down in His Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21).

The innumerable company of the angels takes up the theme (verses 11 and 12), and acclaims the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain, because angels too have a profound interest in the atoning work of Christ. They have no sins to be forgiven, but their true happiness and eternal security depend equally with ours on the worthiness of the Lamb to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing (vv. 10-11). Their security is founded on the successful accomplishment of Christ’s task.

Is there any mystery about the final acclaim of universal creation (verses 13-14)?

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.
And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”

No, there is no hint here of modern universalism with its teaching of general salvation for all the impenitent, including the devils in hell. This verse expresses the unanimity of all creation in the acknowledgment of the Triune God, revealed in Christ, as to the fitness of the Godhead to be Creator and Ruler of all things. Let no-one mistake the true and far-reaching meaning of these words. As the apostle Paul had earlier declared that at the name of Jesus every knee must bow, of things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11) so we are to understand that when all God's purposes are consummated, all creation will acknowledge that no imputation lies at the door of deity as touching God's integrity in holiness and truth. The original lie is laid for ever. The devil knows that he is wrong, and the final verdict of the judgment seat will be received and must be received, in all its righteousness and worth, by every creature in all the universe. The name of Christ must reign in hell just as surely as it reigns in heaven. Every tongue which has spoken against God will be silent. Nothing can ever again be spoken against the truth of God.

In hell, as in heaven, every knee must bow at the name of Jesus. There can be no dissent in any part of God's creation. Evil as an active element is abolished for ever, and will not arise a second time to trouble creation. The eternal state will in fact be eternal. The time of probation is over. Blessing and honour and glory and power are ascribed for ever unto Him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb. The association of the designation 'the Lamb' with the throne of God is indicative of that divine atonement achieved by Christ, through which the reconciling of all things has become cosmic in its extent. This does not mean - and we again repudiate any suggestion that it ever can mean - a universal restorationism; it can only mean the assent of all creation to the divine integrity, and the recognition that the death of Christ has proved fully and finally that the Being of God is unchangeable, perfect, and holy LOVE. It is of highest significance that the man without the wedding garment was speechless (Matthew 22:12) - that is, he is forever convinced of the true judgment of God and finds nothing to say against it, but rather in heart and conscience approves, even to his own everlasting shame.

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS - chapter 6

The opening or breaking of the seals signifies the disclosure of the contents of the parchment scroll now in the hand of Christ. Instead of words John sees symbolic pictures which remain for the Church to interpret. The general meaning should not present great difficulty so long as we rely on the Word of God in all its parts to be its own interpreter. The first four seals introduce FOUR HORSEMEN, one of

whom is the captain and the other three are those who wait upon His commands. The first, or captain of the cohort, is Christ. The other three are the ministers of the divine vengeance directed by Him in the course of history.

The fifth seal introduces the faithful martyrs who have died for the cause of Christ. They are introduced to symbolise the witness of the Church down the ages - a witness even unto blood. The sufferings of Christ's witnesses and the delay of the day of vengeance shows the righteousness of God in the calamities which are to be directed upon the enemies of the Kingdom of God.

The sixth seal illustrates the successive judgments which in age after age break the pride of the wicked and frustrate their evil designs.

The seventh seal (which is not broken until the beginning chapter 8) finally releases the judgments as a whole, and contains the record of those judgments until the end of time. Hence we have the following scheme:

SIX SEALS which disclose the agents of the divine justice, or the resources at God's disposal for the deliverance of His people.

The **SEVENTH SEAL** which introduces and contains within itself the movements of divine providence conducting the Church through a hostile world until the moment of final deliverance and triumph in heaven. This Seal introduces **SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS**, which may be said to be contained in the **LAST SEAL** and which pictorialise those acts by which, throughout the ages, God has brought down the power of the enemy and opened up a pathway for the deliverance of His people.

The **SEVENTH TRUMPET**, like the **SEVENTH SEAL**, is comprehensive. Though in fact it is the **LAST TRUMP** described by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:52 as signalling the coming of the Lord and the great Resurrection Day (see also 2 Thess. 4:16), yet in John's vision it comprehends a rapid sequence of terrible judgments known as the **SEVEN VIALS** (Rev. chaps. 15 and 16) which mark the last chapter of human history in this world.

Interspersed between these sequences of **TRUMPETS AND VIALS** are more detailed descriptions of the judgments referred to, in addition to vivid symbolic pictures of the Church's sufferings and testimony during the entire course of time.

The Apocalypse thereupon closes with the final scene of the blessedness and joy which await the righteous (the Church) who throughout the long ages have kept the faith and now receive their full reward in union with God in the heavenly paradise, the UPPER EDEN, the Garden of the soul.

The Book is therefore a unity, forming a key to the understanding of the mystery of the journey of the redeemed through a hostile wilderness of a world, and their unscathed arrival at last at the destiny decreed for them from the foundation of creation.

Returning to chapter 6, it is clearly to be noted that the FOUR HORSEMEN do not represent successive phases of history, but only the ACTORS on the stage of history. Much confusion has arisen through the non-recognition of this fact. Most of the writers of the "Historical" school have sought to relate the four riders to Roman emperors, or phases of the decline of the Roman Empire, and the TRUMPET judgments to be a fresh series of historic phases following the fall of Rome. The confusion has arisen because writers have not sought sufficiently in the Old Testament (from which the figures are taken) for the elucidation of the mystery.

THE FIRST SEAL

The misconceptions of Futurism are if anything more to be deplored than those of the Historical school, as we shall now see as we come to the interpretation of the FIRST SEAL:

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”
- Rev. 6.1-2

The hurt which the Futurist view has inflicted upon the Church is nowhere more evident than in its cardinal error of mistaking Christ for Satan (or Satan's henchman) as the subject of the First Seal.

We quote from W.E. Vine's little book entitled, "The Sealed Book of the Apocalypse":

“We must distinguish this rider from the One in chap. 19:11. The Rider in the latter case is Christ at His second advent. The one in chapter 6 is apparently a Satanic anticipatory imitation of Christ, and represents the Antichrist at his accession to power”

Now the only places where the term “antichrist” is used in the N.T. are in the epistles of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). According to John antichrist was a present reality in his day, and we may therefore safely presume has been with us ever since, and is with us today. John says in the first of the quotations above,

“Little children it is the last time, and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time”.

In the second quotation antichrist is identified by his doctrine - he “denies the Father and the Son”. In the third quotation John warns that “the spirit of antichrist” is the “denial that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”.

“THE LAST TIME”

“The last time” is not some era yet future when the age is expiring, but the whole of historic time since the Incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. John specifically declares in the quotation above, “It is the last time”. Paul concurs in Hebrews 1:1 and Heb. 9:26. Antichrist is not a person due to appear near the end of time, but a malignant spirit of error which has always been with us and which organises itself into an apostate kingdom ‘opposing and exalting itself against all that is called God or that is worshipped’ (2 Thess. 2:4-8). In Paul’s day the error was not fully developed. There was a hindering power which must be removed before the anti-christian system could openly reveal itself. That hindering power was Imperial Rome, then and for centuries after, the mainstay of paganism. When Rome fell the throne of Paganism became vacant for the occupation of a new and ecclesiastical kingdom the identity of which is well known to all who have the most elementary acquaintance with history.

Error changes its form but not its nature, and the denial of the Son may be just as effectively performed by the false exaltation of Mary, as by the relegation of Christ to a purely human figure without His Godhead. The early Grecian error denied His manhood; the modern error now rampant in what used to be the Protestant churches raises grave doubts as to His true deity.

“Antichrist” is not a person, but a system of error masquerading under the Christian name. It is always with us and is troubling the true Church today, whether it has its chief residence at Rome, or resides over the present Protestant apostasy.

For true men of God like Mr. Vine to assert that the Rider on the White Horse in Rev. 6 is not Christ but antichrist, is not of course an error of a fatal order, and it does not contain any principle placing saving faith in jeopardy, but that it is a grave error of exposition, carrying consequences of far-reaching effect to the understanding of all the prophetic scriptures, who would deny? We proceed to what we consider to be invincible proof that the Rider of the First Seal is none other than Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Head of the Church, riding forth on an unbroken career of conquest against every foe which rises up against His Kingdom.

THE MAN AMONG THE MYRTLE TREES

The first proof is the correspondence between this royal rider and Zechariah’s vision of “The Man among the Myrtle Trees” (Zech. 1:8). The situation in Zechariah’s day and that of John at Patmos was prophetically similar. In Zechariah’s time, all the world was at rest and only the Church of God (Israel) was troubled. This was precisely the case with John, when a general peace reigned throughout the world, and only the people of God were troubled. See Zech. 1:11, where the agents of God reported, “We have walked to and fro through the earth, and behold all the earth sitteth still and is at rest”.

The Lord appears, to comfort the prophet and to reassure His people. Zechariah sees Him as a rider on a red horse, followed by squadrons of horsemen riding horses red, speckled (margin, bay) and white. The variation of the colours as between John’s visions in Rev. 6 and that of Zechariah is required only to avoid an artificial correspondence which would impair the independence of the visions. The substance is the same. John’s foremost rider is on a white horse, and His three agents riding after Him and under His command are mounted on horses red, black, and pale. The identity of the two visions is preserved in the number four and the purpose for which the squadrons ride is the comfort and assurance of the people of God that with them are powers serenely superior to anything that can be against them.

Zechariah’s foremost rider is identified as the LORD in verse 13 (in the O.T. , LORD in capitals always represents what is in the original Hebrew, JEHOVAH) .

“The myrtle trees in the bottom” amongst which the riders are gathered represent the Church, whether of Old Testament or New. The myrtle is distinguished for its grace and modesty, and it is highly significant that Esther the Queen, contemporary with Zechariah, has her original name ”Hadassah” (Esther 2:7) which means ‘myrtle’. Esther is meant to typify the Church, and her history must be understood in this way. As she was preserved in the midst of the ungodly, so the people whom she represented were preserved when all things were against them.

That the myrtle trees were ‘in the bottom’ indicates their lowly position in the sight of the world, but Christ and the squadrons of His omnipotence are ever present to defend and exalt.

THE FOUR CHARIOTS

There is in Zechariah’s prophecy a further vision (chap. 6:1-8) which corresponds with that in chapter 1 and also with the horsemen of Rev. 6. This vision is of THE FOUR CHARIOTS AND THE MOUNTAINS OF BRASS.

Four chariots appear from between two mountains of brass. They are drawn respectively by horses: red, black, white, and bay. These four chariots are the agents of God's judgment upon opposers of His Word. “These are the four spirits of the heavens which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth” (v.5). Four, as usual in prophecy, symbolises universality; here, the presiding sovereignty of God’s judgments upon all nations, especially with reference to the preservation of His redeemed people, is in view.

Two chariots are sent to ‘the north country’, one to the south, and the fourth on a roving commission over the whole earth.

To the north and south of Israel in Zechariah’s day were located the two great empires of the oppression - Babylon and Egypt. The northern power in prophecy, be it known, is not Russia but the Euphrates empires. The only route of invasion of Palestine by the latter was by way of the river valley of the Euphrates which takes its rise in the mountains of Armenia to the north of Palestine. The Tubal and Mesech of prophecy are not (as is often so ignorantly claimed) Tobolsk and Moscow, but two cities of Cilicia lying immediately above Palestine, as any common Bible map will show. Dr. Scofield was apparently unaware that this is plainly shown in the first Bible map in his own Reference Bible. The Russian names have no more to commend them than a mere accidental resemblance of spelling, and we have often wondered why the insignificant city of Tobolsk should

ever have qualified (in the view of Futurism) for place in any realistic prophetic scheme. Petersburg (Leningrad) might have had a much superior claim. We mention these facts in the passing because of the misleading effect of theories which depend upon nothing more substantial than a fortuitous collection of consonants.

The immediate judgment upon Israel represented by the Babylonian power was ended (in Zechariah's day); God's Spirit of Judgment had been 'quieted' in the north country (v.8), by the casting down of this power. His indignation was past. Egypt would be subdued by the charioteer dispatched to the south, and would no more be a menace to God's people. There remained the great historic world outside, and this the Lord would keep within bounds by His judgments represented in the wide-ranging fourth chariot.

The mountains of brass are symbolic of God's impregnable defence of His Church in all situations – "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people" (Psalm 125:2)

The meaning of the vision is clear. Salvation is sure. All God's enemies (and those of His people) will be scattered. The correspondence of these two visions in Zechariah with that of John in Rev. 6 is beyond dispute. The horsemen are not agents of the devil, but of Almighty God. Therefore the first Rider of John's vision is the Son of God who leads the armies of the Lord, to whom is given the crown of universal conquest, as Zechariah's vision confirms also, for the crowning of Joshua (Hebrew for Jesus) the high priest, in the continuance of Zechariah's prophecy is in fact the crowning of Christ:

"Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both". - Zech. 6:13

When the visions, of Zechariah and of John, are considered, who will continue to teach that the all-conquering Rider of Rev. is not Christ at all, but the devil's henchman? And can anyone tell us what matter of consolation this could possibly be to the troubled people of God in John's day (or any other day) when this infernal rider is actually given command of those forces of war, famine and pestilence which we had always understood to be the prerogatives of omnipotence? John surely had dried his tears in vain!

THE RIDER OF PSALM 45

The second proof that the first Horseman of John's vision is the Son of God, is His identity with the Rider of Psalm 45. In the most glorious of psalms Christ is addressed as the Eternal God (compare verse 6 with Hebrews 1:8) and represented as commissioned (by the Father to 'ride prosperously' and cause all foes to fall under Him as His arrows pierce their hearts (v.4-5). To "ride prosperously" is the same as in John, "conquering and to conquer". John mentions the bow of conquest, and David the arrows of destruction flighted from that bow.

It is a curious reflection on the ineptitude of Futurism to produce true theologians and expositors, that because arrows are not mentioned in connection with John's rider, only a bow, therefore it is concluded that this is a different rider from the one in Psalm 45. This is scarcely worthy of a serious refutation, except to illustrate the weakness of such teaching not only in this place but in its entire treatment of the Apocalypse. We would point out that there are no arrows mentioned in Rev. 6, David's rider in Psalm 4 does not have a bow, though what use a bow might be without arrows, or arrows without a bow, is something which passes normal comprehension. We would point out to our friends that the bow stands in scripture as the symbol of warfare, and not even the most ardent of our literalists has ever been bold enough to assert that Antichrist actually will carry a bow or that Christ ever shot, or will shot arrows into the heart of His enemies. Jacob promised to Joseph a portion above his brethren "of that which he took out of the hand the Amorite with his sword and with his bow", (what, no arrows?) The children of Ephraim, being harnessed and carrying bows turned themselves back in the day of battle (Ps. 78:9): no mention arrows, though the existence of this essential part of their weapon no-one would deny.

Mr. Vine is not above taking the bow as a symbol of warfare when he adds, "... a bow, suggestive of conquest carried on at distance and by the removal of individual opponents. He (antichrist) rides to power by an easily gained series of successes, and as a Satanically aided genius he attains to leadership over the nations by his attractive personality and by his unprecedented powers of organisation".

So facile is it to describe in detail events supposed to be yet future when we shall not be present to be proved wrong. The attractive picture of antichrist, drawn by Mr. Vine, is standard amongst Futuristic writers - ever since Mr. Sidney Watson at the beginning of this century wrote his imaginary novel romantically describing the short-lived reign of Antichrist and his imposing personality and charm. It is a

picture which hardly fits in with the portrait of “the Beast” given by John in chapter 13 - a monster with seven heads and ten horns.

A CONQUEROR WHO KNOWS NO DEFEAT

The third proof that John’s rider is Christ lies in the true nature of His conquests. The term “conquering and to conquer” attributed to this Rider means an unending series of conquests, uninterrupted by any defeat, whereas even our Futurist friends must confess that their antichrist at the last meets his Waterloo. Alford’s comment at this point is worthy of reproduction:

“The going forth conquering in order to conquer can only point to one interpretation. The conquering might be said of any victorious earthly power whose victories should endure for the time then present, and afterwards pass away: but ‘to conquer’ can only be said of a power whose victories should last for ever. Final and permanent victory then is here imported. Victory we may say on the part of that kingdom against which the gates of hell shall not prevail: whose fortunes and trials are the great subject of this revelation. Such is the first vision, the opening of the first seal in the mystery of the divine purposes: victory for God’s church and people: the great keynote, so to speak, of all the apocalyptic harmonies. And notice that in this interpretation there is no lack of correspondence with the three visions which follow. All four are judgments upon the earth: the beating down of earthly power, the breaking up of earthly peace, the exhausting of earthly wealth, the destruction of earthly life”.

INTRODUCED WITH DIVINE HONOURS

The fourth proof is the greatest of all, and lies in **THE MANNER OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THIS RIDER AND HIS FOLLOWERS**. He (and they) are introduced with divine honours by a peal of thunder from the throne in heaven, and by a voice from the cherubim, “COME AND SEE”.

We are aware of the dispute which exists among the so-called textual authorities as to the validity of this reading, ”Come and see”. We are satisfied with the rendering in the Received Text which has been with the Church throughout historic time. “Come and see” is what the voice commands. Some textual scholars prefer the single word, “Come”, but their prejudice against the Received Text is well-known despite the voice of antiquity which sounds therein. The three oldest codices are the Sinaitic, the Vatican and the Alexandrine. The Sinaitic appears in this instance

to be favourable to the reading of the Received Text. The Vatican codex does not have the Book of Revelation at all. The Alexandrine is notoriously defective.

“COME AND SEE”

But there is an evidence in favour of our reading, superlative in its nature, and bearing with great power upon its true prophetic interpretation. The Book of Revelation is rich in its correspondence with Old Testament usages, and John himself had the best of reasons for being moved in his soul by this cry from the cherubim – “Come and see”. The cry is an announcement of deity:

“Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men”. - Psalm 66:5 (see also Psalm 46:8)

John had an experience which led him to attach supreme importance to these words, for they carried him back to his first encounter with his Lord. That John was one of the two disciples who were pointed to Christ by John the Baptist at the Jordan (John 1:35-36) there has never been any doubt. It was John’s custom in his Gospel to shroud himself in modest anonymity. He and Andrew followed the Lord who was aware of their presence (indeed, He had ordained from the foundation of the earth that this encounter should take place). The Lord turned and addressed the two disciples, “WHAT seek ye?” They replied, “Master, where dwellest thou?” The Lord replied, “COME AND SEE”. The startling nature of this, invitation was not lost upon John. It passed down the line of potential apostleship to Philip and through him to Nathaniel to whom Philip reported, “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth”

“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” asked Nathaniel.
Philip saith unto him, “COME AND SEE”. - John 1:46-47

The first flashing out of deity in the Lord’s words was not lost on John to whom every word of Him who was the Word was precious as ointment poured forth. The communication of the Lord’s saying was made to Philip who in turn arrested Nathaniel with its repetition.

Now John hears it again in the fourfold “Come and see” thundered forth from the cherubim. It is the announcement of the riding forth of omnipotence, in the Person of the Son, with the forces of history marshaled under His command, to break the power of this world and bring to confusion all the malice of the Evil One against Christ’s Church.

Yet our friends ask us to accept that the one who is thus introduced with divine honours and the voice of the cherubim is - the devil - or the devil's henchman! Exposition surely reaches its lowest point just here.

The three following horsemen who do the will of Christ in the execution of His judgments upon the kingdom of this world, are interpreted for us in the 8th verse of our chapter: "Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger and with death, and with the beasts of the earth". The figure occurs in the O.T. prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel:

"I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast."
- Ezek . 14:21

"I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."
- Jeremiah 14:12, etc.

The statement that power was given to these great horsemen 'over the fourth part of the earth' applies with peculiar force to the situation in John's day, for the Roman Empire under which he was oppressed could justly be considered to dominate the fourth part of the earth. But Rome is not the exclusive object of the vision. The judgment ultimately inflicted upon the cruel system which then persecuted the Church is repeated throughout history whenever a power arises to oppose the Kingdom of God. A brief look at the historical events of those early centuries of the Church's history will not come amiss at this stage.

Domitian (the tyrant who persecuted the Church in John's day) was the last of the Twelve Caesars (as they are known) , the immediate successors of the great Julius Caesar, all of them of the same family as that great man. Domitian died in AD 96 and thereafter, for 84 years (to AD 180) five great emperors reigned - Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonine's - Pius and Marcus Aurelius. It was a period of prosperity and tranquility, during which the world was at rest, and only the people of God were troubled (as in the analogous period described in the first chapter of Zechariah).

After the Antonine's came Commodus, a vicious profligate whose crimes led to his assassination in AD 192. For the next century, till AD 284, peace was taken from the earth. It was one of the most calamitous periods in world history. We are told that "32 emperors and 27 pretenders to the empire alternately hurried each other from the throne by incessant civil warfare". The economy of the empire broke

under the strain. Ruinous taxation impoverished the great families on whose stability the empire had been built. Prices soared, harvests were ruined, and scarcity and famine prevailed. Rulers in the western world today ought to take alarm as they see an analogy between those days and ours. Mounting public expenditure and savage taxation, along with the collapse of the old public virtues; the destruction of the middle classes and the breakdown of public morality, will as surely destroy our modern civilisation as it destroyed that of Rome in the early centuries of our era.

Pestilence swept the hungry, despairing masses, and the population of Europe sank by one-third - some authorities calculate by one-half. Gibbon tells us that from the year 250 to 265 a furious plague raged without interruption in every province, every city, and almost every family of the Roman Empire. Many towns were entirely depopulated. More than half the population of Alexandria perished. "Could one venture to extend the analogy to the other provinces" wrote Gibbon, "we might suspect that war, pestilence and famine had consumed in a few years the half of the human race".

Is it too much to warn that the whole world today trembles on the brink of a disaster more far reaching even than that which brought the mighty Roman Empire to terrible destruction?

The principal crime of our Western world today is not perhaps the open persecution of the righteous, but (a crime which Imperial Rome never fully knew), the despising of the treasure of God's Word which by so much suffering and sacrifice came to our fathers, but is now set aside and the god of forces, of gain, of pleasure, and the putrid dunghill gods of fleshly lust and moral pollution, to the wholesale degradation of human nature, have risen from their ancient graves to lord it over mind and conscience. (2 Peter 2:21, 22)

We have maintained that however applicable these judgments may be to a particular chapter of history they may not be confined exclusively to that period. As war, famine and pestilence are part of the total history of the human race, so these terrible horsemen are ceaselessly at work in obedience to divine providence breaking the power of nations and tyrannies and setting limits to their capacity for evil. The obvious connection between the horses and charioteers of Zechariah, and those of Rev. 6 shows that as they were fully engaged in the days of the OT prophet so are they in perpetual commission throughout the history of the Church of the New Testament, as agents of the divine justice.

THE APOCALYPTIC FAMINE

The one mysterious feature of John's horsemen, however, for which there is no counterpart in Zechariah, is the pair of balances in the hand of him who has to do with the apocalyptic famine. A voice from the midst of the cherubim proclaims, "A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny, and see that thou hurt not the oil and the wine". Much guesswork among commentators and writers might have been avoided if recourse had been made to the one passage in the Old Testament where there is a highly significant area of correspondence.

Some writers, without any regular investigation have settled for "food at famine prices", whereas the slightest acquaintance with Biblical prices and measures would have assured them of the contrary - that the food on offer is well within the capacity of everyone. Others, obsessed with the history of the Roman Empire, have held that the prices have to do with the ruinous taxation imposed on the farming community in the days of the Roman decline.

It is difficult to understand why recourse has not been taken to the wonderful connection with the words of Elisha during the siege of Samaria: "Hear ye the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria". (2 Kings 7:1)

The starving inhabitants of the besieged city were to find abundance of food at prices within the reach of all, within 24 hours of the prediction. The siege terminated abruptly the next morning and the entire population sallied forth to possess themselves of the spoil abandoned in the camp of the heathen army whom the Lord had caused to flee in terror from some invisible foe.

The only difference between the relief afforded to the Samaritan multitude and that described in Rev. 6 is that food is both cheaper and more plentiful in the latter case. The deliverance under Elisha is the type of the apocalyptic deliverance of the people of God, for whom the terrible horsemen of the divine justice ride only for their help and comfort. God has promised to keep the soul of His people alive in famine (Ps. 33:19). "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous" (Ps. 125:3). The difference which God makes between His oppressed people and those who would destroy them is that which distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians in the days of the plagues. There was light, life and peace in their dwellings.

SPIRITUAL PROVISION

We must not confine the divine solicitude for His people to material provision, of course, for the Book of Revelation must be spiritually understood. The wheat and the barley, the oil and the wine of Revelation 6 symbolise spiritual values. Here is the Word of God, the preaching of Christ, the sweet, sustaining, refreshing, ministry of the Spirit of God. In the worst of times, the Church will have her consolation. The wicked will be restrained and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be well-filled.

DEATH AND HELL

There is also a special significance to be attached to the description of the fourth horseman - he whose name is Death - and Hell followed with him (v.8). Death and hell are specially linked in Revelation (see chap. 1:18 and 20:13). The word for hell here is Hades and Hengstenberg remarks, "The word Hades is used in the NT only in reference to dead sinners. See especially Luke 16:23 where to be in Hades and to be in torment are inseparably connected together. In Rev. 20:13 it is the ungodly alone who are spoken of. Hades appears as their temporary receptacle after they leave the world. The subject is the judgments to be executed upon the ungodly world as opposed to the kingdom of Christ. For such to die and to go into hell is all one. Of the elect no account is made here. How it was to fare with them in the midst of these judgments first appears in chapter 7. Hades is appropriate here only as the place of torment, and is fitted to deepen the impression of terror".

We conclude that the judgments of Rev. 6 are not for the people of God, but for the wicked of this world in their oppressive enmity to the Church and her testimony. The Career of these terrible riders is not yet ended. Let the wicked world be warned.