
BLUE BANNER FAITH AND LIFE

J. G. VOS, Editor and Manager

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Jerusalem the Golden

By Bernard of Cluny, about A.D. 1145.

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

They stand, those halls of Syon,
Conjubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng;
The Prince is ever in them,
The daylight is serene;
The pastures of the Blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the Throne of David,
And there, from care released,
The song of them that triumph,
The shout of them that feast;
And they who, with their Leader,
Have conquered in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white!

And now we fight the battle,
But then shall wear the crown
Of full and everlasting
And passionless renown:
And now we watch and struggle,
And now we live in hope,
And Syon, in her anguish,
With Babylon must cope;
But He whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known,
And they that know and see Him
Shall have Him for their own.

And there is David's Fountain,
And life in fullest glow;
And there the light is golden,
And milk and honey flow—

The light that hath no evening,
The health that hath no sore,
The life that hath no ending,
But lasteth evermore.

For thee, O dear, dear Country!
Mine eyes their vigils keep;
For every love, beholding
Thy happy name, they weep.
The mention of thy glory
Is unction to the breast,
And medicine in sickness,
And love, and life, and rest.

The Cross is all thy splendor,
The Crucified thy praise;
His laud and benediction
Thy ransomed people raise:
"Jesus, the Gem of Beauty,
True God and Man," they sing,
"The never-failing Garden,
The ever-golden Ring;
The Door, the Pledge, the Husband,
The Guardian of his Court;
The Day-star of Salvation,
The Porter and the Port!"

When in my sin I totter,
I weep, or try to weep:
But grace, sweet grace celestial,
Shall all its love display,
And David's Royal Fountain
Purge every sin away.

Exult, O dust and ashes!
The Lord shall be thy part;
His only, His for ever,
Thou shalt be, and thou art!
Exult, O dust and ashes!
The Lord shall be thy part;
His only, His for ever,
Thou shalt be, and thou art!

Translated by John Mason Neale (selected stanzas)

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NUMBER 1

Scripture and the "Modern" Attitude

Exemplified by Selected Verses from Psalm 119

Compiled by J. G. Vos, Professor
Geneva College

The Holy Bible

53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy law.

63. I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts.

89. For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven.

97. O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Thy Word.

105. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

126. It is time for Thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law.

136. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law.

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not Thy Word.

160. Thy Word is true from the beginning; and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

162. I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil.

163. I hate and abhor lying: but Thy law do I love.

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek Thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments.

The "Modern" Attitude

What is there to be horrified about? They aren't wicked; they are just mature people with courage to reject outmoded tabus.

I am a companion of people who forget God. I find such people congenial.

The Bible needs to be changed to make it fit human desires and preferences.

I don't love it at all. In fact many a day passes without my giving it a serious thought.

I allow my feet to walk in the prevailing trend of the times. I don't want to be considered out-of-date.

My decisions and actions are motivated by the modern man-centered view of life.

Nonsense! God loves everybody. He is a realist and expects us to live in the 20th century.

Tears of repentance are foreign to my experience. I want to be positive, not negative.

"Transgression" is an outmoded idea. When I saw what the "transgressors" were doing, I was glad, because it showed their emancipation from legalistic ideas of ethics.

Truth is relative, not absolute. It changes with times and situations. How can a law over 3,000 years old be relevant today?

I couldn't care less about the Bible. My thinking and values are different.

I am a mature modern and am free from outworn inhibitions. What I hate and abhor is being fenced in by rules not of my own making; what I really love is to follow my own inclinations.

There is no real standard to stray from. God's "commandments" are only outmoded ancient tabus. Why bother about them? I don't want to be "sought"; I only want God to leave me alone.

Comment on the foregoing tabulation: Modern man is in rebellion against God. Especially modern man is in revolt against the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. The "modern" attitudes shown in the right-hand column are in contrast to the inspired religious and ethical norms of Psalm 119 and of the Bible as a whole. It is sad but only too true that many of these "modern" rebellious attitudes are found among nominal Christians and even among people who are members in good standing in evangelical and Reformed

churches. Satan uses the spirit of the world or the age to erode the faithfulness and vitality of the visible Church. Only by awareness of Satan's devices can the Christian and the Church guard against them. Dear reader, where do you stand? Do you realize that the world-view subtly communicated by the popular magazines and media is in rebellion against God? Or do you absorb it in slumbering unawareness that it is the antithesis of real Bible Christianity?

—Editor.

Arminianism and Sovereign Grace

By J. G. Vos

Many present-day Christians are confused about the Bible doctrine of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners. Certainly many who think they are following the teaching of Scripture are actually holding a view rooted in human reason rather than in the Word of God — a view which sets man's freedom of choice above God's eternal counsel as the ultimate decisive factor in human salvation. This view has had various names in the history of Christianity; the name most commonly used is Arminianism.

The name "Arminianism" comes from **Arminius**, which in turn is the Latinized form of the Dutch name **Hermanns** or **Hermansen**. It has no connection whatever with "Armenian," which is the name of a people and language of the Near East. The not uncommon confusion of "Arminian" with "Armenian" betrays lack of knowledge as to what Arminianism is. "Arminian" and "Arminianism" are theological terms; they denominate a particular interpretation of Christianity, or a particular system of theology. "Armenian," on the other hand, is an ethnological and linguistic term; it denominates a particular branch of the human race, and their language.

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian who was born in 1560 and died in 1609. However, Arminianism is really older than the time of Arminius. Under one name or another the basic ideas of Arminianism have existed through practically the entire history of the Christian Church. Thus, for example, the heresy of Pelagianism, which flourished in the fifth century after Christ, was basically similar to Arminianism. Similarly, the official theology of Roman Catholicism, which is based largely on the writings of Thomas Aquinas, includes features which resemble characteristic tenets of Arminianism. Throughout the history of Christianity the tendency to emphasize the freedom of man at the expense of the sovereignty of God has always been at work. Whenever this tendency has become strong and vocal, at any given time and place, heresy of the Pelagian-Arminian type has appeared. Moreover, it requires no special indoctrination to be an Arminian. The tendency toward Arminianism is always working in all of us, and is held in check only by the grace of God causing people to take the real

sovereignty of God seriously and to make Scripture truly normative in their thinking. Apart from such special grace of God we all tend to be Arminians; that is, we tend to magnify our freedom and powers and to think of ourselves as more or less independent of God.

Arminianism was at first a reaction against the Reformed theology, or Calvinism. It took offense at several specific doctrines of the Reformed Faith. The early Dutch Arminians were called "Remonstrants" because they issued a manifesto called the Remonstrance objecting to these doctrines of Calvinism. To settle this controversy, the historic Synod of Dort was called in Holland. It met in the years 1618 and 1619, and was attended by delegates from several countries besides Holland. The Synod of Dort declared the doctrines of the Remonstrants to be heretical, and in opposition to them it issued the Canons of the Synod of Dort which affirmed the truth of the contrary doctrines of the Reformed Faith. Although condemned as a heresy, Arminianism continued to exist and to influence people. In a somewhat modified form it was held by John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist Church. Today in English-speaking countries the majority of Protestants who are not liberals are Arminian in their theology, though many of them are members of officially Reformed or Calvinistic denominations. Many evangelical Christians who know nothing about Arminius and perhaps do not even know the term "Arminianism" are nevertheless Arminian in their thinking.

The five doctrines of the Reformed Faith to which the Arminians or Remonstrants objected were: 1. God's unconditional election of sinners unto salvation. 2. The total depravity of the unsaved sinner. 3. Particular atonement, or the doctrine that the intended purpose of Christ's atonement was to redeem the elect. 4. The efficacious character of the saving grace of God, which without fail brings about the salvation of the elect. 5. The perseverance of the saints, or the doctrine that the truly saved Christian cannot lose his salvation and perish eternally.

Over against these Reformed doctrines the Arminians held the contrary views, namely: 1. God's

election of sinners to salvation is not absolute, but conditional, being based on God's knowing beforehand that they will repent and believe the Gospel. 2. The unsaved sinner is not totally depraved, but has only been morally weakened by sin. 3. Universal atonement, or the doctrine that the intended purpose of Christ's atonement was to redeem all mankind. 4. The grace of God is not in itself efficacious, but only persuasive, and does not certainly bring about the salvation of anyone. 5. Truly saved Christians can at any time totally fall away from grace and so perish eternally.

The unscriptural character of the Arminian system was somewhat modified by the Methodists under John Wesley and especially Richard Watson, the most prominent Methodist theologian. This modified form of Arminianism is called "Evangelical Arminianism" and is the type of Arminianism most often found today. Wesleyan or Evangelical Arminianism is more Biblical, but at the same time less consistent, than the older Arminianism of the Dutch Remonstrants. Evangelical Arminianism still differs in important respects from the consistent Biblical Christianity which we commonly call Calvinism or the Reformed Faith.

The teaching of the Bible on the subjects of divine sovereignty and human freedom is paradoxical. That is, it seems to involve a contradiction. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign and that He has, from all eternity, foreordained every event that comes to pass in the field of time and space. This foreordination includes the choice of particular persons to be heirs of eternal life, and the passing by of others who are to be condemned to eternal punishment on account of their own sins. At the same time the Bible teaches that man is a free agent and is responsible for the use or abuse of his freedom. It is his duty to repent and believe the Gospel, and only by doing so can he receive salvation and eternal life. Here, then, is a paradox between divine sovereignty and human freedom. If God has foreordained all that comes to pass, including all my personal decisions, how can I really be free and how can I really be held responsible for my decisions? Am I not a mere robot or puppet manipulated by the eternal decrees of God?

Arminianism is a specific way of dealing with this and similar paradoxes of Scripture. It undertakes to solve the paradox by affirming the freedom and responsibility of man, and limiting the sovereignty of God to allow for this. Arminianism is, therefore, the belief that God is limited by man's free will. When they read in the Bible such statements as that of Ephesians 1:4 ("... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love"), Arminians interpret this in such a way that they hold that the real choosing is done by man, not by God. They say that God, before the foundation of the world, chose unto eternal life those who he knew beforehand would by their own free will repent and believe on Christ. This amounts to saying that God, in eternity, elected those of whom He knew that they would elect themselves. It maintains that God's act of election is a mere ratifying of a decision made by man's free will. A well-known evangelist is quoted as saying, "God's hands are tied. He can only wait for you to make your decision." Thus the Ar-

minian solves the paradox by affirming man's freedom and denying God's sovereignty.

Arminianism cannot do justice to Scripture. In interpreting the Bible in their own way, Arminians do violence to the words of Scripture. They cannot avoid doing this if they are to remain Arminians. They have to force unnatural meanings on statements of the Bible. For example, in Ephesians 1:11 we are told that Christians are "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Straightforwardly interpreted, this text certainly means that God's act of predestination was not determined by anything outside of God Himself, for God is said to "**work all things after the counsel of his own will.**" But Arminians interpret this to mean that Christians are "predestinated according to the eternally foreseen decisions of man's free will."

Again, Scripture teaches that Christians are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). This verse certainly teaches that the Christian's good works (including, of course, all the good decisions of his will) were foreordained by God in order that the Christian should perform them. It certainly teaches that these good works are the **outcome** of God's foreordination and saving work in the Christian. Arminians, however, are forced by their system to interpret this text to mean that the Christian's good works were foreordained by God **because He knew beforehand that the Christian would perform them.** Arminians are forced to maintain that one of those good works — the decision to accept Christ — is not the outcome, but **the basis or original source** of God's saving work in the Christian. They hold that God's eternal predestination is based upon God's knowing in advance that the sinner would (of his own free will) repent and believe.

Did God choose me because He foresaw that I would choose Him, or did I choose God because He first chose me? Which is prior, which is more basic, God's decision or man's? They cannot both be; one or the other must be the more ultimate and basic. Arminianism decides in favor of man's decision being the more basic, and is then forced to interpret Scripture all along the line in terms of this false principle. Arminianism is really rationalistic; it misuses Scripture because of what it regards as the demands of human reason. It cannot face a paradox or apparent contradiction and let it stand. At all costs the paradox must be solved, says the Arminian. So he solves it at the expense of the sovereignty of God, thus denying an important truth of Scripture, and at the same time involving himself in other difficulties that are even worse.

Calvinism faces the paradox between divine sovereignty and human freedom and allows it to stand unsolved, while it affirms **both** God's real sovereignty and man's true freedom. Calvinism leaves the paradox unsolved because it stands unsolved in the Bible itself. The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty and man's freedom. It does not tone down or "interpret" either of these in order to emphasize the other. When the issue is raised, as it is, for example, in Romans 9:19, the Bible

replies, not by trying to solve the paradox and thus satisfy man's reason, but by reminding us that as creatures we have no right to pronounce judgment on the acts of our Creator: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

The relation between human freedom and divine sovereignty involves the relation between the finite and the Infinite, between time and eternity, between creature and Creator. It is bound to be veiled in mystery and cloaked with thick darkness; it cannot be fathomed by human reason; it is among the deep things of God. We should not expect to be able to explain it by human reason. We do not have to understand this mystery; all that is required of us is that we accept the truths of God's Word by faith. It is the strength, not the weakness, of Calvinism that it refrains from attempting to solve this and similar paradoxes. In this matter the attitude of Calvinism is more **religious** than that of Arminianism. It does justice to Scripture, and it has a reverent attitude in refusing to tone down statements of the Bible because of the demands of human reason. The real Calvinist will never say "God's hands are tied." He is more moved by reverence for God and God's Word than by the insistent demand of sinful man's reason that all paradoxes be solved at any cost.

It is a mercy that many people are inconsistent. If Arminians were to follow their Arminian principles through with perfect logical consistency to the end of the road, they would finally have to say that man is his own saviour. But they do not and cannot say this because they are Christians, and the grace of God which is at work in them prevents them from being consistent Arminians. A really consistent Arminian would end up as a humanist. Actually, however, the Arminian continues as a Christian, in spite of holding a partly erroneous theology, because his happy inconsistency keeps him from following Arminianism all the way to the end of the road.

This inconsistency of Arminians is often quite conspicuous to others, though the Arminians themselves are, of course, unconscious of it. An evangelist

will tell his audience over and over that everything depends on their own free will, even to the extent of saying that "God's hands are tied." Then before the "altar call" the same evangelist will pray earnestly that God will bring people to repentance and salvation. If God's hands are really tied, the prayer ought to be addressed to the audience, not to God, for how can a God whose hands are tied answer the prayer? But, you see, the evangelist does not **really** believe that God's hands are tied, though he has just said they are. He really believes that in the end it depends on God's working after all, even though this is just the opposite of what he said a little while before in his sermon. In other words, there is something in the evangelist which cannot accept the Arminian statement that "God's hands are tied" and that convinces him deeply (though he is quite unaware of the inconsistency) that God's power, which can come in answer to prayer, can and does move the sinner to repentance and faith. Every Arminian, if he is really a Christian, is a Calvinist at heart. Men can be better than their creed, just as they can be worse than their creed.

What is the harm of Arminianism? Is this dispute a mere quarrel about words and terms? Is it merely "theological hair-splitting"? Does it make any real practical difference whether we are Calvinists or Arminians? Yes, it certainly does make a real, practical difference. This controversy affects the heart and core of our religious life. It deeply affects what we think of God and what we think of ourselves. "Arminianism tends to self-sufficiency; Augustinianism (Calvinism) promotes dependence upon God" (A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, one volume edition, page 605). Strong also points out that Arminian converts say "I gave my heart to the Lord", while Augustinian (Reformed or Calvinistic) converts say, "The Holy Spirit convicted me of sin and renewed my heart." In short, Calvinism exalts God and humbles man, while Arminianism limits God and flatters man and his powers. We hope it has been made clear that the essential difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is not merely theological but religious in the deepest sense. It concerns man's attitude toward God, and his appraisal of himself in the light of God.

Wholehearted Contending for the Faith

Our forefathers in the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) pledged themselves to strive together earnestly for the reformation of religion according to the Word of God, and swore that they would not give themselves to "a detestable indifferency and neutrality in this cause." It meant bearing reproach, suffering and for some of them even martyrdom. They doubtless realized the danger of such outcomes, yet they firmly repudiated compromise and rejected "indifferency and neutrality in this cause" (the defence of the Reformed Faith) as detestable.

We today live in a different age with a different

spirit and a weaker concern for the integrity of the Christian Faith. As Horatius Bonar wrote a century ago:

"Old truth, which once struck deep in hearts,
Fights hard for life, but fights in vain;
Old error into vigor starts
And fable comes to life again."

As long ago as 1895 Benjamin B. Warfield wrote: "Men are tired of thinking. They are tired of defending the truth. Let us all stop thinking, stop believing, they cry, and what a happy family we shall be!" (*The Presbyterian Quarterly*, ix, 1895; *Studies in Theology*, 1932, p. 588). If this was true in 1895 when Warfield

wrote it—and it surely was—how much more is it true in 1975, when we are confronted on every hand with destructive power and surrounded on all sides by those who are indifferent about contending for the faith—who do not contend for it at all, who think it is enough to avoid outright denials of Reformed orthodoxy, or at any rate to defend it ambiguously, gently and mildly.

The present brief article is a call to Reformed believers to stand up and be counted. It is a call to courage, to honesty, and to plain speaking. The apostle Paul wrote: "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12). He said what he meant, and he meant what he said, and he said it loud enough to be heard by the persons concerned.

Throughout the New Testament earnest and strenuous contending for the faith is enjoined upon Christians. Note some of the following Scriptures.

Jude 3, ". . . ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Titus 1:9, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

2 Timothy 4:3, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables."

Galatians 1:8,9, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Ephesians 6:14, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth. . . ."

Revelation 2:14,15, the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes is condemned in no uncertain terms, to which the Lord Jesus adds the emphatic statement, "which thing I hate."

Again, in Revelation 2:20, the church at Thyatira is sternly rebuked for tolerating in its midst a woman called "Jezebel", who evidently taught a popular anti-nomian doctrine (you can break the commandments of God and it does not count as sinful.)

One or two more texts may be cited from the Old Testament.

Psalm 119:104, 128, "I hate every false way."

Psalm 119:113, "I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love."

Psalm 119:163, "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love."

Psalm 119:30, "I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me."

Psalm 69:9, "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. . . ."

Jeremiah 23:32, "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."

Has the modern church not become like the church of the Laodiceans, to whom the Lord said: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

What is needed today, in response to the earnest and plain-spoken injunctions of Holy Scripture, is a bold, emphatic, plain-spoken affirmation of the truths of Scripture, including the Reformed Faith for which our forefathers so nobly witnessed, bled, and died. What is needed today is a clear, ringing, affirmation of the truth of the Reformed Faith—an affirmation that cannot be misunderstood and that does not need to be "explained" in lengthy discussions afterwards to try to show that what was said could be understood in an orthodox sense.

The great Reformed creeds and confessions for which our forefathers labored, witnessed, and often suffered and died, are treated lightly today, and often simply ignored. Often they are treated as mere theological technicalities, said to be "mere church creeds" and not relevant for the broad spectrum of modern human life.

The present writer is weary of hearing and reading discourses and treatises which purport to be Reformed, which seem to be quite other than truly Reformed, and which have to be explained at length by subsequent discussion to defend them against the charge of radical unsoundness. At worst this sort of activity is dishonest; at best it is weak, lukewarm and ambiguous in setting forth the truth.

There is much call for revival today, and certainly the Church of the present day needs revival desperately. But in many quarters it seems to be a call for revival of evangelistic activity only. Where is the trumpet call for revival in confession of the truth? Be assured, that any revival in evangelism, missions or other manifestations of church life, will be only superficial and transitory unless it is based on the strong rock foundation of Biblical truth.

Dear reader, do not be deceived by the spirit of the age, which has so deeply infected the organized church. It is not enough to avoid outright denials of Christian truth. It is not enough to defend the truth mildly and with faint praise. The revival for which we should certainly pray and work must be a revival of conviction and confession of the truth—a revival which will sweep

away the lukewarmness, the evasiveness, the ambiguity of Christian confession and witnessing today. Let us seek grace from God, and be emphatic and courageous again in contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” —I Corinthians 14:8.

Studies in the Book of Revelation

LESSON 11

REVELATION CHAPTER 1, cont.

The Bible prominently predicts that history will have an end when Christ comes again. The present world order will be transformed or pass over into the eternal order of things, a different state of existence from that which we know today. The editor of *The Christian Century*, quoted at the end of the previous lesson as saying that the second coming of Christ is happening all the time, was simply following the modern philosophic view of history, which comes down from the ancient Greeks: history is circular; it has motion but no progress. It is a succession of eras, the golden age, the silver age, the mud age, and finally the golden age again. This never had a beginning, and it will never have an end—it is eternal process. Motion without progress, without origin, without conclusion. This view necessarily holds the eternality of the physical universe, something which no Christian can believe because the Bible starts out by affirming, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” And the Bible ends with a new heaven and a new earth. The Christian view of history is pre-supposed at every point in the Bible; the Bible everywhere pre-supposes the linear view of history. History had a beginning at the creation. Neither history nor the physical universe has existed from eternity; both had a beginning, when God created. History also has a crisis point, called in the Bible “the fulness of time”—the time of the crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. This is the focal point, the fulcrum on which history turns. So we divide history into B.C. and A.D., in recognition of this basic truth. History also will have a conclusion; as it has not been going on from all eternity, so it will not continue to go on to all eternity. History as we know it, and the universe as we see it and participate in it, will pass away. This does not mean that we will be annihilated or cease to exist, but that there will be a different and eternal order of things. What part the present universe may have in that is an interesting question, but foreign to our purpose here and now.

You see, you have to think of God as transcendent over historical time. We do not simply talk of space and time any more—we speak of “the space-time continuum.” Length, depth and thickness are three dimensions; add time to that and you get a fourth, and that makes the space-time continuum, the field of the physical universe in which matter and energy—and mind, if you please—

can act and interact. And this is life as we know it, the space-time continuum and what goes on in it. God created the field, and He created the forces and entities and persons that act and interact in that field, but God Himself is far above it.

Augustine the famous bishop of Hippo in North Africa (died A.D. 430) in his book entitled *Confessions* wrestles with the problem of the relation of God to time. It is pretty heavy reading. The part where he tells about his conversion is easy, but when he gets to grappling with philosophic ideas it isn't easy. Augustine says he heard the question asked “What was God doing before he made the world?” Now if there was anything Augustine lacked, it was a sense of humor; he was always serious about everything. He reports the answer he heard given to the above question, adding that he did not endorse this answer, but was merely reporting it—the answer given being that before he made the world, God was getting hell ready as a place for people who ask too many questions! Augusting added that he did not consider this a worthy answer; the question, he says, was asked in good faith and deserved a serious answer, so he would attempt to answer it. This is followed by some pretty heavy reading, and he finally concludes by stating that the question cannot be answered because it is really a meaningless question. When you say “before” or “after,” you have already assumed that the being you are speaking about is a citizen of the space-time continuum, that this being exists within the fabric of physical space and historical time. But this is not true of God; He is transcendent above space and time; the future is as present and real to Him as the past. That of course is a true and sound answer; and incidentally, Bible prophecy would be impossible if God did not already know the future and if it were not already a certainty in His mind. If the future is not already a certainty in the mind of God, prophecy would be reduced to a Gallup-type poll or a system of probability guessing. Only because the predicting prophecies of Scripture come from the mind of a God to whom the future is already real, could Isaiah, for example, predict the virgin birth of Christ 700 years in advance. This is the background of the kind of idea we are dealing with here in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation—a linear view of history, and a transcendent God who is infinitely above space and

time—a God who is not Himself a part of the historical process.

And Revelation here describes something about the end, and we are not here discussing entropy or the second law of thermodynamics, but a person, namely Jesus Christ. He is connected with the end of the world order as we know it. So, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him. Now both this verse (Revelation 1:7) and the one in Acts (1:11), as well as others that could be cited from the Gospels and Epistles, emphasize three things: (1) Christ's second coming is sure; (2) it is personal; and (3) it will be visible.

People have tried to explain these truths away by tying them up with historical events of various kinds, but the Bible represents them as unique and unparalleled, something that will mark the end of the present world order and the beginning of something very different. And this involves not merely spiritual realities but earth-shaking cosmic changes, which will be visible to everyone. The living who have not yet died will be in the world when these things happen and will see Christ's second coming. Some people have asked, how can every eye see Christ at His second coming, when the world is round? I have heard this answered by someone saying that every eye shall see Him on television. I don't consider this a very good answer. Don't doubt that God is able to make it come to pass that every eye shall see Him at His second coming, even those who crucified Him. Those who have died will be raised from the dead, and they will witness the second coming of Christ. Not only Christians or the redeemed, but the wicked who have died in their sins, will be raised from the dead and will see the second coming of Christ.

I think it is necessary to emphasize this Biblical realism because of the common tendency to spiritualize these things and make them refer to events that happen over and over again through history. I have read a good deal of this sort of thing, and I am convinced that people who indulge in this kind of spiritualizing fail seriously to do justice to the Scriptures. Now Jesus said to His disciples as they were looking at the Jerusalem temple, that the day would come when there wouldn't be one stone left upon another in that temple. This was certainly a prediction of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled about forty years later at the destruction of Jerusalem in the great Jewish-Roman war, A.D. 68-70. The disciples were very curious and wanted

to know when this would be, and Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). We should realize that Christ comes in various events through history—certainly in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; that was a coming of Christ in judgment, a preliminary form of judgment. And certainly the Day of Pentecost when He came in the power of the Holy Spirit was a coming of Christ in grace. We could no doubt trace many more. Christ has come in grace in times of great revival, and He has come in judgment in times of great calamity; all of these are properly spoken of as comings of Christ, but they are not to be put in the same category with what is mentioned in Revelation 1:7 and Acts 1:11, where we read that every eye shall see Him as He comes with clouds. This is not one of a long series of often repeated historical events, real as these certainly are; rather, it is something that will happen catastrophically, it will happen uniquely and once for all. It will mark the end of the present world order.

Now note that the second coming of Christ will bring joy and comfort to Christians, but dismay and woe to the non-Christian world. He cometh with clouds—surely this spells comfort for Christians, for the early Christians and for Christians of our own time.

And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. When he appears in glory for judgment, all the great and mighty and sophisticated unbelievers and scoffers of this world are going to meet their match and much more than their match. The doubts, the criticism, the unbelief, the tearing up of God's Word, the ungodly living—all of this is going to run headlong into a sudden cataclysm of confrontation. It will be a moment of truth and utter reality that cannot possibly be escaped; people will simply have to face it. It will bring comfort and joy to Christians, but it will be utter and ultimate doom and disaster to the world. In one of the visions in a later chapter of the Book of Revelation the same thing is pictured in apocalyptic imagery: people will say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come, and who is able to stand? There are no rocks in this world big enough to hide those who have rejected Jesus Christ. This is metaphor, of course; it means that people will utterly panic as they suddenly realize that the thing they have spent their life denying is true after all, and it is now forever too late.

LESSON 12

REVELATION CHAPTER 1, cont.

In our English Bible, the last word of the Old Testament is "curse." "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"—Malachi 4:6. This is not the dominant theme of the Old Testament, but it is the last word of the Old Testament as a book (in the order of books in our Bible). This was followed by 400 years of silence on the part of God. Then John the Baptist came and said, "Repent,

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The word Malachi means "My Messenger." And near the end of the book of Malachi, chapter 3 verses 1 and 2, we read, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come.

saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" The messenger mentioned in Malachi would be John the Baptist, and "the Lord whom ye seek" would be Jesus Christ. He is called "the messenger of the covenant"—the covenant of grace, certainly, bringing His people eternal salvation in the presence of God. He will come suddenly to His temple. This was actually the temple of Herod, replacing the second temple, which in turn replaced Solomon's temple, which replaced the Mosaic tabernacle. But Jesus Christ came to it, first when He was forty days old (Luke 2:26-28); then later when He was twelve years old (Luke 2:41-43). You will recall that He said on this occasion "I must be about my Father's business." In the Greek it is "I must be in the things of my Father," that is, in my Father's house, the Jerusalem temple. "The messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." The common folk delighted in Him. The shepherds, the man named Simeon in the temple, a very old woman named Anna, numerous folk like Lazarus, Mary and Martha of Bethany—they all received the greatest kind of blessing and comfort from the first coming and presence of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, people like Annas and Caiaphas and Herod and Pontius Pilate, not to mention Judas and numerous others, hated Him. To them He was a menace to be gotten rid of in some way. Now we see the same antithesis again in Revelation chapter 1. The messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in; but who may abide the day of his coming? The second coming of Christ will be unspeakably terrible to those who are in their sin and unbelief, and to all His enemies. Who can stand when He appears? Malachi goes on to say that He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and so on. This is indeed referring to the first coming of Christ, although the Old Testament does not always distinguish between the two comings, because from the Old Testament point of view both were still far in the future. Notice again in Malachi, chapter 4, verses 1, 2, and 6, "For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven." This I take as primarily a prediction of the second coming of our Saviour. "And all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." This is the destiny of the wicked. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (vs. 2). And at the end of the chapter, verses 5 and 6, the coming of Elijah the prophet is predicted. From the New Testament we know that this was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

It is possible that this fourth chapter of Malachi refers both to the second and to the first coming of Christ—we have to get light from the New Testament to distinguish these two comings in detail. Continuing now

with Revelation 1, Jesus says here in verse 8, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Here we have again the Christian view of history, with a beginning and an ending—which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty. God's eternity, which is clear above the circle of the earth and above the line of historical time, is related to an eternal plan for world history, Operation History. This is God's plan which is working itself out, which can give us comfort as we view the extremely tragic and disconcerting earth-shaking events going on in the world today. The increase of wars, of tyranny, of dictatorship, of world communism, of all other threats and evils, of secularism, the proportion of Christians in the world's population getting smaller every year (you must realize that while there are more Christians in the world this year than last year, the **percentage** of Christians in the world's population gets smaller year by year because the increase in the number of Christians does not keep up with the tremendous population explosion of the non-Christian world. If you are good at mathematics then you can project this to the point where the Christians will be an infinitesimal fraction of the world's population. I doubt if the present world order will last that long, but Jesus said that the gates of hell—the greatest possible power of evil—shall not prevail against His church, so we can be sure that the Church will not really be destroyed.)

This reference to Alpha and Omega strongly emphasizes the transcendent character of God above all history and all historical process. I remember when the old League of Nations was being organized at the end of World War I (1918-1919), hearing a man say, "This is our last and only hope for the world." Alas for the world if the League of Nations based at Geneva, Switzerland, was our last and only hope! Later I heard people say the same thing about the United Nations Organization, formed after the end of World War II. Alas, it has proven ineffective, and cannot really keep the peace even between small and weak nations. You can be sure that the last and only real hope of the world is Jesus Christ, and the real decisions are not going to be made at the United Nations, nor at Washington, or Moscow, or Paris, or any other place on this earth that you may want to name. Christ, the second Person of the divine Trinity, transcends the world and history. He is the One who is still to come, and He is the Almighty.

In verse 9 John begins to speak: "I John, who also am your brother." Notice how humble he is. He doesn't say, "I John, the pope," nor "I John, one of the twelve apostles of the Lord," but "I John, your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. . ." Now, what is tribulation? I have heard of a Christian who said, "When the Lord sends tribulation, he expects me to tribulate"—this was offered as an excuse for constantly moaning and complaining about things. Well, perhaps when we Christians suffer pain and distress we are permitted to groan, but not to lose our patience and confidence in

God. You can find a good many examples in the Book of Psalms of godly people groaning and sighing; and Jesus Himself groaned in the spirit on occasion. It is true that we enter into our eternal rest through many troubles and much tribulation. But there is a type of evangelism that tells people that if they will just believe on Jesus Christ their problems will be over. I'm not sure but what the little story papers given out at many of our Sabbath Schools and churches have reflected this somewhat rose-colored and simplistic view of salvation sometimes. Is it true that when a person becomes a Christian believer his troubles are over, and from there on it is plain sailing into the eternal harbor? I am sure it is not true. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. And Jesus said (John 16:33), "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." This is the common experience of God's saints, and it has been, ever since Jesus Christ was present in the flesh on this earth. We suffer troubles and we go through them, and the Lord will deliver us from them in the end (Psalm 34:19). We are not promised a life free of afflictions; we are promised deliverance from them in the end. So John is here speaking the language of the saints of all ages when he speaks of suffering tribulation. This is inevitable as long as we are in a sinful world. The Lord saves us by stages. There is a story about a theological seminary professor who was walking down a city street past a Salvation Army place. A Salvation Army lassie was handing out tracts and inviting people to come in and hear the Gospel, and she asked the professor, "Are you saved?" Whereupon he quoted three Greek words to her and said, "Do you mean, 'Have I been saved, am I being saved, or will I be saved in the future?'" She replied, "Come right on in, we take all kinds of sinners here!" Of course the professor was correct, but he shouldn't have said it to a Salvation Army worker. We are saved from the guilt of our sins instantly when we believe on Jesus Christ; the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and we are pronounced righteous

by the Supreme Judge of the universe, and this is an irreversible once-for-all deal. This is Justification—as God looks at things, you are declared to be a righteous person. Then in sanctification we are saved from the uncleanness and the power and the slavery of sin. This takes a lifetime. And even near the end of our journey in this world we are still living in a sinful environment and constantly being assaulted by temptation in the presence of sin. So the third stage is glorification, which comes when we depart this life to be with the Lord. Let me quote you a good little book—it isn't Scripture but it certainly is Scriptural—the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory. . ." "And their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection." This third stage—glorification—itsself comes in two installments: at death we are made perfect in holiness, and pass into glory; and at the resurrection our human body, identical but vastly changed and fitted for conditions of eternity, will be raised from the dead. Remember the statement of the Apostles' Creed, not composed by the apostles, it is true, but by far the oldest of all Christian creeds: "I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

What keeps us from perfect joy, peace and absolute comfort in this world, and prevents the removal of all tribulation, is the fact and presence of sin. There is something of sin left in the holiest and most mature Christian in this world, and there is sin all around us. This makes absolute comfort and joy impossible. I don't know what it will feel like to appear in heaven at our death, but I know the first thing the Christian will be aware of will be that he is in the presence of Jesus Christ, and the second will be that the pressure is off—it will no longer be hard to avoid sin and practice righteousness; the tension will be gone; we will not have to fight a battle against sin and temptation any more; when we get to heaven it will actually be enjoyable to be good.

LESSON 13

REVELATION CHAPTER 1, cont.

Revelation chapter 1, verses 9 through 20. In verse 9 John tells his readers that he was in the island called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. The island of Patmos is still there; you can visit it but you will not see very much. The area is about 25 square miles, rocky and barren, sparsely inhabited by a few people, located a few miles off what the coast of what is today Asiatic Turkey, in the sea between Turkey and Greece. This out-of-the-way and desolate place was used by the Roman government in John's time as a prison for people who were considered disaffected or disloyal—what we today would perhaps call political prisoners. John tells us that he was there for a definite reason, namely, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, because of his faithfulness in witnessing for Christ.

You can almost always avoid persecution if you are willing to compromise with the prevailing party line or accept the world's standards, but the person who is really faithful to Christ will incur opposition. One of my seminary professors, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, said, "Show me a man that nobody is opposed to, and I will show you a man who is probably unfaithful to his Lord." And our Saviour said, "Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you;" "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John would not let his Christian witness lapse into sinful silence, so he suffered persecution. There is a story about a faithful Christian pastor in Germany who was put in prison by the Nazi government during the

Hitler era. He was offered his freedom if he would sign a paper promising not to preach any more. He refused. They then sent a corrupted, compromised minister in to see him and try to get him to sign the paper. This man came in and said, "Brother, why are you in prison?" The persecuted pastor gave him a withering look and said, "Brother, tell me, why are you NOT in prison?" That was the end of that interview.

If you are faithful to Christ you are going to incur opposition, and in some way at some time you will suffer persecution. Perhaps it isn't likely that you will be imprisoned on an island, or actually put to death, although this isn't impossible either. But John was on this lonely island of Patmos. How he was treated we are not told, but just to be there would be a great hardship. He continues and says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." The word Spirit here in our English Bible has a capital "S," meaning the Holy Spirit. Some writers have said that "the Lord's day" here means what the Bible in some places calls "the day of the Lord." This phrase occurs many times in the Old Testament; one New Testament reference is I Thess. 5:1,2. "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." This is beyond question a reference to the second coming of Christ, which will come as a thief in the night, a surprise and astonishment to wicked people, and even, perhaps, to luke-warm and backslidden Christians. You can find many more references where "the day of the Lord" refers to the termination of world history, the second coming of Christ and related events such as the resurrection and the judgment. And there are those who say that this is the meaning here in Revelation 1:10. They think the idea is that John was by the Holy Spirit lifted in time to the day of Christ's second coming; that the year A.D. 90 or whatever year it was just faded out, and John was transported hundreds or thousands of years into the future. Now it is certainly possible that this is what happened to John, as witness the visions that follow in the book. But that this is the meaning of this statement in Revelation 1:10 is very doubtful. The Lord's Day was the first day of the week which we are accustomed to call "the Christian Sabbath." Evidently it was on this day of the week that these revelations to John began. "In the Spirit" certainly means more than simply engaging in devotions, prayer or worship, as indicated by what follows the statement in the context. John was so visited or acted upon by the Holy Spirit that he passed into a state in which revelation was communicated to him. He was "in the Spirit" in the sense that he was connected up with the Holy Spirit, to become a revelation receiver, and the rest of the book of course records these revelations.

Whole books have been written on the psychology of the receiving of revelation—quite interesting, no doubt, but not terribly important. The important thing about special revelation from God is not the channel but the source—from whom does the revelation come? The modern view of Biblical prophecy is that it is the pro-

duct of the mind or consciousness of the prophets, that these men were intellectuals comparable to our news analysts or to the Greek philosophers, men who try to figure things out and come up with answers. But the Bible represents the prophets as really getting their messages from God. There were many channels through which revelation might come—dreams, visions, voices, angels, etc. Sometimes the Old Testament prophets would watch a dying fire or listen to a bubbling brook, which would center their consciousness and cause them to forget the distracting thoughts or surrounding noises, so that there would be a clear channel for the message that would come from God. These techniques could not of themselves bring revelation, but they might be used to eliminate some of the roadblocks in the way of revelation from God. You may have had the experience at a summer camp of sitting or standing with others in a circle around a dying campfire while someone is giving a message or a testimony. You lose your awareness of the surroundings, and are unusually open to the communication that is taking place. This does not make you a prophet, but it may illustrate how revelation sometimes came to the ancient prophets of the Lord.

So let us say that this was the first day of the week, the Christian Sabbath, the day of the Lord's resurrection. John was "in the Spirit" and he heard behind him a great voice as of a trumpet. In Exodus, just prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-19) there was a terribly loud noise of a trumpet, which grew louder and louder (verse 19) and then there came the articulate speech of God (19b). Here in Revelation the trumpet sound is not just a device to get John's attention—the Lord already had his attention—but a voice like a trumpet, powerful, loud, inescapable, saying (verse 11, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book. . .") Probably John was intended to and did write the book as he went along; the other possibility is that after all these amazing experiences were finished he sat down and wrote the book. But the evidence here and there in the book would seem to indicate that he wrote it as the visions moved along. Note, for example, 10:4. Repeatedly he is commanded to write. On balance it would seem that he wrote as he experienced the visions and voices.

The book that would be written was to be sent to the seven churches in Asia. This of course does not mean the continent of Asia, nor even the great peninsula called Asia Minor, but only the Roman province of Asia, an area on the coast of Anatolia or Asia Minor. Seven churches are listed; the sites of these are known today, and one or two of these are living cities today with churches of some kind existing in them. I think, though, that the churches to which John wrote became extinct during the Roman persecutions, and new churches were established there later. At any rate, the book was to be sent to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia.

Some people take these seven churches, and the letters sent to them, as being a preview of the entire span

of church history from John's time until the Lord's second coming, so that John was living in the age of Ephesus and we today are living in the period of Laodicea with its apostasy and unbelief and immorality and irreligion. Obviously, our own time has some of the characteristics of the Church at Laodicea, but we have no proof that we are indeed in the last period, but you see we are still in the grassroots of history—it isn't finished yet. God is the only One who can really see the end from the beginning. How do we know that there is not another period coming after ours that will be even worse, and even more like the ancient church of Laodicea? This view that the letters to the seven churches are a preview of the entire span of the history of the Church is a minority view held chiefly by those who hold a premillennial view of the second coming, although not exclusively by them. On the other hand, the majority view—and I am speaking all the way through here about people who believe in the Bible; I am leaving out the negative critics who downgrade the whole thing anyway—the majority view among believing scholars is that in the first place these seven churches were seven actual churches which existed at those places when John wrote the book and sent the letters. And secondly, that they are a sampling or cross-section of every church in every time and place. Name the best church you can find, and there are some things in it or about it that will correspond to what is said about the church of Laodicea. Some would apply more fully to one church and some would apply more fully to another, but no church could claim to be free of all these tendencies, or at least of the danger of falling into some of these things, so this would be a cross-cut sampling or examination of every church, and you can put the coat on when it fits. And if it doesn't fit, we can thank the Lord for His grace, and go on to something else. However we must be very sure indeed that it doesn't fit us or our church, before we can claim a clean bill of health for our church. Maybe some churches would be more like that of Philadelphia while others are more like that of Laodicea. But none of these letters, in its applicability, is limited to any one church or to any one period of history.

Although the letters were originally sent to these seven particular local churches, I hope we can see later as we study them that the letters to the seven churches are intimately tied in with the geography and history of these cities. Sir William Ramsay, Scottish archaeologist, tramped over these places and dug and explored them, and was able to discover things which shed a great wealth of light on this part of the Bible, as we shall see when we get to it.

Now, seven golden lampstands (translated "candlesticks" in the King James Version). What is a candle good for except to give light? If a candle cannot be lit, and cannot give light—if it is not made of wax but just a plastic candle intended for decoration, is it any good? There are Christians who are like plastic candles—they don't give out any light. The Jerusalem temple, and the tabernacle before that, had a seven-

branched golden candlestick, and we know what this looked like, because the Romans stole it out of the temple in Jerusalem before they destroyed the place, and Titus, the Roman general, carried it in triumph to Rome, and it is shown on the arch of Titus in sculpture. What happened to the actual gold candlesticks no one knows, but the representation is shown in sculpture on the arch of Titus in Rome—a central upright, with three branches on one side and three on the other side, each with a lamp or candle in it, giving out light. Seven is the number in the Bible that stands for perfection so the seven golden candlesticks would represent the perfect illumination. And among these was Christ Himself. Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world." It was a dark world and very much needed the light of Christ. In another place, Jesus said of His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." Now if Christ is the light of the world, how can we be the light of the world? I recall a stanza of a poem which says, "Christ has no hands but our hands." I am not sure that is completely true, but it is true that ordinarily the Lord works through His people, and the light of the Gospel is brought to the world through the evangelism, witnessing and missionary work of His Church. This is not the Church shining in its own darkness, but the church reflecting or transmitting the light of Christ. And if there ever was a time that needed it, it was the time of John the apostle who wrote the Book of Revelation. Matthew Arnold, British poet and essayist (died 1888), was not much of an evangelical Christian, but he was a literary man, and he wrote a poem picturing the mood and temper of the world into which the Gospel came. F. F. Bruce of Scotland (now of England) wrote a book on the history of early Christianity entitled "The Spreading Flame." His first chapter has the title, "A light shone in the darkness," and his second chapter has the title, "The darkness did not put it out." That was a world very much like our own present-day world. The prevailing mood was disillusionment, boredom, a sense of frustration and lack of meaning in life, and all this running on to pessimism and despair. People had lost their mooring, and the ground of optimism seemed to have faded out. Now Matthew Arnold caught the mood of this era: it was a dark time; suicide was extremely common. He pictures a Roman nobleman who seems to have everything. He has money, rank, social status, a fine mansion to live in, and slaves to wait on his every whim. But this man feels wearied and bored with life, and his great problem is how to "kill time." Arnold pictures it this way:

"On that hard pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell.
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.
In his cool hall with haggard eyes
The Roman noble lay;
He rode abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian Way.
He bade a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his head with flowers.

No easier, nor no quicker passed,
The impracticable hours."

If you want it in one word it is darkness, it is the dark night of the soul, and into this darkness came light from God—the light of Christianity, that brought people release and freedom and new solid ground under their feet, and hope for this life and for eternity.

The seven golden candlesticks of lampstands mean a light from God which the darkness of this world cannot put out. And certainly the world, both then and now, needs this light desperately. Let us look a moment at the last verse of chapter 1. "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks." "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." Note the word "mystery"—this word is used in the Bible in a somewhat different sense from what we are accustomed to. It can be used in two different senses. First, a mystery is something which is inherently baffling. A detective story is called a mystery story because you don't know the solution till the end of the book. But in the second place, the word "mystery" in the Bible is used to mean something which was concealed in the mind of God, but later revealed to men. In the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians the idea that the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs with the Jews of salvation is called a mystery; that is, it had not previously been known (or not as fully as it was later revealed).

And this second meaning is probably the meaning of the word "mystery" here in the Book of Revelation

chapter 1. Now what is meant by the angels of the seven churches? One idea that has been held about this is that every church has a special guardian angel, an invisible but powerful spirit watching over a particular church to see that the members go straight and do right and are spiritually faithful. There seems to be no real evidence for this idea in the Bible. The word angel means literally "messenger." And if we hold that "angels" here means real angels, we at once face a difficulty. How do you write a letter to an angel, and mail it and get it delivered? John was told to send these letters to the angels of the seven churches. I have known of children writing and mailing a letter to Santa Claus; there was a child on the lap of a department store Santa Claus who said, "You mean you never got that letter I sent you?" We don't even believe in praying to angels; how do you send a letter to one of them?

The common understanding of this is that "angels" means the ministers or pastors of these churches. Probably it would include what we call the pastors and the ruling elders, these two classes of officers not being so clearly differentiated then as they are today. The Scofield Bible suggests that these seven churches had sent seven messengers to Patmos to confer with John, and therefore they were there, and John was to write his book and then give it to them. This is possible, but it sounds unnatural—you don't send a letter to someone who is right there with you at the time, and John was told to send the letters. So we may say that the angels means the spiritual leaders of these churches who were responsible that the churches radiate light, and who were fulfilling their functions in the Lord's system and in His plans.

LESSON 14

REVELATION CHAPTER 1, cont.

John, after hearing the voice, turned and saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of them one like unto the Son of man. This title "Son of man" requires some discussion. This was Jesus' favorite title for Himself during His earthly ministry. Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son of man," but no one else called Jesus that, with one or two exceptions. Stephen, when being stoned to death, said he saw heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). There is also a reference where someone quotes Jesus, and asks "Who is this Son of man?" Apart from these instances, Jesus applied this title to Himself, and other people did not use it in speaking of Him. They called Him Rabbi, or Master, or Lord, but not "Son of man." But why? I have heard a good many sermons and lectures and seen a good deal of printed material that relates this title "Son of man" to the human nature of Christ, in distinction from His divine nature. Christ, it is said, is both the Son of God and also the Son of man. This seems quite plausible, but it is not correct. Christ has two natures in one Person, as the Bible teaches and the historic creeds have affirmed, but it is not correct to relate the title "Son of man" especially

to His human nature. This is almost certainly not the true meaning, and there is more to this than is commonly supposed. Jesus did not invent this title; He took it from the Old Testament, where you will find it in various places, but especially in Daniel 7:13,14. Daniel saw in the night visions, and he saw one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, etc. It speaks of transcendent and universal power and glory. In Daniel this title "Son of man" is given to the still future Messiah. And please note that it is a vision of His second coming—note the association with the clouds of heaven. And the emphasis is not on His humanity, the lowly condition of the days of His flesh, but on His transcendent glory, at His second coming in the state of exaltation. Therefore it is a reference to Jesus as the Messiah, not with any particular emphasis on His human nature, but speaking of Him as a total person. The force of this, if you want a fair parallel to it, is something similar to what Paul meant when he called Christ "the second Adam" (or "the last Adam").

This raises a further question: Why did Jesus choose this particular title for Himself? It was certainly an Old Testament title for the Messiah, but not common at all. The common title for the Messiah in the Old Testament is "Son of David." The probable reason for Jesus' using the title "Son of man," on most occasions, instead of "Son of David," was that the Jews of His day had distorted the title "Son of David" with mistaken political ideas and associations; they thought of the Son of David as the one who would throw the Romans out and make the Jewish nation free and independent again, and this was not what Jesus came to do. He came primarily to bear our sins, to suffer and die and rise again. The title "Son of David" was commonly misunderstood. If Jesus had used this title on ordinary occasions for Himself, he would have had to stop and give a 15 minute sermon every time to explain that what he meant by it was different from what was in their minds. So perhaps it is for this reason that Jesus commonly used the title "Son of man," which was certainly Biblical, certainly associated with the glory of the Messiah, and yet free from the earthly worldly political ideas that the Jews of Jesus' day had tied in with the idea of the Messiah as the Son of David.

Jesus was crucified at the age of 33 years or about that. It has been noted that Alexander the Great died at the same age. These were two young men who left a tremendous and enduring imprint on world history, but what a different kind of imprint! Alexander the Great drenched the world of his day in blood to satisfy his selfish ambitions; Jesus shed His own blood as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Probably several of the twelve disciples were older than Jesus. Jesus was a young man, but here on Patmos John sees Jesus Christ as He really is in his heavenly glory. John had seen this once before, along with Peter and James, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). Here in Revelation Jesus appears as a figure of timeless age. The whole picture conveys this impression: the long robe, the feet like white hot brass, the voice like

Niagara Falls or the Mediterranean surf pounding on the shore of Patmos, the eyes like flaming fire—all inspiring, even frightening, but all indicating terrific power and timeless age. This was so different from what most people saw when Jesus was on earth before His crucifixion.

John recognized Him: this is Jesus, no doubt about it, this indeed is Jesus. You will recall that right after the Lord's resurrection two disciples on the road to Emmaus were met by Jesus and He talked with them and they were interested and their heart burned within them, but they did not recognize Him for who He was until he was known to them in the breaking of bread. I take it there was something familiar about the way He asked the blessing, or something else about His manner gave them a clue, and when they opened their eyes He was gone. And Mary standing at the empty tomb, hearing someone speak, thought it was the gardener, and only a moment or two later recognized Jesus.

Only when we get to heaven will we know people as they really are, free from their sinful limitations of this present life. And only then will we see Jesus as He really is. We see now through a glass darkly, but then it will be face to face. Of course, Jesus in His earthly life had no sin or sinful limitations, but His glory was veiled during His estate of humiliation. But in heaven it will be manifested openly for His people to see. And John on Patmos saw Jesus not through a glass darkly, but in reality. And the Jesus who was despised and rejected of men on earth, in heaven is seen in his reality and utter glory. Think what a comfort this must have been to John. After seeing the glorified Christ, it did not matter so much who was the emperor at Rome or what the emperor's policy was. When anyone can see Christ in reality, the emperor at Rome doesn't count any more. It is Jesus Christ that counts in everything. If you are in Christ, all things are going to work together for your good, no matter what wicked people like the emperor Domitian say or do.

LESSON 15

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS, REVELATION 2:1-7

The letter of Jesus Christ to the angel of the Church at Ephesus. This is what Christ has to say to a living but endangered church in a dying city, what He has to say to our church, and what He has to say to every church. Ephesus was a dying city, and the church at Ephesus was an endangered church. There is much here that applies to every church everywhere and at every time. The letter is addressed to the angel of the church; this in all probability means to the pastor, or the pastor and elders, of the church, the official representatives of that church. Christ introduces Himself by this description: He that holds the seven stars in his right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. This of course is symbolic or figurative language; what this

means is that Jesus Christ as the head of the church, knows, cares, commands, admonishes, threatens judgment and rewards righteousness and faithfulness in the church; all the concerns and activities of the church are known to Him. He is in the midst of the seven stars, holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. This would indicate His activity, his authority and His life-giving power within the true churches of Jesus Christ.

Many parts of the Bible have been illuminated by modern archaeology, and no part of Scripture has had more light shed on it, as to its meaning, by archaeology, than Revelation chapters 2 and 3. This has been done

chiefly by the work of the Scottish archaeologist Sir Sir William Ramsay, and others who followed him. Ramsay started out as a skeptical critic of the Bible, and discounted many things in the New Testament. As a New Testament scholar he held that many things in the Book of Acts are unreliable, that Paul's epistles were not all written by Paul, and so on. But he became a traveler and archaeologist and went to all the places that Paul is recorded as having visited or lived in, and what he found convinced him of the genuineness and integrity of the New Testament documents. So far as I know he did not become a believer in the inerrancy or infallibility of the Bible, but he did come to hold its substantial truth and accuracy. With regard to the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, he went to each of these places and spent a considerable amount of time at each. He wrote a large book entitled **The Letters to the Seven Churches**, a definitive work which put previous studies in the shade. No book today that does not take account of what Ramsay wrote deals in an inadequate way with these two chapters. Ramsay showed that in each case the history and geography of the city and the local condition of the church were intertwined with what Christ had to say to the members of that church. The geography and history of the cities is an introduction to, and in a way parallels the condition and situation and outcome of the churches in the various cities. So to understand these letters we need to know something of the background of these seven cities.

Archaeology has a double function; it does not convert unbelievers; it would be fine if we could just turn the archaeologists loose on them and get them converted, but it does not work that way. The trouble with the unbelievers is something inside of themselves; it is not that Christianity lacks valid evidences, but that the unbeliever is strongly biased against God and the Word of God. It takes the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit to convert sinners; facts discovered by archaeology alone cannot do this.

Our faith is not based on reason, but it is not contrary to reason either. You don't have to commit intellectual or scholarly suicide to be a Christian believer. When you have become a Christian, it is good to know that what you have believed by faith is not contrary to valid discovery and evidence.

One part of archaeology's double function is to silence the extreme claims and theories of radical critics of the Bible. A great many extreme and wild claims against statements of the Bible have been effectively silenced in the past by archaeological discoveries. And, in the second place, archaeology has made many parts of the Bible more understandable, enabling us better to see what they mean. This is certainly true of Ephesus.

Ephesus is located on the coast of Anatolia or Asia Minor, which is today part of Turkey. Ephesus is previously mentioned in the New Testament in Acts

chapters 19 and 20. You will recall that Paul preached there and this resulted in a confrontation with a man named Demetrius, a silversmith. Paul hit him where it really hurt, in his pocketbook. This man was making and selling little silver miniature replicas of the great temple of Diana (Greek, Artemis). He was selling these objects to the vast tourist trade that came to Ephesus, and then Paul came and said that Diana was no goddess, and he got a good many people to believe the same thing. This aroused Demetrius and the other silversmiths, and resulted in the great riot on the open-air theatre at Ephesus, where for two hours they shouted "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." This can serve as our introduction to the city of Ephesus. Then there is also Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, written later by Paul. It is an interesting fact that some of the ancient manuscripts do not mention Ephesus in the first verse, and some do. This has caused some wondering, but it is perfectly explainable, on the supposition that Paul intended this letter for more than a single church, and dictated it to a scribe or secretary, and they left a blank where Ephesus was to be mentioned, and wrote the name in that space only in the particular copy that was to be sent to Ephesus, and left it blank in the copy or copies that were to go to other places.

This church was established by Paul, and it was more than forty years old in John's day; John is writing here in the middle 90's of the first century, during the reign of Domitian. So this church was nearly half a century old when the Book of Revelation was written. Ephesus was a port on the Mediterranean Sea, located where a fair sized river, the Cayster, runs out to the sea. This connected with the end of a highway or trade route from the interior that brought merchandise from points east, possibly even silk from as far away as China. Ephesus was the jumping-off place, where the highway ended and the sea began. It was a busy trade colony of the Greeks. Ships were loaded here with products from the interior and sail to Greece, Italy, Spain and other places. On the other hand, they would unload products from western regions which would be trans-shipped overland from Ephesus to points in the interior of Asia. And of course the merchants of Ephesus made a profit on all this, both on what came in and on what went out, so it was a thriving, prosperous city. It was an important Greek commercial colony, a busy, thriving city at its height. In the time of the New Testament, including John and Paul, Ephesus was already past its greatness, perhaps two hundred years past its zenith of prosperity, and was very much on the downgrade so far as business was concerned. There were continual problems with keeping the harbor open.

The plague of the ancient world was deforestation. Ecology had not been thought of yet and people did not realize that if you keep on cutting down trees and don't plant any in their place you are going to have to pay for that later in some way or other. Deforestation of the mountains back of Ephesus, east, north and south, led finally to erosion of the soil from the mountainsides,

and this led to swamps and water accumulating, and serious floods from time to time, in the flat land at the bottom between the mountains and the sea. The result of this was that the harbor of Ephesus was badly choked with silt, and large ships could no longer get to the city. They had to anchor maybe two or three miles out in the Mediterranean, and small craft went in and out with the merchandise. This was a great handicap to the city of Ephesus. Today the ruins of the harbor of Ephesus are seven miles inland from the Mediterranean, and between the sea and the present shore line there is a reedy, grassy swampy plain, inhabited chiefly by frogs. Morton, an interesting writer of travelogues in Bible lands, describes how he sat at the edge of this reedy plain and listened to the countless—perhaps actually millions—frogs which set up a croaking which lasted all night, and it seemed to Morton as he sat there that they were saying, “Great is Diana, Great is Diana, Great is Diana of the

Ephesians!” Morton said this was the final compliment to Diana, the great goddess worshipped by all Asia and the world, but today worshipped only by the frogs!

Thirty miles to the south of Ephesus was Miletus, whose harbor started to choke up even earlier than that of Ephesus, perhaps as long as 500 years before Christ, and for a while this gave Ephesus a break. Later both of these harbors were somewhat cleared and dredged, but this was the common thing all up and down that coast. Now the thing that had to be done if Ephesus was to live as a city, was to keep the harbor clear. The life of the city depended absolutely on this channel of communication by sea. Ruler after ruler put on public works programs to clear the harbor of sand and mud and silt so that large ships could get in. Done largely without machinery, it was costly and difficult work.

LESSON 16

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS, cont.

Rome took over Ephesus and the area around it about 143 years before the birth of Christ, and made Ephesus its headquarters in that part of the world. A Roman proconsul had his headquarters there, and the city was given the title **The Landing Place**. The people were proud of this and vied with other cities for honors and status in the Roman Empire, the greatest empire the world had ever seen. A coin was found, dating from the 200's A.D., with a picture on it of a small oar-propelled boat, apparently indicating the condition of the harbor at the time the coin was made.

In John's time the emperor was Domitian—the one who had John imprisoned on Patmos—and near the end of the first century Domitian was the last ruler to attempt to clear the harbor of Ephesus. This had been declining for more than 200 years. It is recorded that by 600 after Christ, A.D. 600, the battle with sand and mud and silt was finally completely and hopelessly lost. Ephesus, from being a proud and important and wealthy city became a swampy waste, strictly for the frogs. Ephesus had long been deep in economic decline, and then came the frogs, and then one other species of animal life, the malarial mosquito. Malaria is not common in the United States, but it has been and indeed still is in many parts of the world. It drains you of energy; you feel weak and weary. Of course in former times the cause of this disease was not known, but malaria took over this swampy coast and sapped the vitality and strength of the people who still lived there. And then in the Middle Ages the Turks came, and they were mostly destructive of conquered territories, and Ephesus became a dead city—the city a ruin, and the church only a memory. The candlestick or lampstand had been taken away—no longer was Gospel light radiated from a living church at Ephesus. The spirit of the dying city infected the church.

Now let us go on to look at the contents of this letter, Revelation 2:2, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience. . .”. “Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” Do the first works, dredge out the spiritual harbor that keeps you in contact with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ first of all commends the church of Ephesus, and warns them, and ends with a promise. Christ commends them for a whole series of things; if the Lord could say all of this about our own church we would think we had done pretty well—work, patience in time of evil, testing alleged apostles and finding them false, continued effort; note that patience is mentioned twice, once in verse 2 and once in verse 3. And they are specially commended for their intolerance of heresy or false doctrine. All this is commendation—“thy works.”

Anyone who lived in Ephesus would think of one thing when he heard the word “works”—the dredging of the harbor, that was the works at Ephesus. And the Lord knows the works not only of the city of Ephesus, but also of the church of Ephesus. They are not lacking a vigorous program of activities—works, labor, patience, etc. They have not fainted or become discouraged in spite of difficulties. In particular they are commended for not having patience with evildoers and false apostles. Do you suppose if the church of Ephesus were existing today they would be supporting the Ecumenical Movement? I think they would certainly not. And today it is not popular to be considered a heresy-hunter—this is regarded as a dirty name to call people today, at least some people think so. But the Lord commends the church of Ephesus **precisely because of its intolerance—**

not being able to bear; that is the literal meaning of intolerance—not being able to bear those that were teachers of false doctrines. The term “apostles” here does not mean the Twelve Apostles, but rather authentic preachers or missionaries, those who are sent. And false apostles would be those who claimed to be authentic and to have been sent, but who upon thorough investigation were found to be false. Heresy is false doctrine of such a nature that if successful it would destroy Christianity. The germs and beginnings of it can be found in any church any time, anywhere. There are no perfectly sanctified people in the world, and there are no perfectly orthodox people in this world either. We all have in our thinking the germs of heresy or false doctrine which if **consistently** acted on and followed out would destroy our Christian faith; but God in His mercy prevents these germs of heresy from having free course, so that we are mercifully permitted to be inconsistent. There are people who have thought things and said things, and consistently followed their ideas through and ended up by becoming atheists, or something else just as bad. But by the mercy of God most of us are prevented from being so consistent; we may not be aware of any inconsistency, but it is there and it keeps the germs of heresy in us from destroying our Christian faith.

When heresy has to be dealt with, someone is sure to start quoting First Corinthians 13 and talking about the need for showing Christian love. But heresy that would destroy Christianity must be dealt with and it is not real Christian love to tolerate it. I heard a minister say once in a Synod or Presbytery meeting when something of this kind had to be faced, “Mr. Moderator, there is no way to kill a chicken that is completely satisfactory from the standpoint of the chicken.” There are times and sit-

uations where truth is more important than personalities, and where truth has to be vindicated and insisted on even if it involves opposing someone and accusing somebody. This we should remember: Christ did not criticize the Ephesian church for their intolerance; He commended them for it. Of course, this is against the spirit of our age, and perhaps one reason why the Visible Church with its many denominations is in the sad condition much of it is in today is because in the previous generation people were not willing to face their problems openly and honestly and deal with them according to Scripture and according to truth and righteousness. There have been many instances in the history of Christianity where someone stood up for the truth against opposition, and was extremely unpopular at the time, but was later vindicated by the verdict of history. The most famous was Athanasius, a presbyter of Alexandria, who at the great Council of Nicaea stood up for the true and eternal deity of Jesus Christ against overwhelming opposition. **Athanasius contra mundum** was how it was later described—“Athanasius against the world.” But he was finally vindicated, and it was his faith and courage that were used by the Lord to save Christianity from being merged with the paganism of that day. That was something like the spirit of the church at Ephesus, and the Lord commends them for it.

When something appears that is doubtful from the standpoint of Christian truth, don't by-pass it; check it out, test it by Scripture, and if it cannot stand this test, don't let it continue unchallenged in the Church. We are not commanded to root heresy out of the world, but we are certainly commanded to weed it out of the church.

LESSON 17

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS, REVELATION 2:1-7, cont.

The Lord also has here a complaint about the Ephesian church. After all this commendation of earnest, faithful and laborious continued activity, He says, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” Now, is it possible for a church to have a buzzing program of activities and works, and still be lacking in love? I read about a missionary somewhere in South America who said he had no time to pray or read the Bible; he was too busy witnessing to the pagan Indians there about Christ. No time to pray or read the Bible! If he keeps on like that it won't be worth anything. No time to pray or read the Bible! This is like saying, I don't have any time to eat. Not eating might be a good idea for some people for a limited time, but eventually you've got to eat—at any rate to get a bit of a snack from time to time! And don't be like the farmer who tried as an experiment to get his horse to live on nothing but water. Three times, according to the story, he was on the verge of success, but unfortunately each time at the critical moment the horse died, and he had to start

over again with another horse! You can't live without spiritual nourishment, and this means devotions, the mainspring of your life, prayer and Bible study, your channel of connection with the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

So the Ephesian Christians had lost their first love. Notice that the Lord does not accuse them of tapering off their activity, which was evidently continuing full blast as usual. But the Lord sees the heart, He sees the defective motives. They are not carrying on the activities with the kind of love they once had. It is possible to go about an active church program that includes all kinds of features and projects, just as a program of busy work; and on the other hand, it is possible to carry on such a program out of love for the Lord. And which of these is the case makes all the difference in the world, as to how the Lord views the work of that church. He sees the heart, and if real love isn't there, if the work is being carried on without real love for the Lord as the motivating force, the activities are not worth any-

thing at all. Remember Paul's chapter on love, First Corinthians 13—"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am nothing." In my younger days I used to mimeograph the annual report of the Kansas Women's Presbyterial. It was a long time ago, so I guess I can safely say something about it now. They got credit, each society, for each member of the society that had read a book. The members seemed to choose the thinner and smaller books quite regularly, but they figured credit down to one-half of a percentage point for reading those missionary or religious books. I got the impression that the important thing was not what was in the books, nor what the books could do for the readers, but the sacred "Standard of Efficiency" that mattered. I remember remarking that if it was up to me, the first thing I would do would be to abolish the "Standard of Efficiency" of the Women's Missionary Societies. I'm not sure they will love me for this candid comment, but I will stand by it. It may be a bit hard to call it a form of idolatry, but I do think it was religious formalism of an extreme sort, just routine busy work, obviously not spontaneous and obviously not motivated by love. They were keeping up the good work, but the love had waned. If this sort of thing continues, after a while, the work itself will also wane. I wonder if our generation today, by and large, in the Christian world, is not coasting along a good bit on the spiritual momentum inherited from a previous generation, just coasting along on the Christian zeal and concern of our grandparents, without ourselves really having the spiritual contact. And if this is the case, and continues without deep revival, the next generation after us is going to be left high and dry without something that we still have—something that we still have, not because of our personal concern, zeal or earnestness, but because it came down to us from the previous generation. Surely this is at least possible, and maybe one of the real things that the Lord would say to the church of today, and especially to those churches that congratulate themselves on having a well-rounded and well-equipped program of activities, might be, "Remember, you have lost your first love!" This is what counts in the eyes of the Lord. Someone has said that the Christian church must be a divine institution, otherwise it never could have survived almost two thousand years with absolutely no business methods! My friends, it is not business methods that the church primarily lacks or needs—it is heartfelt, sincere love for the Lord. The Church in its best days had no statistics, no computers, no standards of efficiency—none of these things that seem so important to us today, but it did have the saving, life-giving power of God at work in it.

There is a story about Thomas Aquinas, the famous theologian back in the Middle Ages, that on one occasion he went to Rome and visited the pope and was shown around all through the pope's magnificent palace, with all the art treasures, silver and gold, and the pope said, "Brother Thomas, you can see the day is past when the church could say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" And Thomas replied, "Yes, Father, but the day has also

passed when the church could say, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk.'"

You see, with the coming in of the success, and the gadgets and the equipment, something has been lost. Don't mistake my intended meaning here: I am in favor of the church having the best equipment it can get. The mimeograph that was bought at a pawn shop and has been handed down by three pastors in succession, is not good enough for the church anymore. I really don't think it is. We should have better equipment, and we should not equip the Lord's servants with typewriters that don't work and things like that. On the other hand, without a vital, burning love for the Lord, all the equipment that money will buy doesn't mean a thing. "Thou hast left thy first love!"

The Lord warns them with a triple warning: Remember, repent, repeat the first works—or else. This expression "or else" is considered quite modern—you do such-and-such or else—but there it is in the Bible. Remember, repent, repeat, or else. The candlestick being taken away means, you are going to lose your opportunity to witness for Christ. A church without love for Christ is not really a burning candlestick in His hand. The Ephesians are to remember their history, to recall their previous condition, what they had been like formerly; then they are to repent, and this last is the Greek word meaning "to change one's mind"—change your value system so that you get back to right thinking on the old basis of commitment, as to what is and what is not most important. Repent, and do the first works: this is intimately tied in with the history of the city. The "first works" were a long time before Paul and John; the first time a Roman ruler really put on a major program to clear the harbor. It was a tremendous undertaking, and of course it cost a lot of money, much more than the city of Ephesus could or did pay. And for a while it was successful—the first works. Then after a time the people relaxed and didn't keep the dredging up, as was necessary almost from day to day, and the sand and silt got ahead of them. And there came a time when they could no longer get in and out of the harbor, and the work had to be done all over again, and that was the second works for the harbor of Ephesus.

Now the church of Ephesus is told here that it must repeat the first works. If you expect to live as a lampstand in Christ's hands, you've got to do the second works, that is, to repeat the first works over again. Get back to the old basis of vital communication with the Lord and keep the spiritual harbor or channel of communication with the Lord clear, or your candlestick will be removed.

Ephesus is dead, the church there is only a memory, the candlestick is long gone from there, so all this came true in actual life. What is the message of this to the American church—to your church and mine of the present day?

LESSON 18

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS, REVELATION 2:1-7, cont.

There is further commendation here: "Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." You may wonder, what does this word mean? It is derived from the Nicholas name, quite obviously I think, meaning literally "Conquerors of the people." This was evidently a very harmful sect which was haunting the churches. Scholars mostly believe—rightly, I think—that the Nicolaitanes were the same, or at any rate closely similar to, the people mentioned in verse 14 who held the doctrine of Balaam; and then further down, in verse 20, that they got along with a woman named Jezebel. This was almost certainly not her real name, but she was called Jezebel because she was a real Jezebel of a woman. You will recall the Old Testament Jezebel, an extremely wicked person who slew the prophets of the Lord. Apparently the Nicolaitanes and the Balaamites and the Jezebelites were identical or very similar in their teachings and tendencies. These people advocated tolerance of sin, which is technically called antinomianism—the notion that your sins are forgiven by the grace of God, therefore it does not matter whether you keep on sinning or not. God is glorified when He forgives your sins; if He forgives ten sins He gets ten points of glory by this. So why not help God to get more glory? Go ahead, commit a hundred sins, or a million sins; the more you commit, the more glory God can get in forgiving them! This is the doctrine that the Lord says He hates.

At the Lutheran Reformation in Germany, back in the 1500's, there was a wild lunatic fringe fanatical sect which claimed that good works are not only not necessary for the Christian life, but positively injurious to the emancipated spiritual life, and the truly spiritual Christian will be careful to avoid them. Martin Luther commented on this—he was never a man to call a spade a shovel—and said of these fanatics, "Their damnation is just."

The Nicolaitanes were affecting the church of Ephesus. Would you like to commit some immoralities? Well, go right ahead, it is only your body, not your soul that does it. Then about going to a feast in an idol's temple, and becoming involved more or less in heathen ceremonies: you can do this too, because all your sins will be forgiven, you will have a clean slate, the grace of God covers everything. As a Christian you have blanket coverage, so it is all right to advocate an easy tolerance of evil. Such was the "line" of the Nicolaitanes, Balaamites and Jezebelites.

It is one thing to fall into evil through being a victim of temptation, as any of us may do from time to time; it is something very different to go around campaigning and advocating this sort of thing as all right, as the Nicolaitanes did. Now, this has a very modern sound. Do we have people like that in the world today? There has been sin of a shocking kind in the world ever since Adam

and Eve. Cain killed his brother Abel, and you go on from there; this is nothing new; the immorality and the crime and the sin that we know today are old, they are not new. The difference is that today, unlike in former times, today we have bishops and clergymen and professors of theology and professors of Bible in "Christian colleges" (not Geneva College, though!) standing up to say that these things are not wrong. Bishop John Robinson of the Church of England wrote a notorious book called *Honest to God*, in which he says that sex outside marriage under certain circumstances may not be necessarily wrong. This is what is called situational ethics, the idea that nothing is really right or wrong, but it all depends on your situation and your circumstances. Someone has said that the Ten Commandments should be re-named the Ten Suggestions. It is not just a case of Christians through weakness falling into temptation and sin, not just a case of ordinary wicked people giving themselves over to wickedness. It is today a case of the so-called Christian leaders who publish religious books and write sermons and get quoted on "Religion" in Time Magazine, who say that these things are not necessarily wrong. This is what we are up against today. This is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes and of Balaam and of Jezebel all over again in the modern world. So what Ephesus was faced with was the danger of compromising Christian standards. Down to the time when the Book of Revelation was written the church had resisted this danger. They knew about the Nicolaitanes and the rest of these people, but they were not buying it. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which the Lord Himself hated too. Ephesus as a church is not involved in a compromise with the world; the thing they need to repent of is internal and spiritual, a lack of their early devotion and first love. As they had not compromised on the wider field, there was hope for them.

There is also a promise here for those who overcome, in verse 7, "Him that overcometh. . .". Just before that, though, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Note that "churches" is plural, proving that this message is not intended only for the Church of Ephesus at that time, but for all churches of every time and place. If we are one of the churches, then the Holy Spirit is saying this to us too—there is a message in it for us too.

Then comes the promise. The one who overcomes will be given the fruit of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Those who went to those pagan feasts got a special food to eat, which was considered to be of a sacramental nature, and here is the Christian counterpart—the Christian who will not participate in that sort of thing, who refuses to compromise with such evil, who keeps himself clean from that, is promised the fruit of the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is seen in the very beginning of the

Bible, in the early chapters of Genesis, and then it drops out of the Bible, but here in Revelation it appears again. The person who fights against sin, against the devil and against the devil's system in the world, will get the fruit of the Tree of Life. Paradise of course means heaven. This brings us to the end of the Letter to the Church of Ephesus.

The church at Ephesus is commended for resisting theological error and also commended for resisting liars. These two are side by side—those who falsely claimed to be apostles, and those who preached false doctrines.

The Ephesian church sifted these out, and rejected them. On the other hand, they also resisted those who would break down Christian life standards. So the Ephesian church can be compared with churches of the present day. The church at Ephesus worked very hard; the only thing the Lord said against them was that they had lost their first love. The Lord says this because He never flatters people; He tells the real, honest, down-to-earth truth; He sees people as they really are; the message concerns realities, not any kind of sentimentality or wishful thinking.

LESSON 19

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA, REVELATION 2:8-11

Sir William Ramsay gives each of these cities a descriptive title. Ephesus he calls the city of change, Smyrna the city of life, Pergamos the city of authority, and so on down through the seven cities. You will recall why Ephesus was the city of change. They had to work constantly dredging the harbor to keep communication with the sea open; today the harbor of Ephesus is seven miles inland, and Ephesus is only ruins, a totally dead city. Smyrna, on the other hand, is one of the few that is still a living city today. The Turkish spelling of the name Smyrna is Ismir. We import figs and other products from Izmir. It is apparently one of the oldest known cities in that part of the world. Ramsay says that this was a Greek city one thousand years before the birth of Christ. That is about as long ago as anything that could be called a Greek city could be found, and still living as a city today. The Greeks were subdivided into two racial groups, the Ionians and the Aeolians. Smyrna was an Aeolian city, then it was conquered and became an Ionian city. In the classic period of Greece, and the Roman Empire, Smyrna was called "the crown of Ionia." In fact it is considered very beautiful even today. It was a seaport like Ephesus. They had a small, landlocked harbor that was entered from the sea by a narrow channel, and they could put a chain across the entrance to keep enemy ships from coming in.

The mountain behind the city, Mount Pagos, which is simply the Greek word for "hill", was a symmetrically shaped mountain often referred to as the crown of the city. On the top of this mountain there is today a ruined castle, but in New Testament times there was on the mountain top a group of buildings in classic Greek architecture, with beauty and symmetry and Greek pillars or columns, and more buildings down the slope. "The crown of Ionia"—this name fits in with the message that Christ has to the city there. It was at Smyrna that the martyr Polycarp was put to death. His name, Polycarp, means "much fruit." He was put to death by burning in the year 155. He was an old man, said to be 80 or over at that time, and bishop or pastor of the Church at Smyrna. He was arrested and commanded to blaspheme the name of Jesus Christ, which he refused to do. The Roman proconsul who was prosecuting him, said "I will have you thrown to the wild beasts." Polycarp re-

plied "I will not blaspheme the name of Jesus Christ." Then the proconsul said, "Allright, if you are not afraid of the wild beasts, we will throw you to the flames and have you burned alive." Polycarp answered, "You are speaking of the fire that burns for one hour and then goes out, instead of thinking of the fire that burns for ever." So Polycarp was put to death, one of the truly great figures of the early church, about A.D. 155.

This letter to the Church at Smyrna is unique or almost unique among these seven letters, in that it is entirely commendatory; there is no criticism, no censure on the church for anything. It is completely a statement of approval and encouragement. You will recall that the letter to Ephesus commended the church there for a number of things, but censured them for having lost their first love. There is no such censure in the letter to Smyrna, and this certainly speaks highly for the faithfulness and spiritual condition of the church in that city.

The Lord introduces Himself here as the one who was dead and yet lived, or as some of the recent translations have it, was dead and lived again. This last translation is certainly incorrect; there is nothing in the Greek that suggests living again. In case you are studying Greek, it is the Greek aorist tense and means "continued to live even when dead." "Was dead," etc., can be translated "became dead and yet lived." So you see death was not a termination of His life.

Smyrna was a Greek city from about 1000 B.C. to about 600 B.C., when it was conquered by enemies and largely destroyed. After that for three to four hundred years it was counted a dead city, though there were still some people living there, and a scattered collection of poor villages around the site, but not a city as the Greeks counted a city. For the Greeks to count something as a city it had to have an organized government, appoint or elect its own magistrates, have its own ideology, and so forth—this was a polis or city. We get the word "political" from the Greek noun polis meaning "city."

Smyrna after being conquered around 600 B.C. was

no polis; it was not what the Greeks would call a city; it was just an area, a place where some people happened to live. Then after about 300 B.C. it was rebuilt and became a real city again, and this continued on to the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation by the apostle John. So you could say that the city of Smyrna became dead and yet lived. There was life there, and it did live again as a city as it had been before—it became dead and yet lived.

It is an interesting fact that Smyrna was an air-conditioned city—air-conditioned in nature's way. There was a westerly breeze that evidently was directed partly by the topography of the land and the mountain just back of the city, that brought cooling, very refreshing winds all summer long, during all the hot part of the year. This is described by Sir William Ramsay in his book *The Letters to the Seven Churches*. He says that this cooling breeze would come almost every day, during late spring, all summer and early autumn. In the middle of the morning when things began to warm up, there came the cooling breeze from off the sea. This was called the *zephyros*, or zephyr. It would blow all day long, and with considerable strength; it even blew water up from the beach onto the shore, with considerable strength. In late afternoon, when the sun was setting far in the west, this breeze would taper off, and there would be only a very light breeze through the night. This kind of weather made Smyrna an ideal place to live. I had a professor once who said in an archaeology course, "Of course California is in a class by itself; you can't mention that along with other places; but apart from California the ideal place to live is Egypt." He said that Egypt has a perfect climate, with very low humidity; you feel fine in Egypt, provided you have money to spend. He thought Egypt was a wonderful place to live. Well, Smyrna was considered so by the people of the Roman province of Asia, and long after John's time enjoyed practically unbroken peace and prosperity with few disasters worthy of mention. Finally it was conquered

by the Turks in 1402 A.D., just about a hundred years before the time of Christopher Columbus and Martin Luther. The Turks did not exterminate the Christians of Smyrna, and it is said that in the present population of Smyrna the Christians outnumber the Muslims three to one. I am sure that many of these must be what we would call nominal Christians, members of the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity or some other Near Eastern branch of the Christian faith. But they certainly are not Muslims; they claim to be believers of Jesus Christ.

Ramsay says that the keynote of this city was life and joy, victory over defeat, superiority over the circumstances, and especially the fact that death did not kill the city—it was dead and yet lived—it lived on amid death for 300 years, later becoming a living city again in the full sense of the word.

Now among the things that the Lord says here to the Church of Smyrna is that He knows their circumstances and especially He knows their poverty, and yet they are rich. How can you be poor and rich at the same time? Well, this depends on what you are talking about. Evidently the Christian people of Smyrna were not very well fixed with this world's goods, and probably some of them had lost their jobs because they were Christians. This was a common thing in the Roman world of that day—loyalty to Christ would cost you your job, and after that you had a hard time, you had to scrounge for a livelihood with all sorts of marginal things that were not very good or profitable. So such people could claim poverty. Yet the Lord says they are rich. Later in the letters to the seven churches, the letter to Laodicea, we read of a church that thought it was rich, but the Lord said it was poor. And the church at Smyrna was poor as the banks count wealth, but the Lord said they were rich—they had the riches that last forever, the true value and the true riches.

LESSON 20

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA, REVELATION 2:8-11, cont.

Another thing mentioned in this letter is the blasphemy of the professing Jews, the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews but they are not, but are in fact the synagogue of Satan. We Christians in Beaver Falls do not have any real trouble with the Jewish Synagogue—a little complaint maybe about Christmas carols in the public schools, but nothing really threatening or devastating. We can hardly believe how these early Christian churches were put upon by the Jews. Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, and as far as Palestine was concerned this put the Jews clear out of the picture as a community of people that could do anything to harm Christians. In all the early period of the Christian Church—the period down to the end of the Book of Acts in the New Testament, it was the Jews that persecuted Christianity while the Romans protected it.

Paul on repeated occasions would have been killed by the Jews, but the Roman officials, who stood for civil rights of a sort, protected him. John is here at the turning of the page—the period where the Jews could harm Christianity is coming to an end. From here on it is the Romans that are persecuting Christianity. Rome finally came to realize that Christianity was not merely a denomination or sect of the Jewish religion, but a religion that stood on its own feet, and actually could be a threat to the future of the Roman Empire.

Do not misunderstand this. The early Christians were of all things not revolutionists or political activists; they were the most peaceful and law-abiding of people, and like some of my old Chinese friends, they thought that the best government is the one that

leaves you alone the most, and beyond this opinion, they were not interested in politics. And of all things they had no idea or intention of doing anything to try to overthrow the Roman Empire. But there was a clash involved of irreconcilable ideologies or world-views. You cannot have two supreme loyalties, and the Romans were sharp enough to realize that the success of Jesus Christ and His kingdom would doom the Roman Empire as an absolutism that claimed and demanded supreme devotion and loyalty of its people. And certainly it was true that even though not a Christian in the world would lift a finger to do anything against the Roman Empire, the supremacy of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords left no room for Caesar with the kind of things Caesar claimed. Jesus said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's, but that was at an earlier period. Later when Caesar himself claimed to be God what were the Christians to do about that? You see this involves you in a different kind of situation. Now at this point here in the Book of Revelation the Jews are very much down on the Christians. Ramsay suggests as a reason for this the fact that probably most of the members of the church at Smyrna had formerly been members of the Jewish synagogue, and had been converted to Christianity by the preaching of the Gospel, and so won to be Christians. And when a Jew is won to be a Christian he is lost to the synagogue; and if not immediately, at least in a generation or two he loses identity with the Jewish race; his children and grandchildren are brought up in Christian circles and marry Christians, and so on. When a Jew is converted to Christ, from then on he is identified with the Christian church rather than with the Jewish synagogue. This results in an increasingly hard core of resistant Jews. When Peter preached on Pentecost, three thousand were converted to Christ all at one time, and a few days later two thousand more, so that there were 5,000; the Greek says that was the number of the men (literally, the males), so if you add a corresponding number of women, there would be some ten thousand Christians in and around Jerusalem. Never after that was there such a mass movement of Jews to become Christians. Peter never had a repetition of that kind of evangelistic success, let alone the rest of the apostles and early missionaries. Paul won the Jews to Christ the hard way, one at a time—one household or maybe just one person at a time.

Those ten thousand Jews in and near Jerusalem that were converted to Christianity in its earliest days were probably most of them pious believers of the Old Testament period. Then God switches His covenant train from the Old Testament track to the New Testament track, and at Peter's preaching these people in a mass movement accept Jesus as the Messiah, repent of their sins, receive Christian baptism and become known as Christians—members of the Christian Church. And this leaves behind a resistant core of Jews who are bitter because they have lost so many members, therefore they are down on Christianity.

It is recorded that at the time of Polycarp's martyr-

dom, half a century after John's time, the Jews took an active part in accusing Polycarp and bringing about his death—the Jews of Smyrna.

The trial of Polycarp was held on a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and he was executed at two o'clock in the afternoon on that Saturday. The proceedings began with a big field day of theatricals and athletics which stopped about eleven o'clock. All the morning was filled with this. The Jews would not attend any of this, because it violated their Sabbath. But to get rid of the person whom they hated as an enemy of their faith apparently took priority even over their extreme strictness about the Sabbath, so they came out in force to the trial of Polycarp. It is recorded in the Gospel of John that the Jews—especially the Pharisees—held a meeting on the Sabbath to plan how to get rid of Jesus; this was also technically illegal, of course, from the standpoint of the Old Testament law. So the Jews of Smyrna turned out for the trial of Polycarp and urged on the Roman officials to have this man put to death.

Polycarp, when commanded to blaspheme the name of Jesus Christ, said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. Shall I now blaspheme my Lord and Master?" He refused, and was immediately condemned to death, and the Jews turned out in force to the place of execution and brought quantities of firewood to help in burning Polycarp alive. This happened half a century after John wrote the Book of Revelation, but it will show you the attitude of the Jews toward the Christians in Smyrna. Now, the Lord says in this letter, that they say they are Jews but really they are not, they are the synagogue of Satan or the devil. Though called the synagogue of the Jews, in real fact they were deniers of almost everything that the name "Jew" ought to mean; they were living contradictions of the name "Israelite." They had the outward name only, not the reality that this name ought to stand for. Paul said in Romans that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly. What is called "Israel" is not always really Israel as the Lord looks on things; it may be the synagogue of Satan. If the Lord said it, it must have been true—the Jews of Smyrna were the synagogue of Satan.

We may note here that in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, in the chapter on Church Fellowship, it says that there may be associations of men that are called churches but that have so far denied the truth of Christianity that they are no longer churches in fact, but rather synagogues of Satan, and are not to be considered as true branches of the Church of Jesus Christ. So a church or other religious organization may become apostate and so contrary to the truth of God that we should not count it as really a church at all. I know that there are some of these in our day. The spiritually alive and alert Christian will realize this and react accordingly.

The Lord says to the Christians of Smyrna, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." There

is suffering ahead for them; the devil is going to cast some of them into prison, that they may be tried, and they shall have tribulation ten days; but they are to be faithful unto death, and the Lord will give them a crown of life.

The devil, you see, is the real and true source of persecution and opposition to Christianity. He is named openly here. It isn't his human agents that are the real source of the trouble—they are merely dupes of Satan; it is the devil himself, invisible behind the scenes, that stirs up persecution and trouble for Christians.

In the Book of Proverbs we read that where nobody adds wood, the fire goes out. If the devil isn't adding any fuel, the flames of persecution will flicker out; at least open and active persecution will die down. Not

everybody would be converted to Christ, but **this sort** of bitter and extreme persecution would flicker out. **But** the devil keeps stirring it up. So the Christians of Smyrna are given to understand the real nature and source of the opposition they face. This would encourage them, because they certainly believed and knew that Christ is stronger than Satan and is sure to overcome Satan and His works.

Some of the Christians of Smyrna are going to be cast into prison for ten days. This reference to ten days is taken mainly as meaning that the period of persecution and extreme suffering will be a definite but limited and measurable period, not something that will go on indefinitely into the future. It will be definite and the church will outlive it.

LESSON 21

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA, REVELATION 2:8-11, cont.

Some of the members of the church at Smyrna would be cast into prison and would have tribulation ten days. We should realize the fact that prison was a prelude to execution. Imprisonment as a penalty for crime was not used in the Roman Empire. The Roman government did not spend money maintaining people in prison for years and years. This was too expensive; there were cheaper ways. The penalty for lawbreaking, if it was a relatively minor offense, was a money fine; if a more serious offense, banishment to some distant foreign region; and the most serious offenses, death. Prisons were used only as temporary guardhouses to keep people until they could be tried, or until appeals could be finished, or until the day of execution after they had been sentenced to be put to death. So when the church at Smyrna is told that some of its members will be put in prison, this probably means they will be executed. Abstractly, of course, the outcome of their trial could be acquittal, but it was not often that Christians before a Roman court won a verdict of acquittal, so this would be very unlikely.

The emphasis in this letter is on faithfulness and loyalty. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Some people have understood this to mean, Be faithful all your life long until you finally die, don't give up your religion at some point in your life; continue steadfast as a Christian believer until the time of your death. This is probably not the meaning, or at any rate not the whole meaning here. Rather, the idea is, Be faithful in maintaining and professing your faith, even though it costs you your life in this world. This is what it was coming to in Smyrna—continue your profession of faith until you die as a martyr, as Polycarp and no doubt many others would do. If you continue your faith as a Christian, when you could

save your life by blaspheming Christ and renouncing Christianity—if you continue faithful to Christ even though the outcome may be death—then you will be given a crown of life.

Jim Elliott was one of the missionaries shot to death by poisoned arrows of the Auca Indians. Incidentally, this was no murder—the Indians believed they were acting in legitimate self-defense; they had come to believe that these people in airplanes had come there to kill them all. And this entire tribe, almost, is now converted to Christ, through the work of Jim Elliott's widow and others. But some time before his death Jim Elliott said: He would be a fool who would refuse to exchange that which cannot be kept for that which cannot be lost. Now that statement I commend to you for thoughtful consideration. No one wants to die a martyr's death; it is a terrible thing to think of; but Jim Elliott sealed his testimony with his life. If you want to read a thrilling book by Jim Elliott's widow, get **The Savage My Kinsman**, by Elisabeth Elliott. All right, anyone would be a fool who would refuse to exchange what cannot be kept for what cannot be lost.

Loyalty was the background of the Smyrna church. These cities like Smyrna once they were taken over by Rome did not seem to be at all restless under the Roman rule; rather, they took pride on their being in a great empire like that; often the various cities vied with each other and tried to outdo each other in displays of loyalty to Rome. It is recorded that at one time there was a Roman army in the hills back of Smyrna, and they got caught in a winter campaign without adequate cold weather clothing; and the citizens of Smyrna took nearly all their own coats and cloaks and winter clothes and gave them to the Roman soldiers. They got real recognition for that

in Rome, and the Roman government didn't forget it in later years. Smyrna went all the way in its loyalty to Rome; and here the Christian church in Smyrna is challenged to be equally loyal to Jesus Christ. Sir William Ramsay says that the Christian church was the real heart and soul of Smyrna—the real citizens of Smyrna were neither the Jews nor the pagans, but the Christians. The Jews were not really Jews, as God looked at things; they were the synagogue of Satan; the people of Smyrna that really counted as God looks at things were the Christians.

Blaiklock, a New Zealand scholar, in a book entitled *Archaeology and the New Testament*, describes the catacombs under the city of Rome—something like 1600 miles of tunnels under and around the city of Rome. Part of these tunnels have not even yet been fully explored and cleared for people to see. But there are thousands and tens of thousands of burials under Rome, in the catacombs. There are pagan burials, and there are many Christian burials, some of them just a few bones left over from Christians who were killed and eaten by lions. In the inscriptions on the pagan tombs there is a predominant note of deep pessimism. One has a quotation from the Latin poet Catullus: "Suns may come and suns may go, but for us there remains one long night to sleep"—*nobis nox una longa dormienda est*. But the Christian tombs show a great contrast to this pagan pessimism; they betray no resentment against their cruel persecutors and murderers, but only peaceful symbols—lambs, doves, flowers, a sheaf of wheat and inscriptions such as: "Not dead but with the Lord"; "Asleep in Jesus"; "Waiting for the Resurrection", and similar sentiments.

Blaiklock comments that here was this great city of Rome above ground, with two and a half million people, going about its business and pleasures and lust and ambition and money—all really dead. All that was really alive in the Rome of that period was underground in the catacombs: the dead Christians were buried there, and the living Christians worshipped there when persecution became fierce. This was where the real life of Rome was, not above ground where people were serving the world, the flesh, and the devil, but down there underground where God looked and saw what was really alive in Rome.

The same could be said of Smyrna. As God looked at Smyrna, the Christians were the real life of the city. The Christian faithful unto death will receive a crown

of life. Smyrna was called "the crown of Ionia", and Mount Pagos was called the crown of Smyrna. They were very proud of this metaphor or figure of speech; it is on some of their coins and medals that have been found, and this ties in with what Christ promises the Christians of Smyrna: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. This is what cannot be lost.

Then the Lord says, "He that overcometh will not be hurt of the second death." The "second death" is mentioned later in the Book of Revelation (chapter 20 verse 14). The second death is the lake of fire, meaning hell. It has been commented that if a person has two resurrections he has only one death, but if he has only one resurrection he has two deaths, the first death and the second death. The first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, when you are born again of the Holy Spirit, and you arise from spiritual death to life in Christ, or Christ rises in you; and the second resurrection is the bodily resurrection at the last day when Christ comes again. Those who have the two resurrections have only one death—what the world calls death: physical death. And those who have only one resurrection, the resurrection to judgment at the end of the world, have two deaths; they have physical death, and then after that they have the second death, called hell or the lake of fire. The basic idea of hell is eternal separation from God. In the Bible both life and death are primarily qualitative ideas, not simply quantitative concepts, such as an extension of time to infinity. Of course the life after death—both heaven and hell—is endless, but the basic idea in the Bible is qualitative. Eternal life in heaven is the full enjoyment of the favor of God. In His great high priestly prayer, John 17:3, Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." In Psalm 30 verse 5 we read, "In his favor is life." This is life in the fullest sense. It is called in the Bible "the life that is life indeed", the enjoyment of the unbroken and indestructible favor of God. And of course eternal death is the opposite of this, it is eternal separation from the favorable presence of God.

Smyrna is a living city today, while Ephesus is totally dead. There are Christian churches and Christian believers in Smyrna today; how many of them are truly regenerate believers is known only to God. But I think you can see why Sir William Ramsay called Smyrna "the city of life."

LESSON 22

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS, REVELATION 2:12-17

This name "Pergamos" really ought to be spelled Pergamum, and it is spelled that way in Bible dictionaries and in recent versions of the Bible. But since we are used the Authorized Version we will continue to call it Pergamos. Pergamos is not quite a totally dead city today. Ephesus is completely dead; Smyrna is

alive; and Pergamos is dead and away, dead and removed. Where the city was in Bible times there is nothing, just ruins. Not too far away, however, there is a modern town with a name similar to Pergamos, which is really the continuation of the ancient city. This place is about fifteen miles inland; it is not a seaport like Ephesus and

Smyrna, and it was not at the end of any important trade route, so it did not have the commercial advantages that **Ephesus** and **Smyrna** had. The importance of **Pergamos** was not commercial or economic, but political. It had been the capital of a kingdom for hundreds of years before the time of the Romans—a kingdom with area approximately equal to that of the later Roman Province of **Asia**. It was thus a seat of government. Ramsay called **Ephesus** the city of change, **Smyrna** the city of life, and **Pergamos** the city of authority. This was its function and its nature.

One hundred and thirty-three years before Christ, the last king of **Pergamos** decided to make his kingdom a part of the Roman Empire, so he made a will and bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman Empire. And when he died, Rome took over, and from then on **Pergamos** was the seat of Roman authority in the Province of **Asia**. Let me read you a description of the site by Sir William Ramsay. He had visited all the other six cities, and came to **Pergamos** last, and he describes his impressions. This city was on the top of a large hill. Nearly all of the seven cities had a hill nearby, with a temple or some structure on the top which would be their acropolis, but in the case of **Pergamos**, the city itself was on the top of the hill, and other buildings were built around the base later. Ramsay describes it: "It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation: A royal city! I came to it after seeing the others, and that was the impression which it produced. There is something unique and overpowering in its effect, planted as it is on its magnificent hill, standing out boldly on the level plain, and dominating the valley and the mountains on the south. Other cities in the land have splendid hills which made them into powerful fortresses in ancient times, but in them the hill as a rule is the acropolis and the city lies beneath or around or before it. But here the hill was the city proper, and the great buildings, chiefly Roman, which lie below the city were external ornaments lending additional beauty and stateliness to it." That is a general description of the site of **Pergamos**.

The Lord opens his message to the angel of the church in **Pergamos**: "These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." This mention of a sharp two-edged sword recalls chapter 1 verse 16 where you read the description of Christ as He appeared in a glorious vision to John. The word used here is not the ordinary Greek word for a sword (*machiara*, used in **Romans** 13:4, meant a long sword with a single edge.) Here in **Revelation** 2 the sword is a sword such as the Roman soldiers used, short, double-edged and with a sharp point. The Greeks called this a barbarian sword, meaning simply that it was not Greek. Ramsay says it was intended for thrusting and then cutting in both directions—a very effective and deadly weapon. In **Romans** 13 the power of the sword is the power to execute the death penalty, the power of life and death. The one who wears the sword is invested with the power of life and death. This was especially suitable to **Pergamos**, the city where official authority was located, the capital of

the Roman province of **Asia**, the seat of the proconsul who had the power of life and death. Christ has the absolute and universal authority, and He speaks here to the church situated in the city where official authority is located.

The Romans classified governors of provinces into those that did and those that did not have the power of the sword. You will recall that Pontius Pilate in **Judea** had the power of the sword. He asked Jesus, "Do you not know that I have power to crucify you and I have power to release you?" And Jesus replied, "You would have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above." This power which Pilate had was the power of the sword, the power of life and death. Some proconsuls had this power and some did not, by grant of the government at Rome. And so here at **Pergamos**, the seat of the Roman proconsul who had the power of life and death and was using this power against Christians, we have Jesus Christ speaking as the one who really has the power of life and death. He is the one who bears the real sword, and has the real and absolute authority.

We are told here that the Lord knows their works, and He knows where they dwell, even where Satan's seat is; and they are holding fast His name and have not denied his faith, and so on. "Satan's seat"—perhaps this should be translated Satan's throne. So here we have the seat of the Roman proconsul, and the Lord calls it the throne of Satan. A prominent atheist has said that God is fading away as the devil has faded away before him. I suppose it is true in some people's minds, that God is fading away, but the trouble, you know, is that this cannot be permanent. I heard of a minister who said that there isn't any devil except in your own evil thoughts. No doubt Satan is quite pleased to hear people say such things; it gives him a better opportunity to do his sinister work. The Bible of course is realistic about Satan; it represents him as really existing, a powerful being (but much less powerful than God, of course), evil, malignant, sinister, the enemy of both God and man, called "the god of this world", "the father of lies", "the deceiver of the nations", and so on. This is the devil. Now, do we have evidence in **America** today of the existence of the devil? Forget all about the popular cartoon image of the devil, with a pitchfork, a forked tail and belching smoke. The devil is far too intelligent to allow himself to be seen in any such way as that. He is more likely to be wearing an academic cap and gown, or appearing in the pulpit of a fashionable but apostate church—not the devil in person but the devil in the person of his agents.

Martin Luther when he was hiding in the Wartburg castle in what is today East Germany, hiding from enemies who would have liked to kill him, and working at translating the Bible and other things, said he saw the devil. He is said to have thrown his inkwell at him and the ink made a big spot on the opposite wall. It is said if you go there today you can still see the ink spot. Now, I don't know whether Luther really saw the devil or not. Maybe his nervous condition at the time induced some hallucinations. But I am sure Luther believed in the

devil and I am sure that the devil knew that Martin Luther was his enemy. Ink in the form of a hurled inkwell doesn't bother the devil at all. Ink used to print good Christian books and Bibles bothers the devil, but ink on the wall does not affect him at all. I have met people in China who claimed they had seen devils or demons, though I never saw any. You can't convince them that they haven't seen devils, either; they know more about this subject than we do. Well, the Bible is realistic in describing Satan, and his works. And the Lord says here that the church at Pergamos is located and dwells where Satan's throne is.

Biblical scholars have tried to figure out what is meant here by Satan's throne. German archaeologists discovered at Pergamos an immense altar of the Greek god Zeus, or Jupiter, the chief of the gods, called by the Greeks Zeus Soter, or "Zeus the Savior". This of course was idolatrous and highly offensive to Christians. It may have been this altar to Zeus that was called Satan's throne. It was discovered in the latter part of the 1800's by a German archaeological expedition. An immense affair, it was taken apart block by block and transported to Germany and reassembled. Today it is in a museum in Communist East Germany. You can go and see it if you choose, on your next trip to Europe. The idea that this altar was the throne of Satan is one explanation.

LESSON 23

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS, REVELATION 2:12-17, cont.

Pergamos, as the Roman capital of the Province of Asia, was the seat of emperor-worship. People had to pretend that they believed in it even if they didn't really, just as in pre-war Japan people had to affirm belief in the divinity of the emperor; they could put their tongue in their cheek and cross their fingers as long as their hands were in their pockets. In pre-war Japan a professor of political science and constitutional law in a large university wrote a textbook in which he made the statement that the emperor is an organ of the state—an affirmation that would be considered an obvious truism anywhere in the western world. This professor was almost publicly disgraced for his statement; he almost lost his freedom and his position. In America you can say that the president is an organ of the state, but in pre-war Japan you could not say that the emperor is an organ of the state.

In the Roman Empire emperor-worship was a device to tie this immense sprawling empire together—an empire that reached from what today is Pakistan, almost, to the border of Scotland in the west. This was a tremendous tract of country of diverse languages, ethnic groups, religious faiths and life-styles. What force could hold all this together? What could keep all this from falling apart? From the Roman standpoint, emperor-worship served as a device for this. The emperor is recognized as divine; people all over this great empire burned their little bit of incense on red-hot charcoal in front of the

Another suggested idea was that there was a god especially worshipped at Pergamos called Asklepios, originally pictured in human form with a serpent alongside, and later portrayed just as a serpent. A medal of this was found which shows the Roman emperor Caracalla (died 217 A.D.—somewhat later than the time of John), visiting Pergamos and paying homage to a serpent coiled around a tree, with his arm lifted in a sort of Nazi salute (a common token of reverence or worship in the ancient world). So, a serpent. And of course this would immediately call to the minds of Christians the history of Adam and Eve and the devil. Indeed the devil is called in the Bible "the old serpent." This is the second possibility as to the meaning of Satan's throne in this letter—that it was something connected with the worship of this god Asklepios, who finally was pictured and honored in the form of a serpent.

Ramsay, however, holds that these could not be the main idea here, that the predominant idea here is the Roman authority that persecuted Christians, and that the idolatry here is not primarily the worship of Zeus nor the worship of Asklepios but the worship of Caesar, the worship of the living emperor at Rome. And this is highly probable, and any connection with Zeus and Asklepios must be secondary and subordinate.

image of Caesar, and this served as "the tie that binds." Not very effectively, perhaps, but better than nothing, from the Roman standpoint.

From the Christian standpoint, on the other hand, this rendering divine honor to Caesar was a terrible evil, a shocking and terrible sin—to honor a man as if he were God.

Now Pergamos was the first place in the Province of Asia, and indeed the first place in the entire continent of Asia, that had a temple and an altar dedicated to the worship of Caesar. For forty years Pergamos was the only city of Asia with this distinction. The temple was dedicated to Augustus, the first Roman emperor for whom divinity was claimed. Later such a temple was built at Ephesus, and still later one at Smyrna; or perhaps Smyrna's was the second and that of Ephesus the third. These however were subordinate and for forty years Pergamos had the only one. This was of course tied in with the central location of Pergamos as the seat of the proconsul who had the power of the sword, the power of life and death.

According to Sir William Ramsay, then, Satan's throne at Pergamos was this center of emperor-worship which was used to persecute Christians. And to them it became a matter of life and death. You might say that Satan's throne, in the first place, was the altar in the temple of

Caesar, and secondly it was the headquarters of the proconsul who carried this wicked policy out. The loyalty of Christians was tested by this one special test.

It is a strange thing—Rome was the most tolerant and the most intolerant of governments. Rome was tolerant of all religions, and there was always room for one more, except for the one religion that claimed to be the only true religion. It was the exclusive claims of Christianity that caused offense. People could worship Isis, Osiris, Mithras—there was plenty of room and tolerance for them all. But Christianity—that was different. So Christians at the time of John, near the end of the first century, were being persecuted just because they were Christians. The emperor Nero is said to have set the city of Rome on fire, and then accused the Christians of having done it. People made up absurd charges like this against the Christians. By the time the Book of Revelation was being written, you didn't have to be accused of setting a city on fire—it was enough just to be known as a Christian; just to be a Christian was considered evidence that a person was subversive, disloyal and a traitor to his country and to Rome. And the loyalty of Christians when accused was tested by their willingness to perform a rite of devotion in the official religion by offering at least a token sacrifice to the so-called divine emperor. There would be a little bed of red-hot charcoal and an image of Caesar above it, or possibly an inscription and name-plate, but more likely an actual image, and the accused person would sprinkle a little powdered incense on the burning charcoal—just that little pinch, some said one grain of incense was enough, just a little bit of incense offered to the image of Caesar, and that action would save your life. But if you refused to do this, you were immediately considered to be a traitor and a public enemy, and were put to death without mercy or delay.

Pergamos was the center of this evil business, and we read that the church remained steadfast against this. The tension and the pressure must have been terrific, but they remained faithful, even in the days when a church member named Antipas was Christ's faithful martyr, who was slain among them, where Satan dwelt. Nothing more is known about this man Antipas than what is stated here in this 13th verse. He is not mentioned elsewhere. It is possible that Antipas was not a resident of Pergamos and not a member of that particular church, but a Christian from somewhere else, because it is said that he was slain "among" them, which would seem to indicate that he was brought or had come from some other place. It was a fact that Pergamos was the place where the trials were held and the executions carried out. So possibly—perhaps even probably—Antipas was brought from Ephesus or from Smyrna or from some other place, and was slain at Pergamos, with the Christians there aware of it, deploring it, but unable to prevent it—he was slain among them.

The people of Pergamos would be most exposed to this danger of losing their life on account of loyalty to Christ, because they lived closest to the center of this

business. This would be the hottest place, the most dangerous place, for Christians, in the entire Roman province of Asia. If a person lived in some remote village out in the woods he could very likely live out his life with no notice being taken of him. But if one lived at Pergamos it would be very dangerous to be known as a Christian. Any enemy of the Christians who had a grudge for some private reason could accuse someone of being a Christian, and this would immediately get him in trouble with the Roman proconsul.

Ramsay also says that while Antipas is the only martyr mentioned in the letters to the seven churches, we should not suppose that he was the only one. This is the nature of these letters; they mention one thing of a kind; presumably Antipas was the first to have been put to death as a Christian in Pergamos, but not by any means the last. There must have been many more, both from Pergamos itself and from other places, but Antipas is mentioned presumably because he was the first, so he set a pattern of faithfulness in this way.

And the Lord commends the church at Pergamos for their faithfulness in the face of this kind of tension and danger. On the other hand, we read that the Lord had a few things against them, because they had those that held the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak king of Moab to seduce the people of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. The reference to Balaam is Numbers chapters 22-24. Probably we are familiar with the history involved. Balaam was the man who was motivated by the love of money, and who advocated doing wrong to accomplish what he felt was good. So the doctrine of Balaam comes down in Scripture as a sample of such immoral tendencies. And so it was at Pergamos. To eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. This was a temptation to people in the church at Pergamos, perhaps chiefly to the ones who were somewhat ahead in the world, who had business interests and so forth which would suffer if they didn't just fall in with the prevailing pattern and life-style. So there was a party or a group at Pergamos that advocated compliance on this front. Ephesus had evidently completely and successfully resisted this kind of temptation; Smyrna was apparently not affected by it; there was only commendation in the letter to Smyrna. But here at Pergamos there was a party that was advocating the wrong thing; and when we reach Thyatira we shall see that it seemed to be almost dominant there.

Do we have the doctrine of Balaam in America today? Are there people of whom it could be truly said that money is their god? And what about fornication and immorality? We don't call this the doctrine of Balaam, today it is called "the new morality." This kind of sin is nothing new; it has been in the world since early times; what is new today is that the supposed leaders of Christianity are rising up and saying that such living is not wrong. Call it "situational ethics", call it "the new morality"—it is really just the very old immorality.

Next the Lord says that the church at Pergamos had

a group or faction that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, and the church was guilty of tolerating this. Why didn't the church do something about it? These pro-Nicolaitanes should have been disciplined, and if they refused to repent they should have been excommunicated; but they were apparently tolerated and nothing was being done about them.

Sir William Ramsay is of the opinion that the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was more sophisticated than the doctrine of Balaam; that the doctrine of Balaam was sort of on a homespun level of compromise with evil, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was a sophisticated rationalization of wrongdoing on the part of the cultured and the educated, the people who were more up in the world, and who were more in danger because of that test of putting incense on the charcoal before the image of Caesar.

Now what is a person to do when he comes to that kind of a Yes or No crisis? Real Christians simply said No, and paid for this with their life. But there would be a strong temptation to explain it away somehow, and this is what Ramsay thinks was the real doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Something like this: after all, what is a little bit of incense, a little pinch of powder between your thumb and your forefinger? How could that be so important? Everybody knows that Caesar isn't really God; this is a mere fiction put up by the government to make sure that people will be loyal to the authority of Rome. Now we are loyal, we are not traitors, we are not disloyal to the Roman Government; and it is just too bad that the particular test specified by the government happens to be something that technically is against our religion; but after all that is just looking at the surface of the thing. What is the harm, really now, of putting a little bit of incense on the charcoal, when all we really mean is that Caesar is the emperor of Rome; we don't mean that he is the God that created heaven and earth;

just the emperor of Rome; we are not pirates or bandits; we are loyal citizens.

So they would explain the temptation away with this compliant rationalization, and when it came to the test they would put the incense on the charcoal and say, Lord Caesar, and get off scot free. Very likely the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was something like this. But we may ask, Was it right to explain a moral issue away like that? You know the whole matter was closely parallel to the attempt of the Japanese Government to enforce recognition of the divinity of the emperor and worship of Amaterasu Omikami (the Sun Goddess) before and during World War II. It was bad in Japan itself, but it was much worse in conquered and occupied countries, especially Manchuria, Korea, and China. They did not dare to torture American citizens, though some were arrested and detained for a time; but terrible things were done to Korean and Chinese Christians. The whole story has never yet been fully told. Where I lived, Christians were blanketed in a fog of fear and tension and anxiety all the time. And so it must have been at Pergamos.

Of course the rationalization cannot stand. It doesn't matter whether it is one grain of incense or a half bushel, that is put on the altar. It is denying Christ. If the church had compromised in this way, Christ and Caesar would have reigned side by side, and Christianity would have been extinguished.

Those who overcome this terrible stress are promised the hidden manna. This means spiritual grace. And a white stone with a new name written on it that only the one who receives it can know. White is the color of holiness and victory; stone is the material of permanence. The Christian who overcomes gets a title deed to something that the Roman Government (or any other) can neither give nor take away.

To be continued

Religious Terms Defined

POLYTHEISM. Belief in many gods.

POPE. The title claimed by the Bishop of Rome as supreme earthly head of the Roman Catholic Church. ("Pope" originally meant "father"). ("There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof. . ."—Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV. 6).

POPERY. The system of doctrine and practices maintained by the Roman Catholic Church. This system is chiefly summarized in the Decrees of the Council of Trent, A.D. 1545-1563. It is a mixture of truth and error. Giving false answers to the crucial questions about the way of salvation, it must be adjudged, as a system, to be false.

POSITIVISM. The system of philosophy which holds that the only real knowledge is knowledge of phenomena, that is, knowledge of facts obtained by our senses. This philosophy is destructive of Christianity because it teaches that it is impossible to have real knowledge of God or of the human soul.

POSTMILLENNIALISM. That view of the Last Things which holds that the second coming of Christ will take place at the close of a long period of world-wide peace and righteousness, called "the Millennium" or "the Kingdom of God." Orthodox Postmillennialism accepts the supernatural Christianity of the Scriptures, and holds that the Millennium will be brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men, especially through evangelism, missionary work, and the

application of Christian principles to society. Opposing views are Premillennialism and Amillennialism.

PRAYER. "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies" (Shorter Catechism, 98).

PREACHING. The public proclamation and application of the Word of God, by one who has been duly approved and called to the office of the ministry of the Word. (See the Larger Catechism, Q. 158, 159. Strictly speaking, preaching is a function of ordained ministers and licentiates, in distinction from exhorting, which may properly be done by other Christians.

PREDESTINATION. God's determination, from all eternity, of the final destiny of every individual among angels and men. "The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass" (Shorter Catechism, 7).

PREMILLENNIALISM. The view of the Last Things which holds that the second coming of Christ will be followed by a period of world-wide peace and righteousness, before the end of the world, called "the Millennium" or "the Kingdom of God," during which Christ will reign in person as king on this earth. (Premillennialists are divided into various groups by their different views of the order of events associated with the second coming of Christ, but they all agree in holding that there will be a Millennium on earth AFTER the second coming of Christ but BEFORE the end of the world.

PRESBYTER. Literally, an elder. Presbyters are officers of the New Testament Church, of two classes: (1) those who only rule (today called "elders" or "ru-

ling elders"); (2) those who in addition to ruling also teach or preach (today called "ministers"). All ministers and all ruling elders are rightly called "presbyters."

PRESBYTERIANISM. That form of church government in which the church is governed by a plurality of presbyters (ministers and ruling elders) in a series of graded courts of which the highest is a synod or general assembly. (See article, "Bible Authority for Sessions, Presbyteries and Synods," by Frank D. Frazer, in *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, July-September 1952, pp. 119-123.)

PRE-ADAMITES. A prehistoric race of human beings held by some to have existed before the creation of Adam and Eve. There is no Biblical basis for such an idea, and the Biblical data which are alleged to support it have, when legitimately interpreted, no such implication.

PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST. The doctrine that Jesus Christ, before His birth of the Virgin Mary, existed from all eternity as the Son of God, the second Person of the divine Trinity. Opposed to Arianism, Unitarianism, Liberalism, Humanism and Modernism. (See Shorter Catechism, Q. 21,22).

PROBATION. A trial or test of someone or something. The situation in which God placed Adam and Eve, commonly called the Covenant of Life or Covenant of Works, was essentially a test or probation with regard to their obedience to God.

PROFESSOR. "Any person who makes an open acknowledgement of the religion of Christ, or who outwardly manifests his attachment to Christianity. All real Christians are professors, but all professors are not real Christians" (Buck's Theological Dictionary).

Some Noteworthy Quotations

IT IS DANGEROUS dressing for another world by the looking-glass of this world.

— William Secker

THE DOCTRINE of an eternal purpose of God is the foundation upon which all the teaching of the Bible is really based. Back of all the events of human history, back of all the changes in the inconceivable vastness of the universe, back of space itself and time, there lies one mysterious purpose of Him to whom there is no before or after, no here or yonder, to whom all things are naked and open, the living and holy God.

— J. Gresham Machen

THE CHRISTIAN MAN finds in the Bible the very Word of God. Let it not be said that depend-

ence upon a book is a dead or an artificial thing. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it set the world aflame. Dependence upon a word of man would be slavish, but dependence upon God's Word is life. Dark and gloomy would be the world, if we were left to our own devices, and had no blessed Word of God. The Bible to the Christian is not a burdensome law, but the very Magna Charta of Christian liberty.

— J. Gresham Machen

IT IS PERFECTLY TRUE that no mere man can pay the penalty of another man's sin. But it does not follow that Jesus could not do it; for Jesus was no mere man but the eternal Son of God.

— J. Gresham Machen

More Light on the Toronto Movement

The erroneous system of Bible interpretation commonly called Darby-Scofield Dispensationalism made tremendous inroads in evangelical circles for a quarter of a century, while it was scarcely challenged by serious critiques on the theological level. More recently, there have appeared a number of scholarly critiques of Dispensationalism, beginning with *Prophecy and the Church*, by Dr. Oswald T. Allis (originally published in 1945). Following Dr. Allis's monumental work quite a number of treatises, monographs and full-length books have appeared which bring Darby-Scofield Dispensationalism under the searchlight of sound exegetical treatment of the Scriptures.

Similarly, the Toronto Movement, variously known as Reformationalism, Neo-Calvinism, Neo-Kuyperianism and Dooyeweerdianism, for a number of years had a clear field for promotion and expansion, with little or no scholarly criticism to face. Numerous people, including the present writer, supposed this movement to be an authentic development of Calvinism—an authentic application of Biblical Christianity to the broad spectrum of human life, following the lead of the late great Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands.

During the last ten or a dozen years, however, many who once thought this movement worthy of commendation and support, have been increasingly disenchanted with it. It has become increasingly evident that this movement has within it tendencies which are seriously at variance with historic Christianity as such. This deviation from historic orthodoxy has become evident chiefly in the books published by the adherents of the movement. I shall mention three books which I believe to be **radically and seriously** unsound from the standpoint of the historic Christian Faith. These are, *Understanding the Scriptures*, by A. H. DeGraaf and Calvin C. Seerveld, published 1969; *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, by H. Evan Runner; and *The Challenge of our Age*, by Hendrik Hart. It is my understanding that the first of these books, *Understanding the Scriptures*, is now out of print and not being reprinted or issued by the Wedge Publishing Foundation (publishing agency of the Toronto movement). However I am unaware of any retraction by its authors, or by the AACS (Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship) or by the ICS (Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto). The other two books are in print and being advertised and circulated by the AACS/ICS/Wedge.

When the Toronto movement is brought under serious criticism, the leadership of the movement is likely to seek a resolution of differences by mutual face-to-face discussion, in Toronto or elsewhere. The objectionable publications are not retracted or repudiated, but the attempt is made by informal discussion to show that the movement is basically orthodox. By lengthy discussion it may be attempted to convince critics that their criticisms are based on misunderstandings and are therefore irrelevant or needless.

In the opinion of the present writer, this method is not satisfactory or adequate to clear the Toronto movement of the allegation of heterodoxy. Statements that are not true to the historic Christian and Reformed Faith do not require **explanation**, they require **retraction** and **repudiation**. The publication of material that is radically unsound from the standpoint of historic Christianity, does not call for **explanation**, but for **repentance**, and failing that, it calls for **discipline**. We have seen no signs of such dealing with unorthodox materials by the leadership of the Toronto movement.

Recently several serious scholarly studies of this movement have appeared. They are listed below with brief comments.

The Dooyeweerdian Concept of the Word of God, by Robert A. Morey. Paperback, 53 pages, published 1974 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, P.O. Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey 07110. Price \$1.50. The author is a Reformed Baptist minister, and a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, class of 1972. This book also contains an article by Professor John M. Frame on the subject **What is God's Word?**, and one by Gerald O'Donnell on **Scripture, Faith and the Scholar's Use of the Scriptures**. There is also an extensive bibliography of literature in favor of and against the movement. See review of this book in this issue of *Blue Banner Faith and Life*.

Power-word and Text-word in Recent Reformed Thought, by Harry L. Downs. Paperback, 144 pages, published 1974 by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, P.O. Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey 07110. Price \$3.50. This book was originally written as a thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids. The author is a Christian Reformed pastor in Ontario, Canada. This is a more difficult book than Morey's, but certainly very relevant to the matters at issue. It deals with the ambiguities in the usage of the term "Word of God" which have become apparent in the literature of the Toronto movement.

Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism, by William Young, in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Volume XXXVI (Fall 1973 and winter 1974; pages 48-64 and 156-173. Price of the two issues, \$2.50 each; published by Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118. Dr. William Young is professor of philosophy at the University of Rhode Island. He has been a frequent contributor to *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, including an article on *The Second Commandment* and a series on *The Puritan Principle of Worship*. Dr. Young holds that while Abraham Kuyper was right about many things, he was wrong about one crucial matter, namely the concept of "Presumptive Regeneration" as the ground for the practice of infant bap-

tism. In this particular matter Kuyper broke away from historic Reformed theology. Young finds that the Toronto movement has followed this deviation of Kuyper's and developed a tendency which he calls "Hyper-Covenantism." In particular, he finds in the Toronto movement two very serious erroneous tendencies, namely (1) an antipathy to what the English Puritans called "experimental religion"—telling covenant children and youth that they are under the wrath of God and must seek spiritual regeneration; and (2) a pronounced tendency toward antinomianism—neglecting the Ten Commandments as the Christian's standard of right and wrong.

It will cost you five dollars to purchase the two *Journal* issues containing Dr. Young's scholarly article, but if you are a minister, or a theological student, or even a college student, the money will be well spent.

We shall continue to keep our readers informed about this dangerous movement, by continued publication of articles and reviews of the *Wedge* publications, as well as reviews of books critical of the movement. Meantime, we are looking for evidence that the Toronto leadership has repudiated unsound materials published by them.

Reviews of Religious Books

The favorable reviewing of a book here does not imply approval of its entire contents. Purchase books from your book dealer or from the publishers. Do not send orders for books to Blue Banner Faith and Life.

EARTH'S MOST CHALLENGING MYSTERIES, by Reginald Daly. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506. 1972, paperback, pp. 403. \$3.95.

This book is written from the standpoint of faith in Biblical inerrancy. The author is committed to "Flood Geology." He believes in a relatively young earth. He does not hold Ussher's chronology, as he speaks, e.g., of the ice age as ending 10,000 years ago (page 147), and also holds that this was after the Flood of Noah's day (pp. 142, 264).

The reviewer was baffled by the seeming inconsistencies of viewpoint within the book. The author appeals to radiocarbon or carbon-14 dates when they support his thesis (pp. 147-378) but discounts or ignores them when they do not. For example, charcoal found in the Lascaux cave (France, Upper Palaeolithic) is dated by the radiocarbon test at 15,500 years old (plus or minus a standard deviation). This figure may or may not be correct or accurate, but should be taken into account if one is going to base statements on radiocarbon dating.

The author, who is a professor of mathematics and physics, places the origin of man at 5,000 to 10,000 years ago (page 147). At the same time he holds that Noah's Flood may likely have taken place 2378 B.C. (p. 148). He states that "most versions of the Bible give 2446 B.C. as the date when Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth" (p. 148). Actually, no version of the Bible states this—it is an inference from Biblical data.

If Noah lived 2446 B.C., he was only 300 to 400 years before Abraham (c. 2000 B.C.). But archaeology in the Tigris-Euphrates valley has shown that human civilization there was actually ancient in Abraham's day. Abraham lived apparently in the Third Dynasty of Ur of the Chaldees (c. 2150-2050 B.C., *New Bible Dictionary*; c. 2135-2025 B.C., Unger, *Archeology and the Old Testament*, p. 107). The Third Dynasty of Ur was founded by Ur Nammu. The Tell Obeid culture ex-

cavated at or near Ur of the Chaldees dates from around 4,000 B.C. (Unger, op.cit., 44). In Palestine, remains at Jericho date back to at least 5000 B.C. (Neolithic), three thousand years before Abraham, and 2500 years before Daly's probable date for the Flood. The Great Pyramid in Egypt was built around 2600 B.C., during Egyptian dynasties I–II (B.C. 2650-2200). Prior to this in Egypt there were three well-authenticated pre-dynastic cultures, plus two dynasties (IV and V), covering the period from 3000 B.C. to 2650 B.C. (Source, *The New Bible Dictionary*, Douglas, p. 340).

The author, to say the least, should have taken account of and examined these claims to authentic history running to hundreds of years before his suggested date for the Flood.

The lack of an index renders the book difficult to use. On p. 397-403 there is a compendious Bibliography, which, however, does not include Klotz, *Genes, Genesis and Evolution*; Frair and Davis, *The Case For Creation*; Maatman, *The Bible, Natural Science and Evolution*; Kerut, *Implications of Evolution*; Macbeth, *Darwin Retried*.

The section on God and the public schools (pp. 388-9) is good but does not go far enough. What is needed is not merely a public school system purified of evolutionism and other strongly anti-Biblical ideologies, but a school system founded on and oriented to a truly Christian world-and-life view.

On the other hand, this book performs a real service in pointing out the many problems involved in current treatments of historical geology, and asking many questions which orthodox historical geology cannot answer without modifying its basic assumption of uniformitarianism.

—J. G. Vos

THE DOOYEWEERDIAN CONCEPT OF THE WORD OF GOD, by Robert A. Morey. 1974, Presbyterian and

Reformed Publishing Co., P.O. Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey, 07110. Pp. 53, paperback, \$1.50.

This is another of a growing number of works critical of the Toronto Movement. The book addresses one of the major problems in the controversy created by Toronto, and constitutes an emphatic warning against the movement. Morey has provided the reader with a very helpful bibliography classified according to the various authors' dispositions toward the movement. The display of scholars against the movement includes many of today's long-established leaders in Reformed circles. Special attention should be given to the two excellent appendices by John M. Frame and Gerald O'Donnell, respectively, which set forth the traditional position challenged by Toronto.

Morey begins by surveying the Toronto position on the Word of God and its relevance to science, etc. His work is sufficient to provide the reader with an awareness of the problem. Then the author sets forth a long list of weaknesses.

The text of the book has several inadequacies. At crucial points Morey lapses into technical vocabulary which he does not sufficiently explain. Consequently, the reader who is unfamiliar with the vocabulary will experience difficulty in following the discussion. Technical vocabulary is sometimes used in non-technical contexts (e.g., the use of "discerning" on page 70, or of "form(s)" on pages 4 and 5, thus clouding the presentation. Sometimes Morey seems to misunderstand basic Toronto positions. This is especially clear in the chart on page 3 where it would appear that both God and the Word are eternal in the same sense. To Toronto, however, God's eternity is independent of creation, and the Word's (considered as "not divine, not created") eternity is in relation to the creation—it is what God "puts" to the creation.

Many of Morey's criticisms are legitimate, but their potency is considerably weakened, first, by his inadequate statement of traditional positions. For example, he says,

"Every doctrine, theory, and dogma of man must be treated tested as to whether or not it can be traced back through historic Christianity to the apostles themselves" (p. 14).

The question is not historical continuity but Scriptural support. The Toronto movement asserts that what it teaches is new, but not novel—that is, it is taught in Scripture. Hence, Cornelius Van Til rightly shows that the foundational theses of the Toronto philosophy are contrary to Scripture (cf. the discussion in *Jerusalem and Athens*; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., P.O. Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey, 07110. 1971. \$9.95). Secondly, some of the criticisms of Toronto apply equally to Van Til and others; for example, the view that in order to see any true truth one must see the entire system. Also, other criticisms are accurate in

general but inaccurate in specific statement (e.g., that the Toronto school "is" neo-orthodox).

Finally, the book would be more readable if the author were more fully identified, and if there were a clearer statement of the intended audience, and if the footnotes were in better order (numbers 11, 30, and 35 were absent). No reason could be seen for the arrangement of notes 1, 6, 7, 46, and 47. On page 7 either note 28 should be at the end of the paragraph, or a new note would be needed. On page 15 "van Peursen" needs more explanation, since the note refers to Van Til.

—Leonard J. Coppes

THE RETURNS OF LOVE, by Alex Davidson. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 60515. 1970, pp. 93, paperback, \$1.50.

In a series of personal letters to a close friend this pseudonymous author seeks to understand his homosexual tendencies even though he is completely committed to the orthodox doctrines of biblical Christianity.

The letters do not express the latest in psychological understanding nor does it present a detailed presentation of the biblical data on this definite moral issue. Instead, the author seeks to demonstrate his gradual understanding of the grace of God in removing his sinful habits. The book does not end with final victory over sin, but continues the present struggle of the author with his sinful thoughts as well as his behavior.

We have often heard from the theologian and psychologist on the problem of homosexuality, but the personal side of the sin is not often expressed. This book seeks to present one individual's understanding of his sin from the knowledge of scripture and the careful advice of a Christian friend.

The book ends with a postscript that seeks to express the relation of sin in the life of an individual to the providence of God in manifesting His glory. This book should be read for the benefit of understanding a world that is often a mystery to most Christians. —Richard M. Smiley

MY HEART'S DESIRE FOR ISRAEL, by Richard R. DeRidder. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey 07110. 1974. paperback, pp. 126. \$1.95.

The World Focus Books, of which this is one, is a series designed to seek answers to important Biblical questions. Dr. DeRidder inquires into the relationship called for between Jew and Gentile in the Christian Church, especially in our own day. He deals with this question in the light of Scripture, and the chapter headings, namely, The Middle Wall of Partition, The New Covenant, The Gospel Imperative, The New Diaspora, The Meaning of Apostleship, and Synagogue and Church, indicate the area covered by the inquiry.

This book should prove of inestimable value to those who work among the Jews. —Donald Gillies

WE LEFT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES—A NON-PRO-PHET ORGANIZATION, by Edmond C. Gruss. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Box 185, Nutley, N.J., 07110. 1974, pp. 169, paperback, \$2.95.

Edmond Gruss has brought together in this book the testimonies of six couples who had been Jehovah's Witnesses, and who not only discovered the falsity of Witness teaching, but came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

From their close association with the Watch Tower organization they are able to give valuable information about its motives and methods, and one feels that there is a genuine desire on the part of the editor and contributors to lead their readers to the light of divine truth.

The editing has been done so skillfully that we think nothing is omitted that could add significantly to what all ought to know about Watch Tower teaching, and much of the evidence of the unscripturalness of the teaching is taken from their own published works, that show how often their "prophecies" have failed, and how often they contradict themselves.

We recommend this book to all who would know the truth about Jehovah's Witnesses. —Donald Gillies

CULTS AND THE OCCULT IN THE AGE OF AQUARIUS, by Edmond C. Gruss. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Box 185, Nutley, N.J. 07110. 1974, pp. 132, paperback, \$1.25.

As well as an introductory chapter tracing the rise and development of cults and sects, the author gives an account, not only of such well-known sects as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists, but also of such cults as Scientology, Rosicrucianism, etc., so that each one of fifteen chapters deals with one such sect, with the concluding chapter on the obligation of the Christian in an age when interest in the occult is so rife.

The book is well documented, with a useful bibliography for the guidance of anyone wishing to make further study of the subject. —Donald Gillies

INTRODUCTION TO FRANCIS SCHAEFFER, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 60515, pp. 40, \$1.25, 1974, paperback.

The title of the book is misleading. The reader will be pleased with Schaeffer's essay at the conclusion of the pamphlet: "How I have come to write my books".

It is an attempt to explain why his books were written, how he views the order of the contributions, and to what extent each work serves in communicating the "balance" of Christianity. Schaeffer considers that *The God Who Is There*, *Escape From Reason*, and *He is There and He is Not Silent* provide a unified attempt in presenting the Christian view of the world in the twentieth century. This explanation is helpful in evaluating the propriety of the title, as the booklet is in fact not an analytical introduction to Schaeffer's thought. But the anonymous editor provides the student or group with an opportunity to get to know these three works mentioned by means of twelve studies complete with questions on the chapters assigned, and a consideration of the implications of each topic with a helpful summary.

—Willem Van Gemeren

NO LITTLE PEOPLE, by Francis Schaeffer, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill. 60515, 1974, pp. 271, \$3.50, paperback.

TWO CONTENTS, TWO REALITIES, by Francis A. Schaeffer, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 60515, 1974, pp. 32, \$.95, paperback.

In the autobiographical essay referred to above, Schaeffer had occasion to refer to these two—his most recent—works. They are two spokes radiating from the hub—the three basic works (see above). *No Little People* is a compilation of sixteen sermons which Schaeffer preached at the chapel at L'Abri, his study center at Huemoz, Switzerland. Whatever one may wish to say with regard to Schaeffer's exegesis and method of preaching, it is evident that his central concern is for the church in the twentieth century. From his earlier observation on the lack of "reality" among orthodox evangelical Christians, Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, have given themselves to be used of God that they may demonstrate in their lives that God exists. This book is a demonstration of just that! *Two Contents and Two Realities* presents the reader with a brief statement of his central concern: the reality of God in the church of the twentieth century. The "two contents" are a renewed emphasis on the content of the historic Christian faith with particular stress on the historic, space-time fall as well as the integration of one's faith in all areas; and a willingness of the church to listen to the questions of the day with a view to provide honest answers. True spirituality (Schaeffer also published a book by this title) and a demonstration of "the beauty" of human relationships are the two realities discussed. Schaeffer's concern with the Church of Christ in our times rubs off on any one who has heard or read him. Both books are heartily recommended. —Willem Van Gemeren

Blue Banner Question Box

Readers are invited to submit Biblical, doctrinal and practical questions for answer in this department.

Names of correspondents will not be published, but anonymous communications will be disregarded.

Question:

How should we regard and look upon those Christians, as united unto Christ, who offer praise unto the Lord in public worship using uninspired hymns with instrumental musical accompaniment?

Answer:

Our correspondent is referred to the article **The Visible Church: Its Nature, Unity and Witness**, published in this magazine, July-September 1973, pages 97-109 (also available as a reprint at fifty cents) for a fuller discussion of the matters involved in this question than is possible in the space available here in the "Question Box." The question involves the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Bible, what are the limits of private judgment, and what is the relationship between the principle of private judgment and the corporate witness of a church denomination.

People who give evidence of being Christians must be recognized as believers in the Lord, even though they may differ from us in particular matters about worship, church government, etc. In Christian charity, our judgment must be that such people are **inconsistent**, not that they are non-Christians. Doubtless we ourselves also have some inconsistencies, of which we are unaware. Inconsistency is sinful but if it is unintentional, it is not a deliberate sin to be classed with immorality, theft, murder, slander and the like. Augustine once wrote, "Every lesser good involves an element of sin."

To use a very simple illustration: Baptists who are true to their historic faith must inevitably regard Covenanters and other Presbyterians as in error about im-

mersion and infant baptism; therefore they must judge us to be inconsistent. By the same token, Covenanters and other Presbyterians who are true to their historic faith cannot avoid regarding Baptists as in error about immersion and infant baptism; therefore we must judge them to be inconsistent. In neither case does such thinking involve any denial that those who differ from us are Christians.

On the other hand, those who deny fundamental truths of the Bible, such as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, the substitutionary atonement, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ and of Christians, are heretics and to be repudiated as such until they repent of their false doctrines. We are forbidden to have any kind of religious fellowship with those who deny the basic truths of Christianity. I Timothy 6:5; II Thess. 3:6; Revelation 2:14-16; 2:20-23.

It is furthermore our duty to seek to win other Christians, by patient witnessing, persuasion and love, to Biblical principles of worship. As we have opportunity we can present them with literature expounding the teaching of the Bible on the subject of worship. We have not discharged our responsibility simply by saying that someone else is "inconsistent." Of special value is Dr. William Young's article on **The Second Commandment**, in this magazine, April-June 1972, pages 49-54. Until people grasp the **Biblical principle regulating worship**, they are likely to regard exclusive Psalm-singing, etc., as mere outdated customs of the Covenanters and a few other people from Scotland and Ireland.

—J. G. Vos

Contributions Received

The following contributions have been received since our last issue went to press (August 15, 1974):

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September, 1974. No. 2678, \$100.00. No. 2679, \$5.00. No. 2680, \$2.50. No. 2681, \$50.00. No. 2682, \$10.00. No. 2683, \$2.28. No. 2684, \$10.00. No. 2685, \$25.00.

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November, 1974. No. 2692, \$2.50. No. 2693, \$5.00. No. 2694, \$7.50. No. 2695, \$7.50. No. 2696, \$25.00. No. 2697, .50. No. 2698, \$2.50. No. 2699, \$5.00. No. 2700, \$2.00. No. 2701, \$2.00. No. 2702, \$2.50. No. 2703, \$2.50. No. 2704, \$5.00. No. 2705, \$50.00. No. 2706, \$2.50, No. 2707, \$1.50. No. 2708, \$20.00.

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Later contributions will be reported in our next issue. Without such generous contributions as these it would hardly be possible to continue publishing the magazine, as subscriptions and sales of back issues and reprints provide only about half of the amount needed. We are trying to resist inflation by not raising our subscription rates. Many thanks to all who have helped. Your con-

tributions, incidentally, are deductible from your federal taxable income if you live in the United States.

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**BLUE
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Your Deepest Longing

Sometimes when you have been alone, away from the busy activities of life, have you felt a deep, mysterious longing that was certainly real, and yet you could not quite describe it in words? A deep feeling that what you really want most is something out beyond you which you can't quite reach or see clearly, yet the longing itself is a kind of joy?

Deep in your heart you realize that nothing in this world can really satisfy that longing. All the good things in life that you can have and enjoy still leave that deep longing unsatisfied. When you are quiet enough to think about life, it comes back to haunt you. Just to feel the longing gives you a kind of joy that even the best happiness of this world cannot equal.

That deep, mysterious longing is the longing for heaven. God created us for eternal life or heaven, and he put that deep longing in our hearts. Even our sin has not erased it, though it has partly obscured it. We were created not just for this world, but for the perfect, eternal world that is called "heaven." Christians know that this world is only the beginning — it is the kindergarten and first grade of God's great school — the part we were really made for is beyond. St. Augustine said in a famous prayer recorded in his life story, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." And even when you are a Christian and the restlessness of your heart has found peace from God, still that haunting longing is there. You can never get entirely away from it. Heaven is drawing you beyond this present life to the life that you were really made for. The Bible calls it "eternal life" or "the life that is life indeed."

Atheists and Communists laugh and scoff at us Christians. They say we are looking for pie in the sky by and by. They believe that this life is the only life. But

they are fighting against their own deepest longing; they are trying to cancel something that was put into every human by God who created us — the hunger for the life beyond.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had the deep longing, and knew that this world can never fully satisfy. This is shown in Hebrews 11:9,10,13-16. David had the deep longing; he looked forward to dwelling in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6). Our Saviour Jesus Christ has taught us to look forward to the answer to the deep longing (John 14:1-4).

Our deep longing will be satisfied in two stages. First, when we die, although our body is buried in the ground, our soul goes instantly to be in heaven with the Lord (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 6:9). This is the first stage. The Bible speaks of it as peaceful, restful, being in the presence of the Lord, and *waiting*. Waiting for Stage Two, which is the resurrection. Our body will be raised from death and re-united to our soul. It will be the same body we lived in in this world, but changed to be like the glorious body of Jesus Christ. Never again can we have pain, suffering, weakness, sickness or death (I Corinthians 15:54).

Heaven is a place (John 14:1). This does not mean a place in this world, or even in the solar system or the universe that we study by astronomy. It may be a place in a different kind of universe with a different kind of space and time, but it will be a place — Jesus Christ said so.

What will heaven be like? The Bible describes heaven in two ways: first, what there will not be in heaven. There will be no death, pain, sorrow, trouble, suffering. A good many things are mentioned in Revelation 21 and 22 that will not be in heaven. Take your Bible and make a list of them.

On the other hand, heaven will be the fulfillment of that deepest longing. We shall see the Lord face to face (Rev. 22:4). We shall have wonderful work to do for the Lord (Rev. 22:3). Everything good and clean and pure that we really wanted, we will have in heaven, or else God will give us something even better. Heaven will be so much better than this world that words cannot describe its wonders and its joys. Just what it will be like is God's great secret — and it will be our great surprise when we get there.

Not everybody can go to heaven. Take Revelation chapters 21 and 22 and make a list of the kind of people that cannot enter heaven. This means, of course, they cannot unless they repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ before they die. Heaven is God's great surprise gift to His own children who are saved from their sins by Christ (Revelation 7:14-17). The common idea today is that everyone will go to heaven, but the Bible says that sinners, unless they repent and believe and get saved, will go to hell.

In the old Greek myths and stories, people thought of the dead as mere ghosts; they called them "shades." They thought that this life with its bright sunshine and solid earth was the real life, and anything after death was a dim shadow of this life. But the Bible teaches that heaven is the real life. When we get there we will be fully alive as we never were in this world. We will know that it is this life that is the shadow, and heaven is the real life that God created us for. When you get there you will feel like saying, "This is what I always really longed for; I could never quite grasp it, but now I know. This is my real home; this is what I was really created for. Everything before was only getting me ready for this!" —J. G. Vos

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NUMBER 2

Women and the Ministry: Some Guidance From St. Paul

By the Rev. C. Stewart Petrie, B.A., B.D.

Note: This article is reproduced by special permission from the October, 1959 issue of *The Reformed Theological Review* (Australia). It deals with a subject which is increasingly becoming a controversial issue in the Protestant world. More and more of the large denominations are admitting women to ordination to the office of the ministry, as well as to the office of ruling elder. It is remarkable that the arguments advanced in favor of such a course are usually either based on expediency rather than on Scripture, or they consist of an appeal to general principles of Scripture as cancelling specific statements of Scripture on the subject. In the judgment of your editor, Mr. Petrie's article has unusual merit in that he argues his case, and proposes to settle the question, strictly and solely upon the basis of the relevant statements of Scripture. As ordination of women to the ministry and eldership becomes increasingly common in the Protestant world around us, we should be able to render an intelligent judgment as to the bearing of Scripture teaching on this modern development. Mr. Petrie's article is recommended as a contribution to this end. — Editor.

Among the controversial themes in current trends of theological fashion, that concerning the ordination of women to the ministry is persistently being thrust into the foreground for consideration, as of paramount importance for the continued well-being of the Church. Any full assessment of the claims and implications that arise would involve excursion into the much wider doctrines of the Church and the Ministry, both of which themselves are in need of considerably more understanding and clarification if the prevailing confusion and uncertainty are to be resolved. For the present, the more restricted quest is undertaken of seeking such guidance as may be found in the writings of St. Paul, where he touches upon the position of women. For this purpose it is not proposed to discard any of the letters generally attributed to the apostle. The most confident denial to him of epistles such as Ephesians or the Pastorals is largely offset by the acknowledgement that even these have a very strong Pauline background and content.

The apostle Paul has from time to time suffered many harsh things at the hands of his in-

terpreters, the chief offenders, of course, being those who would seek his patronage for an issue already determined in their own minds, or those who for their own reasons are in any case predisposed to resent his counsel. Not least has he been maligned for the attitude towards women that has been wished upon him, an ungracious streak of misogyny being read into his occasional writings as its result. At best this sub-Christian outlook is either minimized or tolerantly excused on the grounds of his earlier Jewish upbringing and his inevitable subservience to the long-established customs of his day. At worst he is stigmatized as a forthright woman-hater, who was in pressing need — if the recently reported opinion of some who profess an expertness in such experimentations be correct — of psychoanalysis and consequent readjustment. But this is not new: even in his lifetime literal stigmata were not unknown to the chief of the apostles.

The charge of antipathy to the opposite sex is firmly refuted from numerous passages in his own writings, as, for instance, the cordial salutations to women given in Romans 16, the grateful recognition recorded in Philippians 4, and the high commendation offered in the early verses of 2 Timothy. Constructively, the dignity of womanhood is enhanced by Paul's noble conception of marriage, most tellingly set forth when he applies the figure of husband and wife to Christ and His Church, with great emphasis on Christ's cherishing the Church, in Ephesians 5:22-33.

In the search for guidance from St. Paul, it is essential to stress the precariousness of playing with isolated verses. If texts are simply listed and set off against each other in a nice balance of words, it is impossible to reach worthwhile conclusions. Thus, to call on single verses, we may observe that, whereas Galatians 3:28 declares that there are no distinctions of sex, Ephesians 5:22 requires wives to be in subordination to their husbands; and, although in 1 Corinthians 11:5 women apparently are permitted to speak when Christians come together, yet in 14:34 they are enjoined to silence. We must seek to discover whether there is a consistent teaching in which these seeming contradictions are resolved. In any case, it is to be observed that those who are most anxious to rely on solitary verses to sustain their cause fre-

quently show much reluctance in attending to context circumstances.

A satisfactory understanding of Paul's standpoint in regard to women certainly cannot be gained from selected sentences treated in isolation. Besides, whilst he is not unready to offer immediate and concise guidance on specific points that arise, it is generally noticeable that Paul judiciously avoids petty rules for trivial occasions. He will be observed rather to enunciate great guiding principles which his readers must be wise enough to heed and to apply.

One such principle is set forth in his great epistle of freedom to the Galatians. He brings his readers to see how, in contrast with their former state of pupillage under the law, they are now in full sonship. "Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:26). Then he goes on to affirm, "There is no Jew nor Greek, there is no slave nor free, there is no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). We must not take from Paul the credit of so clearly enunciating this principle. But he is not alone in recognizing it. It runs through the New Testament in one form or another, beginning from Peter's perception at Joppa that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Indeed, it is adumbrated in Deuteronomy 10:17. But of course it was in the life of Jesus that the theory was truly revealed in practice. We recall that His ministry of teaching and healing was to men and women without distinction, perhaps reminding ourselves specially of His attitude to women as shown in His interview with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4), in the ministrations He accepted from certain women of substance (Luke 8), in His treatment of the woman taken in adultery (John 8), or in the joy of friendship that He shared in a Bethany home (Luke 10, John 11).

From his Master, Paul has learned that "In Christ" all are one. Race or class or sex precludes no one from acceptance into the family of God. Sex confers no spiritual preference. Men and women alike are regarded as persons, none having the right to special privileges, none handicapped by special disability.

Yet this emancipating declaration has been quaintly overpressed and distorted. It is quoted to enforce the view that in Christ immediately all differences literally and completely vanish. With this dissolution of all sex distinctions, men and women are at once in all respects on an equal footing, sharing without any discrimination the same activities and responsibilities. It is insisted that the only real equality existing in Christ is that which in its application at once resolutely and finally obliterates all differences of sex.

But this is thoroughly to misunderstand Paul's meaning. It is wrongly to turn oneness into identity. Paul is concerned with the spiritual status of those who are "in Christ." His principle gives special emphasis to the truth that God is no respecter of persons, that in Christ everyone, re-

gardless of race or class or sex, has the standing of a person who is a child of God. This principle pervades the new life in Christ. It is not relaxed when Paul deliberately persuades the slave Onesimus to return to his master Philemon. Nor is it contradicted when Paul continues to observe the properties pertaining to the relationships between men and women. The Christian community continues as male and female. It is not an asexual society whose members are unsexed as in Christ they are accepted into the family of God. But as men remain "Jew" or "Greek," without being compelled to renounce their nationality and live in some non-political state, as they may continue "bond" or "free" without change to their social standing, inevitably more so must they retain their characteristics as "male and female," even while they are accepted, and must accept one another, as "all one in Christ Jesus." For each is now in his own right a person, neither more nor less than a child of God, "in Christ Jesus."

Now it was the mis-application of this principle with which Paul had to contend at Corinth, and with which in consequence he deals in the first epistle to the church there, chapters 11 and 14. So eager apparently were some of the women to assert their new-found emancipation in Christ, to demonstrate their spiritual equality with men in Him, that they did at least two things that were not customarily attributed to their sex. Some of them had promptly discarded one of the most distinctive of womanly habits and had appeared in the gatherings for prayer with unveiled heads. Others seemingly had gone further by taking some speaking part in the public services, but whether this was by claiming the right to preach or by asking questions we cannot say with certainty.

Wherein lay the real impropriety of their behaviour? That the head covering was discarded in a city notorious for its immorality, when the woman who went abroad unveiled thereby unmistakably advertised herself as a shameless hussy, may be part of the picture, but it is not the essential part. In dealing with disorders in Christian worship — and obviously there were many in Corinth — Paul is concerned with much more than the observance of outward decorum. The covering of the head was of significance both as indicating woman's subordination to men and also, more positively, as marking her true sphere which was found in the home. So, by divesting herself of the covering, she was not merely setting herself on an equality alongside her male fellow-worshippers, but she was by her demeanour disdaining the womanly obligations which were peculiarly hers and which she alone could fulfil.

This is the first step towards undue self-assertion, and there went along with it a consequent depreciation, leading to avoidance and neglect, of her own essential characteristics. Paul is therefore at pains to deal with the problem in some detail. Later, in enjoining women to be silent in the services, he does not need to cover all the ground again, but insists that they be "in

subordination" according to "the law." In 1 Timothy 2:12, a sharper tone appears: women are forbidden in this way "to domineer" (**authentein**).

To meet this situation at Corinth, with its hazardous implications, Paul is impelled to recall another fundamental principle which does not contradict his words to the Galatians but is complementary to what is said there. Whilst remaining true to his insistence that men and women are persons without distinction in Christ, he nevertheless refuses to ignore the God-given and therefore fundamental differences between the sexes, which in the Christian community are rightly neither belittled nor magnified. The precise details of his presentation and application may sometimes be difficult and even obscure for us, but there can be no doubt as to the general tenor of his argument. That Paul's direction may be unpalatable to those who despise scriptural guidance in this "enlightened" age is beside the point. Its truth is ultimately inescapable.

The basis of Paul's teaching is clear and unequivocal; "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Some who are disposed to accept Paul's teaching with qualification insist that here Paul is speaking only of the married state, and that consequently he did not intend any general application. It is argued that, since **aner** may mean either "man" or "husband," and **gyne** may mean either "woman" or "wife," the reference here, in conformity with Paul's teaching elsewhere regarding the subordination of wife to husband, is concerned only with those who are married. It is thus not a general statement for all, but should be restricted to mean, "The head of the wife is the husband." Some add their own grammatical rules to give support to the rendering.

But this would appear to be against the required sense of the passage. "The head of every man (**andros**) is Christ." **Aner** is obviously used here instead of the more general **anthropos** in preparation for the antithesis with **gyne**. If **aner** in the second clause be rendered "husband," it should also be similarly translated in the first clause: "the head of every husband is Christ." Those who arbitrarily shift throughout the passage from "man" to "husband" and from "woman to wife" are hardly consistent and appear to be pressing some private interpretation.

In other places, Paul writes specifically concerning husbands and wives, but here he appears to be dealing with man and woman generally, not merely with husband and wife. Yet, as will be pointed out later, were the restriction allowed, it would not affect the main position. For the present, in any case, we may regard the relevant burden of Paul's declaration to be that "the head of the woman is the man," and, a little later, "the woman is the glory, i.e., the reflection (**doxa**) of the man."

It is generally agreed that Paul is appealing to the early narratives in Genesis, and so some consideration must now be given to these. In Genesis 1 we read that "God created man in his own image . . . male and female" (v. 27f.), to have dominion and to be fruitful and multiply. This is a general statement, but what it says is important: not just "man," but "male and female." In chapter 2 the story is told differently. There man is created first, and afterwards since it is not good that he should be alone, he is given a helper, "meet" for him, that, is corresponding to him, befitting his dignity. She is taken from his side, and he recognizes her as belonging to him: "she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (vv. 23-24). The significance of this narrative is carefully and fairly brought out by S. R. Driver, it being designed, he says, "to set forth the moral and social relation of the sexes to each other, the dependence of woman upon man, her close relationship to him, and the foundation existing in nature for the attachment springing up between them, and for the feelings with which each should naturally regard the other. The woman is formed out of the man's side: hence it is the wife's natural duty to be at hand, ready at all times to be a 'help' to her husband; it is the husband's natural duty ever to cherish and defend his wife, as part of his own self." The events of chapter 3 do not change the relationship; they result in its being underlined and emphasized: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (v 16). The implicit dependence of 2:21ff, is now made explicit. (The punishment of the man furnishes a parallel: although sentenced to toil for his bread, he had already been appointed to work (2:15) before "the fall.")

The Danish scholar, Professor Johs. Pederesen, has summed up this aspect of the creation stories. "In both accounts man and woman are indissolubly bound together, but the closeness of the connection is differently expressed." In the first narrative, "singular and plural are used indifferently about the same being. Man is a whole consisting of two parts, the man and the woman. Nothing is said of the relation between them, except that they are indispensable to each other, and not till they are united do they together form a whole human being." In the second narrative, "Yahweh first created man, i.e., the man. The man is himself man, but he lacks something that he may be so wholly." The needed help is given in woman. "She is taken out of him, and thus she must be there, in order that he may be man wholly. She is a part of him." "Thus the shade of difference between the two accounts is that, according to the former, the man and the woman together make man, while according to the latter the man is man proper, though the woman is necessary in order that he may be man wholly."

These aspects of the Genesis narratives have

been stressed because of their importance for the understanding of Paul. From them there emerge three relevant points. First, in the New Testament understanding of the creation stories, these stories are treated as a whole, and Paul does not anticipate modern source theories. Our Lord's use, too, is an instance of this treatment of them as a whole: "From the beginning of the creation, male and female made he them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh: so that they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mark 10:6-8; Matthew 19:4-6). Here words from Genesis 1 and 2 are brought together regardless of any modern recognition of different sources. Consequently, in seeking to interpret Paul's use of Genesis, it is quite misleading to separate what he has, like his Master, kept together. It is to the Genesis passages as a whole that Paul turns.

The second point is that, in Pederson's phrase, "man and woman are indissolubly bound together." This truth runs through the narratives. "Male and female created he them." "It is not good for the man to be alone." "They shall be one flesh." When to these significant assertions is added the charge of Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful, and multiply," it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the divine purpose was to be fulfilled by the union of the two sexes in marriage. For man to be alone, and no less for woman, in God's plan, "is not good." This receives support from two of the ten commandments, either of which, in our own day, we ignore at our peril. Paul himself reminds us that "the first commandment with promise" is that which says, "Honour thy father and mother" (Ephesians 6:2)—particular honour, that is, not to one's elders in any general sense, but specifically to parents, father and mother. The seventh commandment more directly concerns the preservation of the sanctity of marriage. Again, these both have our Lord's full endorsement. (See Matthew 15:4-6, Mark 7:10-13, Luke 2:51; Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9.)

So, when Paul turns to Genesis for support, he is thinking of the normal man and woman who are indissolubly bound together in fulfilment of the Creator's expressed purpose. It is this which makes the choice in 1 Corinthians II between "man and woman" and "husband and wife" finally irrelevant. Marriage is the norm.

What of those who do not attain fulfilment in marriage? Jesus recognized that there were some who accepted celibacy "for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matthew 19:12), but neither he, nor Paul after him, recommended this form of self-renunciation as the ideal. It is the exception, not the rule. In 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul treats of the matter, he is not giving a general dissertation on marriage; he is seeking to meet particular difficulties in what are not normal circumstances. He frankly admits that he has

"no commandment of the Lord" (v. 25) to offer the unmarried. The most he can offer is an opinion which, he makes clear, is qualified as "good for the present distress" (v. 27), because "the time is short" (v. 29).

The third point is that, while indicating that man and woman are complementary to each other, the Genesis passages at the same time set woman in subordination to man. On this subordinate relationship Paul's teaching hinges, not only in 1 Corinthians, but also in Ephesians 5:22ff. and 1 Timothy 2:11ff. It is reasonable to assume a similar basis for Colossians 3:18f. (Compare 1 Timothy 3:4, 12; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7.)

This vexed question of "subjection", or rather, "subordination" goes to the heart of the matter. Understanding is not promoted but hindered by the persistent suggestion, mistaken or wilful, that "subordination" implies inferiority; and it is to be deplored that encouragement of an "inferiority complex" is allowed to confuse the issue. Is it possible to lay the persistent bogey of woman's alleged "inferiority," a notion to which neither Jesus nor Paul subscribes? The bogey has arisen chiefly through distortion of the Genesis narratives or non-acceptance of their true implications and then through the consequent reluctance to admit the validity of Paul's teaching.

The verb that he uses is *hypotassethai* and the noun is *hypotage*. The terms are used of the woman, who is to "subordinate" herself or be in "subordination." They are not used of the man as if he is to "subordinate" the woman. Our word "subordination," which is a literal, Latinized rendering, preserves the basic idea, that of "ranking under." The fact is frequently emphasized but it seems so difficult of acceptance that, at the risk of repeating the obvious, it must be reiterated: this "subordination" does not mean "inferiority." There may be variation in the "ranking," but there is no derogation of the person. Paul in no wise revokes his assurance that "in Christ" all have the same filial standing before God. "There is no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The declared spiritual status of woman is unassailable. Yet Paul does not, for he cannot, banish the divinely ordained characteristics that mark the differences of sex. "Male and female created he them." In this life at any rate, not even for those who are "in Christ" can any amount of verbal agility or wishful thinking eradicate or reverse the God-given sex distinctions. And, commensurate with a parity of persons, goes the subordination of woman to man by divine decree.

That subordination does not mean inferiority is brought out by Paul's frequent reminder that Christian relationships recognize mutual rights and obligations of the sexes. The interdependence of man and woman is particularly stressed for those who are "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Even though woman was originally taken from man, every man subsequently has been born of woman; but all things, including man and woman and their relationships, "are of God" (v. 12). Moreover, if wives are called upon to subordinate themselves to their husbands, husbands are no less enjoined to love their wives (Ephesians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:18-19, and compare also 1 Peter 3:7).

Paul is not propounding theories of his own devising. What he writes is based on neither sentiment nor masculine prejudice. He is aiming to expound the divine purpose to Christian readers. He shows how the inter-relationships of men and women, their complementary personalities, their mutual obligations and duties, must accord with and strive to fulfil their natural, that is to say their God-given, endowments, which includes woman's subordination to man.

The contemporary plea for the acceptance of women into the ministry of the Church. Whatever guise it may take, is ultimately bound up with the modern "emancipation" of woman and the general intolerance of restraint. The factors involved are many and complex in this movement for unfettered "freedom." Much good has come of it, but not all is gain. There is much that is mistaken, and a great deal that is wrong. "He that goeth onward," we need to be reminded, "and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God" (2 John 9). Not all "advancement" is genuine progress.

In woman's desire to assert her complete equality with man, more is being lost than feminine graces. The arrival in society of the "career woman," so often strenuously trying, by aping the male, to mollify a festering grievance that she was burdened at birth with the wrong sex; the popular acceptance by society of the working wife and mother who is impelled to augment the family income by force of dread economic pressures or blatantly in pursuit of luxurious living;

the equally accepted parental absenteeism that inevitably victimizes children and encourages delinquency; the prevailing sexual license and the ready turning to divorce, which are bringing marriage into contempt — these are among the disquieting manifestations that are associated with the "modern" woman's repudiation of those privileges and responsibilities that are uniquely feminine. Man, who is aiding and abetting her in the desire to deplore or spurn her sex, may co-operatively don an apron or manipulate the washing machine, but nature utterly debars him from taking her place as wife and mother.

St. Paul would undoubtedly endorse to-day some wise words that were uttered thirty years ago. "The world wants desperately, not female priests and bishops, but Christian wives and mothers. When the home is, as S. Chrysostom calls it, 'a little church,' there is a firm foundation laid on which can be built the fabric of a female ministry in society, various enough to give scope to the richest individual gifts, and wide enough to satisfy the keenest individual zeal. The only equality of the sexes which the Church can rightly make the basis of its practical system recognizes differences of natural function and accepts the principle of subordination in common service. Sex is a factor of such importance that any attempt to ignore it in the sphere of ecclesiastical order must defeat itself. Only by frankly admitting difference can genuine equality be secured. Subordination is the very principle of ordered society, and it has its first expression and ultimate sanction in the Home."

These words have even more relevance to-day. "Modern" is a specious term, wondrous in its propaganda value. It is required of us, however, that we do not yield to the clamant urgings of any popular "modern" majority, but that we do the will of God.

The End

The Biblical Role of the Woman

By the Rev. and Mrs. Cornelis Pronk

The Women's Rights movement is at the height of its popularity today. Betty Friedan, author of the book *The Feminine Mystique*, is credited with the movement called Women's Liberation. According to her, the American woman is suffering from a nameless malady which makes her generally unhappy and dissatisfied with the role assigned to her by society, and therefore she ought to liberate herself from her traditional position.

Since this book many kinds of theories and solutions have been offered to liberate women. Most Women's Lib leaders agree that women are being discriminated against and they should not have to do all the menial tasks and drudgery involved in rearing children and keeping house. They should be able to hold interesting and well-paid jobs, just like the men.

One spokeswoman even advocates that women refuse to marry, married women abandon their families, and let the state take care of the children. Christianity, it is said, is woman's greatest enemy because it prescribes certain duties for women.

Women should use the title Ms. to show their independence and freedom from the role accorded married women.

Women's Lib's attitude even extends to clothing. They contend that extremely feminine and glamorous clothing reduces the woman to a sex symbol; hence the bra burning episodes of a few years ago. In contrast, we now have pantsuits, blue jeans and unisex to show women's liberation and equality with men.

Never underestimate the power of women, a saying goes. And this is true, for better or for worse. Women are obtaining many new so-called **rights**. For example, they have the **right** to easy abortions, birth control, divorce, and equal job opportunities, even jobs such as garbage collectors and construction workers.

Also in the church women are receiving more so-called **rights**. Evidence of this are the attempts being made to have the offices of elder, deacon and even minister, opened up to women. However, let us not blame women only, for men are allowing and helping women to obtain these **rights**.

We need not be surprised at all these revolutionary changes. Women's Lib is nothing new. When Eve listened to Satan, rather than allowing her husband, Adam, to make the decision, she became the first woman to rebel against her God-given role.

I believe that what happened in Paradise is the key to a right understanding of woman's position. For what was God's purpose in creating man and woman?

Genesis 1:27 tells us that **God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them**. This simple statement is deep in meaning. First, it stresses the unity of the human race. God created man, i.e. humanity, in His own image; but right away is added **male and female created he them**. This shows us that although there is unity, there is also diversity. Calvin comments: **God is the source of both sexes. Therefore both of them ought to accept and preserve the part given them by God. They are one, yet they are different. This has implications for us today too. Sin has destroyed many things, but men and women are still different and have different positions.**

Nor can man and woman exist without each other. It is not good that man should be alone, God said, **I will make an help, meet for him, or it can be translated: a help as before him, or over against him**. Calvin says:

. . .since God assigns the woman as a help to man, he not only prescribes the wives the rules of their duties, . . .but he also pronounces that marriage will really prove to men the best support in life. . . Woman is given as a companion and an associate to man, to help him to live well.

The joining of man and wife together also included the propagation of the human race. Before the Fall God pronounced this blessing upon their union: **Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it (Genesis 1:28).**

Adam was created first, then Eve. With Adam God made His covenant. To Adam the command was given to abstain from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for if he should eat of it, he would surely die (Gen. 2:16,17). This headship of the man is reaf-

firmed in the New Testament, and that this headship applies to married and single women both is clear from I Corinthians 11. The inspired apostle speaks of **every man and every woman**, and not husbands and wives. **But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man. . . the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man**. This is God's ordained order by virtue of creation.

Eve was taken out of Adam, out of his side. How he rejoiced in her when God brought her to him. **Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor from the Lord**, Proverbs 18:22 says. There was a beautiful, harmonious relationship between Adam and Eve. Eve was not Adam's rival, nor did Adam enslave Eve to his wishes, but each fulfilled their God-ordained role: Adam dressing and keeping the garden of Eden, Eve being his helper and loving companion.

Alas, how soon this harmonious relationship is broken. The first act we read of Eve results in her husband's downfall and that of the whole human race. Rather than acknowledging Adam's role of leadership, she takes it upon herself to make a decision having infinite and immense consequences for all of mankind.

Why does the serpent approach Eve, rather than Adam? Edward Young, noted orthodox Bible scholar says:

In writing to Timothy Paul says, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (I Tim. 2:13,14). . .There was that in the being of the woman which made her a more suitable vessel to approach than the man.

The serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God has made. Satan used its subtlety to tempt woman; Satan was aware of woman's vulnerability and appealed to her senses. Eve listened, she saw that the fruit was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes.

Now we all know that women have certain weaknesses. In I Peter 3 woman is called the weaker vessel. Physically woman is weaker than man. Her muscular build, as well as her sexual make-up do not fit her for her work requiring great strength. But also in the area of the emotions and the senses women are weaker than men. She is credited to being more tender in her affections and emotions. That her feeling for beauty of appearance is a weakness is shown by the necessity of Scripture to address her, and not man, to dress modestly. and simply (I Tim. 2:9; I Peter 3:3; Prov. 31:30; Isa. 3:24)

Calvin says:

She could previously (before the Fall) look at the tree with sincerity, that no desire to eat of it affected her mind; for the faith she had in the work of God was the best guardian of her heart and of all her senses.

Eve led Adam to disobey. As the famous poet Milton says in *Paradise Lost*, Book IX,

**He scrupled not to eat
Against his better knowledge; not deceived,
But fondly overcome with female charm.**

Adam willingly disobeyed God's commandment and he was held responsible as the covenant head. When God looked for His two lost creatures, He called Adam: **Where art thou?** Adam had to answer first to God, not Eve. **In Adam all die** (I Cor. 15:22); **By one man sin entered into the world** (Rom. 5:12-14); **Adam was first formed, then Eve** (I Tim. 2:13). Adam should have led Eve, but he allowed himself to be led by her.

Ruined is now their beautiful and harmonious relationship. Adam blames Eve, and Eve the serpent. Instead of woman being man's helper and complementing him, she has become rebellious and has become man's rival. Also in the realm of sex, sin has spoilt much, and unnatural relationships and lusts have arisen. The Fall has spoilt everything that was previously beautiful and helpful to man.

But what grace we see now! God will punish Adam and Eve, to be sure, for He is righteous. But he first turns to the serpent to curse it, and predicts the ongoing warfare of Satan and the woman's offspring. But there is hope!

**By woman had come the curse, by woman should
come Him Who would bear and remove the curse.
By woman Paradise was lost, yet by woman was born
the One Who should regain Paradise. O what grace—
the Lord of glory was the woman's Seed! —A.W. Pink**

It is woman's seed, not man's! **God sent forth His Son, made of a woman**, we read in Gal. 4:4.

Woman's punishment is included in her redemption. Her sexual life will be one of sorrow and difficulty. Yet childbirth will save her, for in that way the Savior will come.

As Eve was saved in child-bearing, so it says in I Tim. 2:15 that the New Testament woman will be **saved in child-bearing**, with the qualification: **if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety**. The Lord is still seeking a godly seed (Mal. 2:15). The Lord's Second Coming is abiding until the number of the elect is full. **Children are an heritage of the Lord**, and children are woman's special concern.

As a result of her rebellion against God however, the woman was deeply humbled. This can be seen in the history of all the world. Before the coming of Christ, but for a few exceptions, women held a position of inferiority among practically all peoples of the world. However, even before the coming of Christ, God's grace in elevating the position of women could be seen with God's covenant people, Israel. There her position was one of honor and dignity and she had many privi-

leges and rights. Women could take part in religious ceremonies and there were laws to protect them.

The coming of Christ has done away with the symbols, sacrifices and ceremonies of the law. The rite of circumcision was abolished, so that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Women have the same spiritual privileges as men. They are heirs together of the **grace of life** (I Peter 3:7).

Yet Christ did not abolish the creation order. On the contrary! He has come to fulfil the law and make all things new. When regeneration and conversion take place, He restores what the Fall has ruined. In Christ men and women become new creatures. Christ recreates and sanctifies the creation order, restoring men and women in a right relationship to God and each other. The New Testament does not do away with the Old Testament, but it explains it in a richer and a more glorious way.

Now we begin to understand something of the directions given to men and women, husbands and wives, children and parents. The Lord wants to restore something of the original harmony in our relationships. Only by the new birth and having a new and living relationship with the Lord can a woman lead a life of sanctification in obedience to God's will as revealed in His Word, and then the sweet blessings of such a life will be experienced and God will be glorified in her life.

How Scripture now opens up and we see that **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness** (I Tim. 3:16). Only when we approach Scripture in such a way will we be kept from scoffing and rebelling against its instructions about woman's role.

One principle that is repeated in various Scripture passages is that of subjection, submission, reverence, and obedience of women towards men (I Tim. 2:8-15; I Peter 3:1-8; Col. 3:18,19; Eph. 5:21,22,24).

Today many try to give these principles a different interpretation, but there is no getting away from it, these principles run through all of life. It has to do with the relationship of the church to Christ, children to parents, and the employee to the employer. Why should it therefore be interpreted differently in the relationship of wives to husbands? Of course, we must be careful that we don't distort the meaning of these words and put burdens on women that the Bible never intended.

Let us examine the passage of I Peter 3:5,6, where women are instructed to be **in subjection to their own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well**. When we look at Sarah's life we certainly don't get the idea that she acted out of slavish fear, but rather that she acted in faith and obedience. She obeyed her husband's leadership in everything and apparently had not

objections to leaving her country and relatives when God called Abraham to a country he knew not. Yet she shows to be a woman of strong character when she took matters in her own hands in giving Hagar to Abraham to bear an heir. It was wrong, but it showed her strong desire to see God's promise fulfilled, so that she was willing to make woman's supreme sacrifice of self-denial. When it came to taking an initiative she showed more wisdom than her husband in casting out the son of Hagar.

Her faith gave her a place in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, but her obedience and reverence to her husband make her an example for all godly women to follow.

Submission is a grace to be practiced by the church: **Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord.** Calvin remarks that it takes grace to be humble and submissive, and it is exactly in this that our obedience to Christ shows itself. If this is so, and it is, then we can only draw the conclusion that our present situation is evidence of great lack of spiritual life.

Lack of submission to God and His Word is behind the drive to have women occupy positions of leadership in the church and thereby exercising authority over men. For it is in direct opposition to the words of I Cor. 14:34,35, **Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.** This is repeated in I Tim. 2:12,13—**But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence, for Adam was first formed, then Eve.** Reference is made to the creation order.

Furthermore, qualifications for office-bearers always refer to men, e.g. husbands of one wife, **who ruleth well his own house** (I Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 6:3).

This does not mean that women have no place in the church. They have their own contributions to make and may be active in the worship service by listening to the Word, playing and singing, partaking of the Sacraments, offering of their goods. They may also witness and tell others of the grace of God in their hearts and lives. Women may be co-laborers with men in God's kingdom by adorning their testimony with good works (I Tim. 2:10). This adornment begins with the heart: **the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price** (I Peter 3:4).

Women have special feminine qualities which make them uniquely fitted to perform certain tasks. All believers are instructed to practice hospitality (I Pet. 4:9), but women usually set the initiative in welcoming strangers and creating an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. Women who are looking for usefulness in the church can certainly find lots of opportunity in this

area. Just think of the lonely, the elderly, the widows, the unmarried.

There are many professions and jobs open for women today, but in her own home lies her greatest task and responsibility. To be a good wife to her husband and a good mother for her children is the most rewarding task a woman can have. The home comes first.

Proverbs 31 probably gives us the most beautiful example of such a woman. She is a true helper to her husband. He can safely trust in her to do him good all the days of his life. She doesn't waste time, but gets up early to feed her household. She is not a gossip, but **opens her mouth with wisdom**, and has a kind word for everyone.

Besides guiding her home she has time and knowledge to engage in business dealings. She is talented and capable, skilled and creative. She makes her own clothes, produces fine needlework and goes to great lengths to obtain the best quality merchandise. Her talents are all used for her family's well-being, yet she does not forget the needy and remembers them liberally.

Because of her good reputation her husband enjoys respect and honor. Her children are well looked after, and this is what makes her praise worthy. She has many excellent qualities, but her greatest possession is the fear of the Lord.

Instead of women in the offices, the church and society is in great need of such women!

Without following the description of this virtuous woman literally, I'm sure that with prayerful consideration, every woman should be able to apply this example to herself. We might not have all the talents, but we should use those we have to the advantage of our family, our church and our neighbors.

The older women still have a task in the home. They have a duty to be good examples to the younger women and instruct them in the arts of building a Christian home. Because of their experience the older women will be able to advise the younger women about the problems of guiding the home, their relationship with their husband and the upbringing of children (Titus 2:3-5). A psychiatrist wrote recently that if there were more mature and experienced Christians, thoroughly versed in Scripture, who would listen and advise those who have problems, there would be much less work for psychiatrists and mental hospitals.

The Bible concerns itself also with the widows and unmarried women. Already in the Old Testament widows received God's special concern. Relief and protection was assured for her in Israel (Deut. 10:18; Deut. 14:29; Ex. 22:22-24). God calls Himself the **judge of the widows** (Ps. 68:5) and encourages her to **trust in Him** (Jer. 49:11). The Lord Jesus affirmed the protec-

tion due to widows and pronounced God's judgment on the Pharisees for ye devour widow's houses (Matt. 23:14).

The New Testament church from its earliest beginnings recognized the principle of aiding the widows and the needy. When the church grew, the office of deacon was instituted to take care of their needs. Since they have no husband for support and leadership, the deacons have a special task in aiding them financially, as well as spiritually. All believers have a task here and it is part of true religion to **visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction** (James 1:27). Let us not forget this in our age of social benefits.

Widows also have certain obligations to the church. In I Tim. 5 the apostle Paul lays down certain rules for their conduct. The younger ones may choose to remarry, while for the older ones there may be a special gift of prayer to be in **supplications and prayers night and day** (I Tim. 5:5). Blessed is the family and the church who has such aged widows, for the **effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much** (James 5:16).

The Bible also knows of the problems of the unmarried. In I Cor. 7 the apostle Paul gives an explanation of the duties and obligations of marriage. The Corinthians had apparently written him: **It is good for a man not to touch a woman**. Paul explains that the normal state is marriage, but it adds many burdens and cares for the married persons. If a person therefore has the gift of remaining unmarried, he or she has less cares and burdens, and this gift ought to be used for the Lord's service. Jesus speaks of **eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake** (Matt. 19:12). Yet, if they have not this gift, let them marry, Paul says. It is not wrong therefore for unmarried women to desire and to seek marriage.

Today many satisfying and interesting positions are open for the unmarried woman, where she can find an outlet for her special feminine qualities and thus make a unique contribution to society. She is cautioned to **be holy both in body and spirit**, (I Cor. 7:34).

Examples of single persons leading a useful life were Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Jesus, when on earth, enjoyed being in their home. The apostle Paul probably never married. In the resurrection marriage will not be necessary any more. Then they **neither marry or are given in marriage** (Luke 20:34,35).

Are there still women who don't know what to do with their time and talents? The Lord Jesus gladly received the help of women (Luke 8:2,3). Dorcas and Lydia held very important places in the early church. Dorcas used her skills as seamstress to dress the needy. Lydia was a businesswoman and seems to have been the head of her household, for when she was baptized her household followed (Acts 16:15), and thus a church was instituted in Philippi.

Priscilla, together with her husband Aquila, took

Apollos in their home to teach him the way of God more perfectly (Acts 18:26). In Romans Paul mentions by name **Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church, and Mary, who bestowed much labour on us**. There are **Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord**. In the Epistle to the Philippians Paul entreats them to **help those women which laboured with me in the gospel**.

In the history of the Christian church women as well as men became martyrs for their faith. Women played an important role during the Reformation. John Bunyan honored women by also writing about Christiana in his **Pilgrim's Progress**. The contributions of women to the church were indispensable, and are still so today.

However, we do not find any evidence that women were ordained as office bearers. They were co-labourers with the men in God's kingdom, using the talents and gifts God had given them and as circumstances allowed, but always in their God-ordained place as helpers of the men.

Today many women rebel against their God-ordained role and are dissatisfied with the task God has given them. They seek only to fulfil their own selfish ambitions and desires.

It is true, often women's work is behind the scenes and there is little glory or public recognition. But it is the devil who is encouraging women to stand up and claim every right man has. The devil wants women to neglect their homes, husbands, and children. He knows that if he has women on his side, all of mankind will fall, just as Eve led Adam to sin.

Will the modern-day Eves cause a further downfall of mankind? It already seems to be happening. The problems in the family, in society, in the church, can often be traced to the home where mother and father do not fulfil their God-ordained roles.

Take heed! Don't allow yourself to be influenced by the wisdom of the world. It is not wisdom at all! In God's eyes it is only foolishness. Let the Bible be your guide also in this admittedly complex issue of the woman's role in church and society.

Be not conformed to the world and its atheistic, anti-Christian philosophy, **for the fashion of this world passeth away, but the Word of the Lord stands forever**. (I Peter 3:4).

Note: The foregoing article was originally given by Mrs. Cornelis Pronk at a women's gathering of the Free Reformed Church of North America (Grand Rapids, Michigan). Later it was condensed by her husband, Rev. Cornelis Pronk and given as a message on the **Banner of Truth Radio Broadcast**. It is reproduced here by the kind permission of Rev. and Mrs. Pronk, which is gratefully acknowledged. —Editor

The Toronto Magnetism

By J. G. Vos

In its origin the "Toronto Movement"—The Association for Advancement of Christian Scholarship—was almost entirely Dutch. The original impulse and promotion came from immigrants to Canada after World War II. Promotion proceeded among Christian people of Dutch ancestry and background in Canada and the United States. In the Dutch background were the Free University of Amsterdam and the Calvinistic denomination officially called **Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland** (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands). In Canada and the United States the activity and appeal were largely among the membership of the Christian Reformed Church denomination.

This movement seemed at first to be a commendable and worthy enterprise—an effort to apply the truths of the Reformed interpretation of Christianity to all aspects of human life and learning. Only with the passing of several years did it become increasingly evident that trends toward a drastic revision of Reformed orthodoxy were involved. Books and articles published by prominent leaders of the movement increasingly manifested a tendency to reaction against established and long-held tenets and practices of the Christian Reformed Church. Thus **Understanding the Scriptures**, by DeGraaf and Seerveld (published 1969) advocated a view of Scripture which is, in the judgment of the present writer, irreconcilable with Reformed orthodoxy and with the confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church and other Calvinistic denominations. Two later books, **Out of Concern for the Church and Will All the King's Men** (both symposia), made it increasingly clear that drastic changes in Reformed orthodoxy were being sought. Other books which set forth novel and unsound theological positions were **Insight, Authority and Power**, **The Relation of the Bible to Learning**, and **To Prod the Slumbering Giant**.

All of these books, and some others which might be mentioned, were essentially reaction against positions and conditions, real or alleged, in the Christian Reformed Church denomination. The protest was against traditional formalism, "dead orthodoxy," lack of social concern, and some of the emphases of the Christian school movement as promoted by the (largely Christian Reformed) National Union of Christian Schools.

Efforts to promote the Toronto movement among churches and Christians with no Dutch background have met with varying results. In some cases, it seems to the present writer, the Toronto leadership has quite widely misjudged American churches and their his-

tory, background and problems. Specifically, the attempt to influence American college and university students has indicated a naive lack of awareness of the colossal ignorance of historic Reformed orthodoxy in the minds of American Christian students.

The present article is an attempt to describe the impact of the Toronto movement on American college students as the writer has observed it during the past several years.

With rare exceptions, students with a good knowledge of the historic Reformed Faith have not been greatly influenced by the Toronto movement. Students who are at home in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the works of men like Berkhof, Warfield, Machen, R. B. Kuiper and John Murray, easily see through the basic unorthodoxy of books like **Understanding the Scriptures**, **The Relation of the Bible to Learning** (Runker) and **The Challenge of our Age** (Hart). They soon dismiss the Toronto publications as unsound and harmful.

It is the students without a clear grasp of Reformed truth that are affected. Their own knowledge of basic Reformed theology is confused and deficient, with the result that they are greatly impressed by the zeal and energy of the men of Toronto. Here is a movement which is earnestly and confidently promoted and which claims and seems to have exactly the medicine which our sick society and our enfeebled churches need.

Some American pragmatism has doubtless been at work here. Students halfway through college have said to me, in effect, What other movement besides Toronto is promoting Christian journalism, Christian labor unions, Christian education, Christian music and Christian art? To such students I have replied, The superstructure is indeed impressive, but what about the epistemological foundation underneath? If the philosophic and theological basis is doubtful and shaky, how can the practical results be valid in the end? Are we to ignore basic truth and follow practical activist programs? Such students are almost hypnotized by the impressive projects and programs advocated by Toronto. It is really quite an experience for me, who have been studying theology over fifty years, to be told by a college sophomore that I "do not understand" what is true and right and necessary. I really think that in the non-Dutch American scene students who have climbed on the Toronto bandwagon are often infants in their knowledge of historic Reformed truth.

Someone has said that in student protest, what

counts is not the issue but the protest. And this also seems to be the case with some who have become enchanted with the "Reformational" movement. The long and heavy beards, the uninhibited language—sometimes profane and vulgar—, the high contempt and downgrading of the institutional church and its ordinances, all "ring a bell" in the minds of some students. This seems to be a way to be **anti-establishment** in a Christian way. They have a chance to show off that they are

against things that their parents and pastors and teachers hold dear and sacred.

I have seen a number of students who were enthusiastic about the Toronto movement, who later climbed down off the bandwagon and now are seriously critical of the movement. In some cases the change has been amazingly thorough. And this suggests the appropriate remedy for "Reformationalism"—more and better knowledge of the Bible and the historic Reformed confessions.

Some Noteworthy Quotations

IT IS DANGEROUS dressing for another world by the looking-glass of this world.

— William Secker

THE DOCTRINE of an eternal purpose of God is the foundation upon which all the teaching of the Bible is really based. Back of all the events of human history, back of all the changes in the inconceivable vastness of the universe, back of space itself and time, there lies one mysterious purpose of Him to whom there is no before or after, no here or yonder, to whom all things are naked and open, the living and holy God.

— J. Gresham Machen

THE CHRISTIAN MAN finds in the Bible the very Word of God. Let it not be said that dependence upon a book is a dead or an artificial thing. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it **set** the world aflame. Dependence upon a word of man would be slavish, but dependence upon God's Word is life. Dark and gloomy would be the world, if we were left to our own devices, and had no blessed Word of God. The Bible to the Christian is not a burdensome law, but the very Magna Charta of Christian liberty.

— J. Gresham Machen

IT IS PERFECTLY TRUE that no mere man can pay the penalty of another man's sin. But it does not follow that Jesus could not do it; for Jesus was no mere man but the eternal Son of God.

— J. Gresham Machen

WRESTLE, FIGHT, go forward, watch, fear, believe, pray; and then ye have all the infallible symptoms of one of the elect of Christ within you.

— Samuel Rutherford

CHRIST'S CROSS is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a

bird, or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbor.

— Samuel Rutherford

IF I PROFESS with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle-field besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

— Martin Luther

THE TERM "evolution" has several definitions, and these account for much confusion. Organic evolution has been defined as "the gradual development from the simple unorganized condition of primal matter to the complex structure of the physical universe; and in like manner, from the beginning of organic life on the habitable planet, a gradual unfolding and branching out into all the varied forms of beings which constitute the animal and plant kingdom." Theistic evolution teaches that this process was begun by God and continued under natural law which He established. Evolution, organic or theistic, does not accord with the teaching of creation in the Scriptures and is therefore unscriptural. Evolution is essentially a philosophy of science, and a bad philosophy in my opinion, and is not science. The evolutionist and the creationist have, or should have, the same facts; but their explanations thereof differ decidedly.

— V. Raymond Edman (in **Christian Life Magazine**, February, 1963)

"THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). You may pile up your sins till they rise like a dark mountain, and then multiply them by ten thousand and for those you cannot think of; and after you have tried to enumerate all the sins you have ever committed, just let me bring this one verse in, and that mountain will melt away.

— Dwight L. Moody

Religious Terms Defined

PROPITIATION. A satisfaction of the violated holiness of God by the sacrifice of a substitute provided by and acceptable to God. Christ by His death on the cross is the propitiation for our sins. All "theories of the atonement" which deny that it was essentially a propitiatory sacrifice are unsound.

PROTESTANTS. Those who adhere to the evangelical religion of the Bible over against the doctrines and claims of the Roman Catholic Church. The name "Protestants" was first given in Germany in 1529 to the adherents of the Reformer Martin Luther because they protested against a decree of the Emperor Charles V and the Diet of Spire, and appealed to a General Council of the Church.

PROVIDENCE. "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions" (Shorter Catechism, 11). Providence is God's constant support and control of the universe and all it contains, so that God's eternal purpose for the whole and for every part is infallibly accomplished.

PROVIDENCE, MIRACULOUS. God's preserving and governing His creatures and their actions without, above or against the use of means or second causes.

PROVIDENCE, ORDINARY. God's preserving and governing His creatures and their actions by the use of means or second causes.

PROVIDENCE, SPECIAL. Those acts of God's providence which are especially directed toward the care and welfare of His Church. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, V. 7.

PSEUDO-POSTMILLENNIALISM. An optimistic belief in human betterment and progress which serves Liberals and Modernists as a substitute for belief in the Biblical prophecies concerning the Last Things. Pseudo-Postmillennialism believes that the Kingdom of God will be achieved gradually through a natural process by

which social institutions will be reformed and "Christianized." This differs from orthodox Postmillennialism in that it regards the coming of the Kingdom of God as the product of the operation of natural laws or forces in an evolutionary process, whereas orthodox Postmillennialism regards the coming of the Kingdom of God as the product of the **supernatural** working of the Holy Spirit in connection with the preaching of the Gospel and the expansion of real Christianity in the world.

PURGATORY. According to Roman Catholic theology, purgatory is the state in which persons who die guilty of venial (slight) sins, or have not fully satisfied for the punishment due on account of their sins, suffer for a period of time. According to this doctrine, all souls in purgatory will eventually enter heaven. The doctrine of Purgatory is wholly without Scriptural support, and is contrary to the Biblical truth that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXII. 1, which, after speaking of heaven and hell, adds: "Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none."

PURITANS. That party in the Church of England in the 17th century that sought a greater degree of reformation and purity of the Church than had yet been attained. After the passing of the Act of Uniformity, 1662, the Puritans were commonly called Nonconformists, and later Dissenters.

QUAKERS. A religious sect, properly called the Society of Friends, which arose in England in the 17th century and soon spread to various countries of Europe and also to America. The chief distinguishing characteristics of the Friends are: (1) Their Mysticism, by which their highest authority is the "inner light" rather than the written Word; (2) Their rejection of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as unnecessary; and (3) Their Pacifism, or conscientious refusal to participate in war. There are now in America four associations of Friends, with a total of 639 local societies and about 125,000 members.

Studies in the Book of Revelation

LESSON 24

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA, Revelation 2:18-29

This city of Thyatira—not the church but the city—is called by William Ramsay "the city of weakness that was made strong." He adds that out of the seven cities, Thyatira had the distinction of being the most feeble and insignificant of them all. So far as any earthly power or strength was concerned, Ramsey says that possibly this negative distinction might be shared with Philadelphia, and that in that case the two would be tied

for the bottom place on the list, from the worldly and political and military standpoint—the standpoint of importance in the Roman Empire. A city of weakness which, however, was made strong.

Thyatira was way up north in the Roman Province of Asia, in a valley connecting two other valleys. It had nothing to defend it, no natural defences, no

prominent hills or mountains nearby, nothing to make it strong, but it was located on the highway that went to Pergamos or Pergamum, some miles away from the latter city; thus it guarded the approach to Pergamos. Hence, whoever was ruling that country—formerly kings and later the Romans—always had to have a garrison at Thyatira. If Pergamos, a much more important place, was to be attacked by some enemy, the attacker would first have to attack and capture or destroy Thyatira; then after that if he wanted to hold on to Pergamos, he would find it necessary to rebuild and re-fortify and re-supply Thyatira, just for his own security at Pergamos.

Now I want to read you one paragraph from Ramsey's well-known book, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, which brings out the idea that this particular letter, as well as all the others, are strongly optimistic in the best sense of the word. You know, no one but a Christian has any right to real optimism in these days, and the same was true in the time of the apostle John. The Christian who knows that Jesus Christ is alive and has crashed the barrier and risen from the dead and is the real ruler of the kings of the earth, knows that the ultimate future belongs to him, and all things are bound to work together in the long run for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Now this is the tenor of this paragraph:

“As we go on through the seven letters, point by point, each detail confirms our impression of the unhesitating and sublime confidence in the victory of the church, which prompts and enlivens them. The emperor, the Roman state with its patriotism, its religion and its armies, the brutal populace of the cities, the Jews, and every other enemy of the church are all raging and persecuting and slaying to the utmost of their power, but their power is nought. The real church stands outside of their reach, immeasurably above them, secure and triumphant, eternal in the heavens, while the individual Christians work out their victory in their own life, and above all by their death. So that the more successfully the enemy kills them off, the more absolute is his defeat and the more complete and immediate is their victory. The weakest and least honored among these Christian martyrs as he gains his victory by death is invested with that authority over the nations which the proud empire believed that its officials and governors ruled with. And the Christian rules with a power more supreme than that of Rome itself.”

That is Sir William Ramsey's overall capsule appraisal of the seven letters to the seven churches of the Roman Province of Asia. This calls to mind an often-quoted statement of one of the early church leaders, Tertullian, who lived about A.D. 200 in northern Africa: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. We are of yesterday, but where you kill one there are soon ten, where you kill ten there are soon a hundred, and where you kill a hundred there are soon a thousand; and there is no city or town of any size in the Roman

Empire that does not have the graves of the honored martyred dead.” This has certainly proved true, all through the centuries of the Church's history.

Now here is Thyatira, in itself an insignificant place, which could not possibly be held against any significant attack except for the fact that the Romans had placed a powerful garrison there. And they maintained it powerful, so that in that way Thyatira was made strong out of weakness. I think Ramsey's idea is that the church itself in Thyatira would have been weak, and had no great claim to fame or reputation or anything, but the faith that brings the victory over death, over martyrdom and over defeat made the church strong just as the presence of the Roman army made the city strong.

The traditional legendary great man of Thyatira, called a hero by them, was a man by the name of Tyrimnos. We don't know much about him except that his image has been found on coins and medals, pictured as a warrior riding on a horse with a double-braided battle-axe slung over his shoulder—the legendary hero of Thyatira. At first the place had little importance except as a steppingstone to Pergamos. Later it became somewhat important commercially. Ramsay brings out that the number of trade guilds proved to have existed there is greater than the number in any other of the seven cities. This doesn't mean that they had more trade guilds, necessarily, but that proof of more has been found there than elsewhere among the seven cities. Such trade guilds were a sort of combination labor union and chamber of commerce. The workmen and their employers got together—maybe we could try it out in this country sometime; a sort of co-op deal. You practically had to belong to one of these guilds to have any kind of job. The ones that have been proved to have existed at Thyatira are the following: wool workers, land workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze-smiths. No doubt there were quite a number of others too. These trade guilds were certainly tied in with and have something to do with the problems of the church and the Christians in a place like Thyatira. In the first place, to be a member of one of these organizations one had to participate in their activities, including a banquet from time to time, a feast which would be in the name of a pagan god, the patron god of that particular guild. And while many people might take this as a mere formality, and not really believe in it, perhaps not any more than we believe in Halowe'en or Santa Claus, it was a matter of conscience for the early Christians. The food and especially the meats, that were served at such a feast would have been offered, or formally dedicated, to an idol, and this made a real problem for the Christians. While Paul in Corinthians says that a piece of meat is just a piece of meat, so eat it and raise no questions for conscience' sake, he goes on and says, If somebody says to you, Don't you know that this meat has been offered in sacrifice to idols? then in that case you are not to eat it, lest you scandalize your Christian brother and hurt his con-

science. And evidently this was considered an issue at Thyatira and other places of these letters to the seven churches. In other words, any member of the guild who wouldn't eat this food was immediately conspicuous as a Christian, and trouble and persecution would be likely soon to fall upon him.

Ramsay also brings out that after the ordinary banquet was over the real immorality began. Apparently it was of such a nature that it would make the editor of Playboy magazine blush, if such a thing is possible. It would be pretty awful, you know, pretty extreme. Christians could not possibly participate in this without terrible sin; they could not even stay and watch this kind of a floor show without a guilty conscience. On the other hand, if they were to get up and walk out, this again would immediately bring ridicule and persecution upon them; they would be represented as screwball fanatics, and so on, so you see they were in a real bind. You see, the original purpose of the trade guilds was perfectly legitimate, to promote the interests of some trade or occupation of a business of commercial nature. But it was all tied in with the works of the devil. Nothing in the ancient world was completely secular, everything was tied in with religion—if not the true religion, then some false religion. This was what made so much trouble for the Christians.

At this point we might ask, have we met the name of Thyatira in the New Testament before? Yes, in Acts chapter 16 verse 14, at Philippi of Macedonia, where Paul and Silas were coming to bring the Gospel, and they apparently found no Jewish synagogue, but outside the city at a riverside there was a place where pray-

er was offered, and some people, evidently of the Jewish faith, either members or adherents, and apparently all women, gathered from Sabbath to Sabbath for worship and fellowship. Paul preached the Gospel to them, and a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple dye of Thyatira was there, whose heart the Lord opened to listen and receive the message preached by Paul. Lydia was converted and became a Christian, and then she insisted that Paul and Silas leave the inn where they were staying and come to her house as her guests, and they did. You know inns were not usually very clean and commodious in ancient times, and I found they often weren't in China, either—you are likely to be attacked by bedbugs. I complained to one proprietor of an inn, and he said, we had the place cleaned less than six months ago! Then a Christian family in the village insisted that we come to live in their house, and we found that their place was even worse than the inn! You find some strange things. Well, Lydia was a seller of purple dye, and it came from Thyatira; perhaps Lydia herself came from there too. Some scholars think that the color meant was not purple but a dark maroon shade of red, and others say it was really purple. Anyway, it was a valuable product. Perhaps what Lydia sold was not the dye but the cloth that had been dyed with the dye—at any rate, she was called "a seller of purple." She may have had an agency or concession at Philippi for selling this material that came from Thyatira. This is the first mention of Thyatira in the New Testament. Lydia was also probably the first Thyatiran Christian, because Philippians was written many years before the book of Revelation, almost half a century or so earlier. Lydia was probably with the Lord in heaven by the time John wrote Revelation chapter 2.

LESSON 25

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA, cont., Revelation 2:18-29

The works of Thyatira are lavishly commended in verse 19: "I know thy works, and charity and service, and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first." It is remarkable that "works" are mentioned twice, almost as if they had a double amount, and the last more than the first. Here is a church that lacks nothing in its plans and program, it is all being put into execution effectively, and they even rate high on the statistics, for the last works are more than the first—there is nothing of that kind lacking at Thyatira. And the Lord commends them for this. This is not the only thing about a church; if the spiritual power is lacking, all the buzzing activity is useless, but the activity itself is right, so they are commended highly for this. There are churches, you know, that have no spiritual power and also have no activity.

But now comes an exception to this high commendation. "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."

The Lord holds this against them, that they tolerate this woman Jezebel. Note, please, that the objection is not merely to what Jezebel is doing (more about her name in a little bit), but the fact that the church "suffered" or tolerated her. I heard of a little child who went to Sabbath school and came back, and her mother said, "What did you learn?" And she said, "We learned a Bible verse." "Well, what was it?" "Supper for the little children." The verse as in the Bible, of course, is "Suffer little children to come unto me," meaning permit them, don't hinder them or place obstacles in their way. Suffer is an old English word meaning to permit or tolerate something. And this is the Lord's complaint against the church at Thyatira—against the ordained pastor and elders of that church—that they are letting a woman whom the Lord calls Jezebel get away with something that should not have been tolerated or permitted for one minute—"Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel." You know, the Bible doesn't whitewash anyone; it tells the plain, unvarnished, damaging truth about people; it is truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not written by Dale Carnegie, the author of "How to win friends and Influence People."

“That woman Jezebel”—I don’t think her real name was Jezebel. She headed a movement in the church. The text speaks of her and then it speaks of her “children” and of her teaching other people to do things, therefore she had evidently gotten herself into a position of leadership at Thyatira. The objection was not that she was a woman preacher; that is not even suggested by the language here; the objection is to what she was doing, and what she was saying. “That woman Jezebel”—this is translated in one version of the Bible, “that Jezebel of a woman.” Did you ever hear of a family naming their daughter “Jezebel”? Possibly it is related to the name “Isabel”, so maybe I should be careful not to say too much about the name! The reference of Jezebel, of course, is back to the Old Testament. Any Christian who knew his Bible at all would immediately think of Jezebel the wife of Ahab, back in Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament. Jezebel came from Sidon in Phoenicia—we call it Lebanon today. Her father was Ethbaal, king of Sidon. Note that he had the name of Baal, a pagan god, compounded into his personal name, Ethbaal. He was also the high priest thereof the Baal-Melcarth religion, a particularly vile and corrupt system. I don’t know of anything that is called religion that ever got any lower than this worship of Baal in Old Testament times. Dr. Unger’s book on Old Testament archaeology says that this Canaanite religion was effete and corrupt and the lowest of the religions of the ancient world. Basically a form of nature-worship, it took the form of a worship of sex and fertility in nature—productiveness or fertility of people, domestic animals and farmland. The worship was carried on with obscene and immoral rites—among other things infant sacrifice and temple prostitution. It was priests or prophets of this religion that Elijah killed and had their bodies thrown into the Kishon river.

That was the background of Jezebel. She came to Samaria from Sidon to be the bride—and later queen—of Ahab, the marriage being arranged by Omri, Ahab’s father—certainly a piece of political wheeling and dealing, to get Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Israel lined up together as friendly rather than hostile. The Bible says of Ahab that there was none like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. Ahab might have been just an average run-of-the-mill wicked man if it had not been for Jezebel, who stirred him up to wickedness. In the Book of Proverbs a verse says that where nobody adds wood, the fire goes out. But you see Jezebel kept on adding wood to the fire, and she succeeded in getting the religion of the Lord closed off in the northern kingdom of Israel. And she killed the worshippers of the Lord as far as possible; in fact, according to what God Himself said, she killed all but seven thousand that were left in the kingdom. Pretty terrible—and in place of the worship of the Lord came the worship of Baal, with priests and prophets, temples and sacrifices, as the official religion of the kingdom. You can’t pick out a wicked woman than Jezebel in the Old Testament—she stands out as a terrible example of how wicked a person can become.

And this woman in Thyatira is called “that woman Jezebel” or “that Jezebel of a woman”—surely this speaks volumes as to what the Lord thought of her. And the Lord says that she calls herself a prophetess, which implies that the Lord certainly does not call her one. A self-appointed prophetess. In the Old Testament there were three kinds of prophets: true prophets of the true God, like Elijah, whom God had really sent, and to whom God really revealed Himself; secondly, there were false prophets who claimed to be from the true God, but God had not really sent them. They did not speak in the name of Baal or some pagan God, but claimed to speak in the name of the true God of Israel, Jehovah, but God had not sent them. So you see they were self-appointed, and either self-deceived or deliberate deceivers of other people, claiming to have been sent by the true God when actually they had not been. And in the third place there were the prophets of the false religions, like the religion of Baal and others. These of course were false and they presented a variety of false gods. Now the only true prophets were those whom God had called. The Old Testament gives specific tests for trying out who is a true prophet and who is not. One test was whether the predictions come true or not, but of course people could not always wait to find that out. Another test was whether what this prophet is saying does or does not ring true to what you already know to be God’s revealed truth. If what the prophet is saying does not harmonize with what is already known as God’s infallible revelation of truth, then this new prophet is false, presumptuous, a pretender, a deceiver of the people.

Now here is Jezebel of Thyatira, evidently claiming to be a genuine Christian prophetess, but actually, by what she is saying and doing, she is showing herself to be serving not Christ but the devil. She teaches the Lord’s servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols; and later on, verse 22 and following, she is said to be committing adultery. Some have thought that this means spiritual adultery, religious unfaithfulness; the church is the body and bride of Christ, and Christ is the head and husband of the church, and so on. So the Bible does have this metaphor, calling religious unfaithfulness “adultery”, a breaking of the marriage bond. But probably in Jezebel’s case it speaks of literal adultery. Note that in verse 24 it speaks of the rest of the church’s membership that weren’t in on all this, and that they had not known the depths of Satan, “as they speak.”

I take it, these people, the party that followed Jezebel, claimed to know the deep things—they claim to have a deeper understanding of the truth than the ordinary church members have, the orthodox Christians of the time and place. And the Lord says, “the rest of you who haven’t known that they call the deep things” (which the Lord calls “the deep things of Satan”). The Lord has something to promise them—something better than what Jezebel was promising. Now when we really try to figure out just what it was

that this woman Jezebel was saying and doing that so aroused the condemnation of the Lord, I think it is quite evident that it was something connected with the rites and ceremonies of the guilds, and participation in the feasts and meetings, the gatherings of these trade guilds. But, more than simply yielding to temptation and going there and perhaps eating food that had been offered in sacrifice to idols, and maybe staying to see the floor show afterwards, they were involved in something worse than all this. Apparently, according to the opinion of William Ramsay, Jezebel was teaching that in order to fight Satan you first have to understand Satan; in order to fight evil you first of all have to have a deeper knowledge of what evil is than the ordinary Christians have, who are so afraid of compromising themselves. If you really want to fight sin, you first have to let go and really get down deep into sin, so that you will have a first-hand experience of what sin is and what you are fighting against. Would that kind of teaching appeal to some people? It would be like say-

ing that to realize the evil of alcohol you must first become an alcoholic yourself, and get drunk from time to time; then you will really know what the evil of alcohol is and what it is you are trying to fight against.

Of course, all this is a terrible wrong slant on things. This way could only lead to much greater and worse evil. But probably something like that is implied by the Lord's statement that these people were boasting about knowing the really deep things—the idea that you can conquer evil best by first of all compromising with it, getting to know it from first-hand experience, getting a really good first-rate understanding of it, so that you would be qualified to fight it in an intelligent way. It is surely no wonder that the Lord raised a terrific objection to this kind of doctrine. If Jezebel's ideas were followed by more than a small fraction of the members of the church, this would destroy the church completely—the church in Thyatira would be worse than nothing after a period of time if this teaching were followed.

LESSON 26

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA, cont., Revelation 2:18-29

Notice that the Lord knows everything that is going on at Thyatira. In verse 18 He describes Himself as the Son of God who has eyes like flames of fire, and in verse 23 all the churches shall know that He is the one who searches the reins and hearts, and will give to everyone of the members according to their works. Now the first priority, according to what the Lord says here, for the church at Thyatira is to do something about that woman Jezebel; He will lay no other burden on them, not even on the spiritual parts that have not been infected with this heresy. Just hold on to what you have, the best you can—the burden for Thyatira is to do something about Jezebel, and they have not done it. The Lord had given her a space of time, implying a considerable length of time, to repent, and she hadn't repented, but just went on the same way as she had been doing, and the church tolerated this. Therefore the guilt rests not only on Jezebel but on the church of Thyatira as a whole, and especially on its ordained pastor and officers, for tolerating this kind of condition and this very harmful false teaching within the church. Yes, to do something about Jezebel is their first priority. The Lord doesn't tell them to go ahead with more evangelism, or anything like that, but to do something about that woman Jezebel. This has priority for them above everything else, and until they deal with this problem and get it settled, they don't have a clear track to go ahead with other kinds of activities with any assurance of the Lord's blessing, or any hope of success.

I wonder whether we may sometimes be in the same kind of situation. Are there churches of our denomination that have grown feeble and weak because they are not willing to carry out righteous judgment in the church according to the commands of God, by exercising discipline against people who are living in sin? I don't

mean about some little trifle, but something really serious. The Lord says that Thyatira had failed to do it. They were continuing to tolerate this wicked woman. Therefore the Lord Himself will do it. But this then involves a heavy weight of guilt resting on the church which should have done it, but did not. "I will cast her into a bed"—this probably means that she will be stricken with a sudden and devastating illness. Those that commit adultery with her will be cast into great tribulation. This probably does not merely mean, people who believe like her, but people who have actually committed adultery with her, just like it says—except they repent of their deeds. "And I will kill her children with death"—this is understood to mean her own children, not simply her followers, but her own children—the Lord will kill them with death, and all the churches shall know. In other words the Lord is going to do something in the church at Thyatira of such a drastic nature, and will deal with the situation so completely and thoroughly in His providence, that everybody who hears about it and knows about it will realize that God was at work there, to do something because of this cancerous growth that existed in the church at Thyatira that the members and officers did not do anything about.

Notice that if the church had done its duty, this woman Jezebel alone, or perhaps she and a small group of her partisans, would have been held guilty. But because the church had failed to exercise righteous discipline, the Lord's judgment is also against the pastor, elders and membership of the church, because they tolerated this evil heresy. This is something that should be applied in many situations today. Why didn't the Episcopal Church do something about the lake bishop Pike? A scoffing unbeliever, he scoffed at the doctrine of the Trinity, and the church did not do anything about it,

really. He died tragically, and I suppose we should call his death in the Holy Land an accident; he was lost and found dead in the entrance of a cave. Why didn't the Church of England do something about bishop John Robinson who wrote that wicked book *Honest to God*, a book that tramples underfoot what we hold precious and true?

The late Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the so-called "Red Dean of Canterbury," England, used to go to Moscow and fraternize with the Russian Soviet leaders, and then come back and tell the people of England that the Russian Communists were really Christians—that these people were really trying to apply Christian teachings about society. And people just smiled and let him be. Nothing was done about it.

We don't have a Hewlett Johnson or a Bishop Pike or a John Robinson, in our church denomination, I certainly hope, but we should realize that the time to deal with things like this is before they get to that stage. Recently I was asked by a church member after the morning service what should be done about a person who hasn't attended church for fifteen years, more or less, and the person's name is still on the membership roll, and nothing has been done about him or her. We should realize that in such a case the church itself is responsible, as well as the delinquent member. And when I said this I got the reply that if you do anything about it, all the person's relatives will be up in arms. I replied, "Yes, they will, but you see that comes from letting it go too long. The church ought to check up on people when they have been absent without known reasons for three months. Go and see them, talk to them—the pastor and the elders should do it—and don't let things get to the desperate stage.

Well, just a word or two about the promises to those

who overcome—certainly the more attractive part of this letter. To them the Lord will give power over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, and like the vessels of a potter they will be broken to shivers—to smithereens—"even as I received of my Father." "And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." These last words show us that this is not merely a letter to the church at Thyatira, but to every church. If you have an ear—in other words, if the shoe fits, put it on. If it meets your situation in any way, take it to heart—he that hath an ear, let him hear.

Ramsay comments on this by saying that these poor Christians were being mercilessly done to death by the Roman authorities, and the Jews also were persecuting them; and the Romans think that their proconsuls and other officials have the power to rule the world. But this is only an illusion of theirs; the real power is held only by Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and every Christian as soon as he dies joins the Church Triumphant and shares with Christ in ruling the world, and at the Day of Judgment Christians will be associated with Christ, Paul tells us in Corinthians, in judging—even judging angels, not to mention humans of this world. So the real situation will be exactly reversed from what it looked like during the shameful and dark days when the letters to the seven churches were written.

The morning star that is mentioned probably means Christ Himself. This is the star that shines toward morning and dominates the early morning sky; so Christ dominates the field of the world, really, and the Christian who overcomes is given the morning star. He is irreversibly united to Christ. What Christ has is yours, and what you have is Christ's, and the victory of the eternal future belongs to you in Christ.

LESSON 27

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS, Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis is the fifth letter to the seven churches of the Roman Province of Asia. Each city and church is given a characteristic name by Ramsay, and he calls Sardis "the city of death." This city was located some miles inland from Smyrna and Pergamos, which were on the seacoast. It had once been a powerful city, the capital of the powerful kingdom of Lydia. This is where Croesus had been king at one time—a king famed for his wealth, so we have the proverb "as rich as Croesus." Twice in its history Sardis had been captured by enemies and looted and more or less destroyed, both times because of a failure in watchfulness. Incidentally, although there were many years between, each time the fall of the city resulted from the same failure. This ancient city was on a height, with steep cliffs around a good part of it, and this evidently gave the inhabitants a false sense of security. And while they guarded their city in general in time of war, there was one point that they thought it not important nor a threat to their safety.

This was a place where there was a narrow slip in the rock cliff, through which an enemy could crawl or scramble, one man at a time. If you have visited McConnell's Mill State Park (Pennsylvania) you will be familiar with this kind of rock fissure. There are some amazingly high rocks, left by the continental glacier ages ago, and the road passes one place where there are two tremendous blocks of solid rock, each as big as a small house, and a crack between them which appears to be eight or ten inches wide. A person might be able to scramble through it, it would be a tight squeeze, but it might be possible to do it, but if one of those giant rocks shifted an inch or two, the person would be surely crushed to death. It is freezing water that had split the great rocks apart, and over long periods of time expanded a tiny crack until now the crack is ten inches or more wide. There is a place like that at Sardis, where the rocks are not as hard as those at McConnell's Mill—a softer type of rock that weathered more easily, but

still a slit that an enemy might just manage to crawl through. This they left unguarded, and enemies got in, and opened the gates to others and the city fell to the enemy. And then many years later it happened again, in exactly the same way.

You can hardly feature that our country could get caught off guard again as we did in 1941 at Pearl Harbor, through a lack of adequate watchfulness. It is history, but it should never happen to us again. And the people of Sardis had been caught that way once, but they thought it could never happen to them again. Once the capital of the rich and powerful kingdom of Lydia, a very important city in pre-Roman times, and today Sardis is an utterly dead city. Apparently it is the deadest of all the seven cities mentioned in Revelation. Rocks, weeds, sand, grass, a few miserable little huts and shacks of some local goatherds or shepherds, maybe, and one mile away—at least at the time when Ramsay wrote his book, around 1910, a small railway station and two houses, presumably the dwellings of the people working in the station. That is Sardis as it is today—a dead city, a ghost town if there ever was one anywhere. And the history of the city finds its reflections in the history and condition of the church in Sardis. The Lord says to this church, You have a name for being alive, but actually you are dead. And the deadness of the church at Sardis, while not absolutely total—there is an exception as we shall see—still it was apparently more total and extreme than in any other of the seven churches. The church that gets the highest rating of all is Smyrna, of which only good is spoken; and Sardis perhaps gets the lowest rating of all, with the possible exception of Laodicea. Apparently extremely dead.

The Lord introduces Himself here by saying, “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” The seven stars probably means the seven churches as they are viewed by the Lord in heaven, in their ideal condition, from the viewpoint of eternity. We have already noted (chapter 1 verse 4) that the usage of “seven” here does not mean that the Spirit of God is plural; “seven” stands for ideal perfection. Some people in the early church thought it must mean seven angels, so they began to think of God as far away, and a whole series of mediators between God and us, and a whole series of scaled ranks from God in heaven way down to Christians in this world; this is one reason why we find warnings in the Bible against worshipping angels, and against believing that there is more than one mediator between God and man. Ramsay and other commentators say quite positively and directly that in the inspired word of God, the “seven” here cannot mean angels. They are not the objects of our faith, even though there are angels and they are servants of God and do His bidding and His will, but here the “seven spirits of God” cannot mean angels, nor can it mean that God is a sevenfold being. God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is one only, and indivisible. He came on Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove;

the Holy Spirit is not a dove, but that was the appearance that bystanders saw, at least John and Jesus saw this. In the Old Testament the sacrifices were always divided, but birds that were offered in sacrifice were not. Note Genesis 15:10 (of Abraham), “the birds divided he not.” The Holy Spirit is a unity and not divisible by seven. The “seven” here is then a metaphor or figure of speech for the perfect, manifold activity of the Holy Spirit in connection with the churches. The Holy Spirit is the executive of the Godhead, and is active and taking note of everything that goes on in the churches. The church at Sardis, and every church everywhere and at every time.

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” In the letter to Thyatira, the works are very prominent, even mentioned twice in the letter to Thyatira, “I know thy works.” “And the last are more than the first.” The only thing the Lord says about the works of the church at Sardis is that they do not meet God’s requirements: “I know thy works. . . I have not found thy works perfect before God. . .” Just what these works were and what was lacking in them is not stated here, except that the Lord did not find them satisfactory. Presumably there was here a deadly defect not only in the attitude and motivation, but probably also in the actual works themselves. That things were not being done, that things were allowed to drag along and be neglected, which should have been done and carried out to honor Christ and to benefit people—evidently Sardis was a church that wanted to take it easy and not do much of anything—a lifeless church that is not doing anything. Now, let us consider, Are there dead churches today? And what is it that makes a church dead, as God sees churches? Is it possible for a church to have a very full program of many kinds of activities, and yet be like the church in Sardis as God sees churches? You know back when the prophet Samuel was anointing David to be king of Israel, Jesse, David’s father lined up his seven oldest sons, and Samuel passed them all by, and said, “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” Maybe there are churches like Sardis, with no evangelism, no soul winning, no earnest and fervent and faithful prayer, no real gospel preaching, —nothing that the Holy Spirit ordinarily uses to convert sinners and build up the saints in their faith in Christ. A church building, no doubt, and meetings, and services and so forth, but dead, lifeless and useless as the Lord looks at things.

There is an old story about a Black man who tried to join a socially fashionable church in one of our cities. He met with the officers, and they did not want to receive him as a member but did not want to say that it was because of his race. So they told him to make sure it was the Lord’s will. Pray about it for two weeks, and then come back to their next meeting. So he went away on this assignment, and returned two weeks later, and they said, “Did you pray about it?” “Yes.” “And what did the Lord say in answer to your prayer?” “The

Lord said, 'Jim, it's no use for you to try to get into that church. I've been trying to get into that church myself for over fifty years, and never succeeded in getting in.' If not literally true, this story could be true as a parable.

A Chinese student in New York City took me on a tour of the Riverside Church, near Grant's tomb, overlooking the Hudson River, where the notorious modernist Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick preached for many

years. He is dead now and someone else is his successor. This church, backed by the Rockefeller interests, is probably as "modern" as you could find in New York City, and that is going some. My Chinese guide said, "This church has everything—a magnificent carillon of bells, the finest physical equipment you could find in any church anywhere; in fact, they have everything except Jesus Christ." I fear that was a true verdict on that church, so far as my knowledge of it goes.

LESSON 28

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS, cont., Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis had a fatal indifference, a sluggish carelessness. A number of points bring this out. The first is the admonition to "be watchful." It was lack of watchfulness that had ruined the city of Sardis twice in its history. So here is a parable for the church at Sardis taken from the history of the city of Sardis. "Be watchful." The city had twice met its doom because of failure in watchfulness. And the church of Sardis is likely to suffer a similar calamity, if the members do not become watchful.

Secondly, strengthen the few remaining signs of life, which the Lord says are ready to die. This is the middle of verse 2. "For I have not found thy works perfect before God." That is, even those elements in the church at Sardis that you could say were alive and truly Christian, nevertheless were weak. And in such a perilous condition it looked like just a matter of a little more time until they would be dead too. Therefore the church is to strengthen the few remaining signs of life.

The third counsel here is to remember their beginnings and their past history, and ponder the lessons of these, and realize the obligations which they impose upon them (and which are also imposed upon us of the present day). You know people forget the lessons of history, and they do this to their own harm and peril. Moses in his farewell to the people of Israel—three long speeches which fill most of the book of Deuteronomy, shortly before his death, enjoins upon the people of Israel to remember and not forget the lessons of their history. The key word of Deuteronomy is "Remember." "Forget thou not." Remember what God has done for you, and for your fathers before you, and the long way He led you, how He got you out of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and across the Red Sea, and bore you (a figure of speech, of course) on eagles' wings, and brought you through that waste howling wilderness, and had patience with all your failure and unfaithfulnesses, and so on. Moses loved those people, though they certainly had given him a bad time; he had a fatherly affection for them, and he counselled them to remember what God had done for them, and not to miss the lessons of their past.

This is true of Sardis. They are to remember the origins of their church, how they had received and heard the Gospel, and to take this to heart. Some dealer in

wisecracks has said, Nobody ever learns anything from history except that nobody ever learns anything from history. This is of course an exaggeration, but all the same there is truth in it. A professor of philosophy once said, "He who disdains history is condemned to relive it." The person who is unaware of the lessons of the past, who is unable to profit by them, and unable therefore to avoid the mistakes of the past, falls into the same pitfalls and faces the same problems all over again. This is true in secular life, and it is true in the life of the Church. We learn from Bible history and from the history of the Church the story of God's dealing with us, and what he has to say to us, and we should remember that this is not simply an academic study; this imposes a moral obligation upon us. You cannot study Bible history without coming under added moral obligation. To whom much is given, of them much shall be required.

We might consider whether the terrible damage caused by Hurricane Agnes in the summer of 1972 was a judgment of God. It was the worst flood that eastern North America ever recorded, worse than the very disastrous floods of 1936. Thousands of people lost their homes and their property. Now of course you cannot pinpoint this and say, My family and my house are safe, and somebody else lost their home and family, therefore God's judgment rests on them but not on me. This will not do. You can't individualize it like that. Remember Jesus said, Those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them all, were they worse sinners than all the people in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. But take it in the large, as an experience of our country—billions of dollars damage; we are going to be paying for this damage by taxes for years and years. Can we say that this is not the judgment of God on a country that is increasingly trying to live without God? Throw God out of the public schools, throw prayer and the Bible out, and become increasingly rigid and secular in this notion of the separation of church and state—this is the state of affairs today. At least officially and in its government capacity our country is trying to live without God. And of course there are many millions of our people who are living without any real sense of obligation to God. C. S. Lewis in one of his books said that God has three ways of speaking to people: conscience in God's whisper, Scripture is God's voice, and calamity is

God's shout. And when people are deaf to the whisper and will not listen to the voice, sometimes God flags them down with a shout of calamity, to remind us that as a nation we cannot do it alone, we cannot really live without God. Surely a calamity of the magnitude of Hurricane Agnes is no mere coincidence, no mere chance event. If God controls what comes to pass, this did not come by chance. And of course it is humanly unavoidable, we are helpless before it. What man can do to mitigate a disaster of this kind is as nothing in comparison with the damage and the trouble and destruction. So we may conclude that on the face of it this is a judgment of God upon our country, to teach us that we cannot really live without God, contrary to what so many people, including the justices of the Supreme Court, seem to think today.

Well, we can and should remember our beginnings. Our country was not founded on a godless secular humanism, nor was the Christian church founded on an indifference to God; and such an exclusion of God from a large part of human life, as we see it today, is certainly foreign to the lessons of our history.

Coming back to Sardis, the fourth counsel is to hold fast, get the process of deterioration stopped; the past is bad, but don't let the present and the future be even worse; hold fast what you still have, and don't let that too deteriorate and get worse. And it says, "Repent"—in the Greek this means change your mind, reverse your thinking, change your thinking by a right-about-face, as to what you think about God and what you think about yourself, and what you think about right and wrong. Two things I would like to stress at this point. First, what is the missing note in much present-

day evangelism? And secondly, is the modern church attempting the impossible? Is the call to repentance heard today? You are likely to hear it from the pulpit of the small, truly Reformed denominations, but what about the country as a whole? "Repent!"—this is the prominent note in the Bible. John the Baptist began his ministry with this statement: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus a little later began His public ministry with the same statement, Repent. God is asking you to repent. Repentance has been called the missing note in present-day evangelism, and some people have labeled this "cheap believism." It does not go deep enough. People are being urged to get saved, but they do not know clearly what they need to be saved from. I have heard what is called "evangelism" which consisted essentially in an invitation to make our church your church home. Join us and make this church your church home. And others say, "Believe on Jesus Christ," but never say a word about how people are in danger of going to hell if they don't repent and turn back to God. The guilt of their sins, which they need forgiveness for, cannot be gotten rid of by just saying "I believe in Jesus" or raising my hand in a meeting or signing my name on a little card—you have to know the evil of your sin and confess it before the Lord, and feel that you are guilty and unworthy—this is repentance. In the Bible saving faith is never separated from repentance. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and repentance is the necessary entrance to saving faith. We should honor and support true evangelism that emphasizes not only faith but also repentance, and we should recognize the error and inadequacy of the kind that seems to make it easy for people to come to Christ by omitting the painful and embarrassing part of Christian experience.

LESSON 29

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS, cont., Revelation 3:1-6

The greatest revival America ever had was the Great Awakening in the 1700's, in the time of Jonathan Edwards and others. People were swept into the kingdom of God by the thousands, but this followed upon faithful preaching of the Law of God to convict people of sin. The Law convicts of sin; it doesn't save anybody, but it does convict people of their need of salvation, because it convinces them of their lost and guilty condition before God. Those who have a faulty or superficial idea of their own condition and need, will also regard Christ and His salvation lightly. It is the knowledge of the Law that leads people to repentance. This is prominent in the Bible, but greatly diluted and attenuated in our own day. Jesus did not come, He said, to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. This of course does not mean that there are lots of really righteous people, but it means the self-righteous, those who think of themselves as righteous and who therefore think they do not need to repent.

One of my teachers at Princeton Seminary, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, said that the modern church is

failing because it is attempting the impossible—it is attempting to call the righteous to repentance. Not the really righteous, of course, for there are none such except by divine grace, but the self-righteous, those who imagine themselves to be righteous and are not conscious or aware of any really deep sinfulness and guilt before God. Such people are invited to join a church, to join in its worship and fellowship, and they are encouraged by the church's outreach program to by-pass the narrow door. Samuel Rutherford once wrote, "Stoop, sinner, stoop! It is a low, low door by which we enter the kingdom of God."

I get around Beaver Falls, New Brighton and the Beaver Valley a bit, and I often notice what is on the outdoor bulletin boards of the various churches. Covenant churches usually have a Scripture text or a Biblical theme or statement of some kind. But on the churches of the large denominations you are likely to find an assortment of wisecracks, pithy sayings of worldly wisdom, common sense proverbial statements, and much more of that sort of thing. One I recall said "He who

throws mud loses ground.” Another, “He who gives someone a piece of his mind, loses his peace of mind.” What is wrong with these slogans displayed to the passer-by on the public streets? Just this: there is no Christianity in them. Gandhi, the nationalist leader of India had a plaque over his “pad” which read (in English, I believe), “If you are right, you can afford to keep your temper; if you are wrong, you cannot afford to lose it.” Not a bad idea, and it might well be quoted sometimes in Synod and presbytery meetings. But it is not Christianity, it is just common sense psychology or worldly wisdom. The trouble with these smart sayings on outdoor church bulletin boards is that the ordinary man in the street inevitably gets the notion that this is the church’s message, a kind of good advice and do-goodism. I have been inside of churches where the message from the pulpit wasn’t much better than the outside bulletin board, either. I remember once when I decided not to close my eyes during the prayer nor put the offering I had brought in the collection plate. I recall visiting a church of one of the large denominations, by their invitation, to speak on China to their church school. It was too late to get back to our own church, so I stayed for their morning service. It was the Lord’s Day just before the Fourth of July. The minister preached a “patriotic” message, and honestly I could not discern any theme or subject in it except the general idea that if everybody would be good, there would not be any bad people. It was a series of little stories or anecdotes about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and the only real point was that these men had some civic virtues and idealism that we would do well to imitate. No Christianity in it, none whatever. That was just one Sabbath; I hope on the other 51 Sabbaths of the year the minister preached the Gospel—but I wonder!

This kind of thing has sapped the vitality of the churches of our country. Why don’t they preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified instead of handing out little bits of good advice and stories about Washington and Lincoln? The modern self-righteous person thinks himself all right, he feels no special need of God, and if he goes to church he wants to be soothed and made to feel comfortable. Such a person may be a Protestant of the purest Anglo-Saxon ancestry, but all the same he is a Jew, and a member of the sect of the Pharisees at that. I recall attending a funeral in Kansas. The deceased was not a member of our church, but a neighbour of our family, and the service was in a church of one of the large liberal or neo-orthodox denominations. The minister in his prayer said, “Dear Lord, we know thou dost not expect us to be perfect, but only to do the best we can, and we know our departed brother always did that, so we know it must be well with his soul.” I don’t want anyone to say anything like that at my funeral. I have not always done the best I could—far from it—I have broken the commandments of God daily in thought, word and deed. Not for one single hour in my life have I ever done the best I could, and I certainly don’t expect to get to heaven that way.

You may recall the Reformed Conference on the sov-

ereignty of God, when Dr. Sanderson told the story of how he went to get his clothes back from the dry cleaning shop, and the girl there by mistake gave him a dollar too much change. He promptly handed her back a dollar, and said, “You made a mistake, and gave me a dollar too much change.” She looked at him and said, “Well, you are sure going to go to heaven!” And he said this gave him an opening for a bit of witnessing, and he said, “Yes, I am sure going to go to heaven, but not on account of this dollar,” and then he told her on what he based his hope of heaven and eternal life.

How many millions of people, and many of them church members, do you suppose there are in America who expect to go to heaven on the basis of their own (supposed) moral goodness? There are millions of people like this. And we will never get the revival we so desperately need until there is a nation-wide preaching of the Law of God, and repentance. No one can really believe on Jesus Christ until he realizes the awful truth that he deserves to go to hell for ever. This is the missing note today. Under the guise of being positive the modern church preaches a message that omits a faithful diagnosis of people’s real spiritual condition.

The Lord tells the church in Sardis that He will come as a thief (verse 3b), and while this may refer to Christ’s second coming, it may also include any special coming of Christ in sudden judgment—God’s shout of sudden calamity—and the thing about this is that it cannot be predicted or known in advance. Our only security is to be always ready. Jesus said that in an hour when you think not, the Son of man cometh. When the time of calamity comes there will be no time to repent and no opportunity to repent; the day of grace will be over, the day of judgment will supercede it. In the whole Bible there is only one instance of a dying repentance (the crucified thief)—one instance, that none may despair, and only one, that none may presume.

Not everyone in Sardis was spiritually dead. There were a few names even in Sardis which had not defiled their garments. “They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” Note that little word “even”—that is the word that brings point and punch to the sentence. Suppose someone were to say, “Even in Beaver Falls there are a few real Christians.” This would imply that it is a surprising thing that there are any at all. So in Sardis, considering the general condition of the church, it was a surprising thing that there remained “a few names” that were not sunk in the general apostasy and deadness. A few names of people that we would call, today, vital, born again, believing Christians. These few are of course the real hope—the only real hope—of the church in Sardis. To these comes the promise that they shall walk with the Lord in white. This is the imagery of a Roman triumph, a Roman general that had won a successful campaign and back in Rome he had a triumph, and a big parade passed through the whole city. The participants in this triumph—not the crowds of on-lookers in the streets, but the real participants—would all be clothed in white, the color of triumph and victory.

LESSON 30

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS, cont., Revelation 3:1-6

The Christian who overcomes in the conflict of life will share with Christ in his triumph. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." The opposite of walking in white would be walking in defiled garments, verse 4, like the rest of the people there. This recalls the verse in Isaiah which says that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, that is, of course, in contrast to the righteousness of Christ which the true Christian gets and which causes him, figuratively speaking, to be clothed in white. The filthy rags of so-called human righteousness stand for unconfessed and unrepented sin.

Also the true Christian will have his name written in, and not erased from, the Book of Life. In Rev. 20:12 we get some light on this. It speaks of books in which works were written, and then another book is opened—the book of life—and those whose names are written in the Book of Life are saved unto eternal life; but those whose names are only in the books of works, will be cast into hell. Now the Lord also says that He will confess the names of those in the Book of Life before His Father and the holy angels.

Someone has raised a question. Is it possible to have your name in the Book of Life, and then later have it blotted out of the Book of Life? It says here that those who overcome will not have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. I am sure that God does not actually blot names out of the Book of Life, but we cannot be sure immediately and instantly that our names are in the Book of Life. A deacon once asked his pastor to preach a sermon for the elect only, and the pastor replied, "Certainly, I shall be glad to do it on one condition. Take this piece of chalk and put a mark on the shoulder of all the elect in the congregation. I always want to know whom I am talking to. When you get the elect among us properly identified and marked with the chalk, I'll preach the sermon specially for the elect only!" That was the end of that affair. There is no way to know by a short-cut. Someone says to me, "I would like to be a Christian, but first I want to know whether I am one of the elect." You can find this out only by going the long way around, accepting Christ and coming to know Him. We will leave Sardis at this point and go on to Philadelphia.

LESSON 30, continued

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA, Revelation 3:7-13

This is the sixth of the seven letters. Let us see what is unique in this letter, as compared with most of the other six. There are seven letters in all, and two of them are different from all the rest. Can you state what the difference is? Well, how much is there in this letter of blaming the church and its members for things not going right? None at all. Was there any previous letter sharing this distinction? Yes, one, the letter to the church at Smyrna. The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, in marked contrast to the other five, are entirely commendatory; no fault is found about anything.

This is certainly remarkable. The church at Philadelphia was neither big nor powerful, but it received the Lord's complete approval. What do you think of when you hear the name "Philadelphia?" Does it make you think of crooked politics? Or a place where they send out traffic tickets to people who have never driven a car in their life? Or do you think of William Penn's statue on the top of the city hall at Broad and Market Streets? That is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's largest city, and the least affected by the flood following Hurricane Agnes (1972) of any place in Pennsylvania. But the Philadelphia we are dealing with here in the Book of Revelation was a city in Asia Minor, in the Roman Province of Asia to be precise. It was named for a king called Philadelphus, not because the citizens of Philadelphia were so famous for brotherly love. This king, whose original real name was Eumenes, was king of Pergamos, and seems to have gotten a reputation for a brotherly attitude toward a lot of people, especially his

own brother, a nearby king named Attalus. So the city got its name, Philadelphia; I don't know whether he named it that, but it got the name Philadelphia in honor of this brotherly love.

This city stands in the valley by an open door, an entry way to a region in the back country, going eastward from the Mediterranean Sea, a region from which the wealth and prosperity of the city were derived. The city of Philadelphia was destroyed, levelled to the ground, by a devastating earthquake in the year A.D. 17. This would be during the youth of Jesus when He was presumably still working in the carpenter shop at Nazareth. This earthquake was so severe that it all but ruined the city. And that wasn't all. When they thought it was over, then it started again. And each time they would go back and try to clean up and rebuild the city, and then—wham! another series of earthquake shocks. This continued at irregular and of course completely unpredictable intervals, so finally the people almost gave up hope of ever getting back to normal in their city, and a great many of them moved out to the fields around and lived in tents. They would go into the city to their shops or business in the day time, and go out at night to sleep in their tents. It was more secure; if there is going to be an earthquake, it is better to have a canvas tent fall on your head than a two-story masonry or brick building. Others would stay in the city, but at the first rumbling of a new earthquake shock they would dash out to the tent city outside the gates. So the people of Philadelphia, in spite of many advantages enjoyed,

lived constantly in anxiety and tension because of this repeated and unpredictable hazard of earthquake shocks. I understand that in both California and Japan, an earthquake is not a mentionable subject in polite conversation. It is so terrible, so unpredictable, so beyond all human control. You can try to dig out afterward, but there is really no way of knowing about it beforehand or really preparing adequately for it. The constant earthquake danger certainly affected the character of the city of Philadelphia, and this became a kind of parable of the condition of the church in the city—its outlook and attitudes. Philadelphia was a Greek city from long be-

fore, from very early times, and it was certainly founded with the idea that it would become a center and outpost for the spread of Greek culture—not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but the “gospel” of Greek civilization and culture, after the time of Alexander the Great, who wanted everything Greek spread everywhere. The Greek language, the Greek culture, the Greek lifestyle, Greek education, Greek philosophy and even Greek athletics, not to mention Greek religion. So Sir William Ramsay calls Philadelphia a missionary city. And from Philadelphia the Greek culture did indeed spread through much of the back country and elsewhere.

LESSON 31

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA, Revelation 3:7-13

This back country behind Philadelphia had been in earlier times the kingdoms of Lydia and Phrygia, part of a civilization far below the Greeks in cultural advancement. Philadelphia was to be a promotion center for the more up-to-date and advanced Greek civilization and lifestyle—a lifestyle that the Greeks considered the best in the world. So Philadelphia was in this sense to be a missionary city long before the beginning of Christianity, and indeed Philadelphia was quite successful in this. It was the going thing—the “in thing”—to be like the Greeks, and later it was the “in thing” to be like the Romans. And the Asian peoples after first fighting the Greek-Roman culture, evidently decided it was better to join them than to fight them, so they picked up the Greek culture—it became an option that people no longer had to resist.

Another thing about the ancient city of Philadelphia in pre-Christian times was that the city had repeatedly been given a new name. “Philadelphia” was the only name of it when John wrote the Book of Revelation, but in earlier times it had had at least three or four different names, and each time the name was changed there had been some occasion for the new name. Some victory won, some test met, or some honor achieved, and a king or emperor had recognized this by giving the city a new name. The new name would reflect the city’s nature, its character and achievements, and the people were of course very proud of and well pleased with the new names that the city received. This is reflected in the Christian history of the church at Philadelphia. Here in verse 12 we find three different names mentioned. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name”

Here at the beginning, verse 7, the Lord introduces Himself. “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that shutteth, and no man openeth, and openeth, and no man shutteth.” The word for “true” here is not the ordinary Greek word for “true”; it is a word that can be translated as “genuine or “veritable”. It is a stronger word

than the ordinary word which is used simply for true in distinction from false. These things says the real and genuine One, the holy One.

We may note in passing how highly the New Testament speaks of Christ. There is nothing like any downgrading of Jesus in the pages of Scripture. We had Synod a time or two at Grinnell College in Iowa. They have a fine campus and a large, stately building for their library, and outside under the cornice of the roof there ran a frieze with the names of the great men of history inscribed on it. There were Plato, Aristotle, Michaelangelo, Cicero, Thomas Edison, Abraham Lincoln, and then Jesus Christ and some others. So they gave Jesus a rating alongside of Plato and Michaelangelo—I suppose this was intended to put Jesus on the honor roll along with these men. Doubtless for any others of them it was an honor to have their names on Grinnell College’s library, but for Jesus Christ this is faint praise, this is only putting him on a par with the great men of human history. When people do something like that they have too low an idea of who and what Jesus Christ is. And how much of this kind of thing we see reflected in the “liberal” churches of our time—they speak of Jesus as a good and great man, but they then stop there; they do not regard Him as the eternal Son of God, of whom the Bible says that He is higher than the kings of the earth. Just one of history’s greats. This is a sub-Christian view of who and what Jesus Christ is. Now the Book of Revelation, like the whole Bible, gives Jesus Christ his due. He is holy, true, and has the key of David.

Now, why should the “key of David” be mentioned here? In the Bible, David was the first good king of Israel. You will remember that the people clamored for a king, and they wanted a king for two unworthy reasons—to beat their enemies, and to be like the other countries. And they got Saul, and he was a failure and ended as a tragedy. And then after that they got David, described as a man after God’s own heart. But was David perfect? Certainly not; he had his sins. Among his great sins he numbered the people, certainly with a wrong motive, and there was that scandalous affair with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah the Hittite. He repented afterwards, very deeply but still we

cannot say David lived a blameless life. Yet he was called "a man after God's own heart". Now David is cited over and over again in the Bible as a type or pattern of ideal kingship—a type of Christ as king. This does not mean that David was perfect, but only that he embodied the real idea of what God means by kingship. So here in Revelation 3 the defects of David's character are overlooked, and he is thought of as he ought to have been—as God intended him to be. So Jesus Christ as the anti-type or fulfilment of the type has the key of David—the sovereignty that goes with a God-given and perfect kingship.

There was a bishop a few years back who said we should not speak about the kingdom of God any more; we believe in democracy today and should speak of the democracy of God. What do you think of that? Shall we stop calling Christ a king, and vote for him as a president of the world or the universe? Well, the relation between God and man is not a free democracy. God is a king, and Jesus is a king, but of course a perfect king, and his possession of the key of David stands for his authority as king. He has sovereign authority over the Kingdom of God. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:20) brings this out too. We might note also Ephesians 1:20-23, where Jesus Christ the God-man as Mediator is given the highest sovereignty and authority over all things—the entire universe—for the benefit of the Church, His body. Please note, not merely head over ALL THINGS IN THE CHURCH, but head over ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH, that is, for the benefit of the Church. His kingship is absolute and all-inclusive.

I have known people who stand up in front of a congregation in a church service and take vows of membership and say that they will accept Christ as their Lord. I was never able to get close enough to see whether they had their fingers crossed or not when they said it, but it became evident soon afterwards that what they meant was that they would accept Christ as the Lord of their religious life but not of their business life, or their social life, or their political life; only of their religious life. But the Bible speaks of Christ being supreme over all, not only supreme over religion. Jesus Christ is the absolute King; He has the power. The ultimate decisions that affect the life and well-being of the Church are not made by worldly rulers, kings, presidents, secretaries of state, the World Council of Churches, the United Nations, or anybody else. They are made by Jesus Christ who is supreme over them all, and has them all under His control, so that whatever they do is worked out to fulfil His purpose and accomplish the good of His people in the end.

It says further in verse 8 that Christ opens the door and no one shuts it, and He shuts the door, and no one can open it. Our church denomination once had an extensive missionary work in Turkey; it is all closed off today; the last missionaries had to leave. One of our members went there a few years ago to see if he could salvage something out of the real estate held there, which of course had been paid for in American dollars given by

American Christian people. He found it was possible to sell the land and buildings and put the money in a bank in Turkey, but not possible to get one dollar out of Turkey. The only way to get the benefit would be to go and live there. The same kind of thing has happened in Egypt, India and various other countries. All over the world today the doors of missionary opportunity are going shut; on the other hand there are some new doors opening in some places. Shortly after former President Nixon's visit to China someone hatched up a scheme to try to organize a thousand missionaries to go to China right away and evangelize China. Nothing came of this, of course, as anyone who knew anything about Communist China might have predicted. But Jesus Christ can open the door of Red China again. Don't think that the shutting of that door happened in spite of Him. The decision was made by wicked men, of course, but Jesus Christ is the One who opens and shuts the doors; therefore it is to Him that we should look for open doors to do the work of the Kingdom of God. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes,"—put your confidence in God, not in the government, not even in the United Nations or the World Council of Churches. Christ has the real key for opening and closing doors—He has the authority and power to bring it about; He is a king and not a beggar.

In Nazi Germany during World War II Pastor Martin Niemoeller had some strong convictions, and refused to take orders from the Hitler regime about his work as a minister of the Gospel. He was imprisoned, and might have been shot except for the fact that he was too well known in the rest of the world—they didn't quite dare risk shooting him. But in prison he was offered his freedom if he would sign his name on a paper promising to stop preaching. Niemoeller looked at the paper and refused to sign it. They couldn't get him to sign it. Then they sent a corrupted pastor into the prison to try to persuade him. This man entered Niemoeller's prison cell and said, "Brother Martin, why are you in prison?" Niemoeller gave him a long look, and said, "Brother so-and-so, tell me something. Why are you not in prison?" End of the interview.

In our missionary work in Manchuria, China, prior to World War II, the Japanese occupation authorities required every church to have a permit to exist, issued by a government bureau. We refused to apply for one because it meant recognizing the emperor as the head of the church. Later they required every church to put up a miniature Shinto shrine on the wall, about the size of a cuckoo clock, maybe, and bow to the sun goddess at the beginning of every Christian service. Our churches did not get any orders because they were not registered and so were regarded as non-existent. I remember a Japanese official telling me to my face: "We regard you as the pastor of a non-existent church established by American missionaries." Think about that one for about ten seconds! All the churches were eventually liquidated, but ours lasted longer than some of the ones that had put up the Shinto shrines.

LESSON 32

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA, cont., Revelation 3:7-13

Faithfulness is strongly stressed here. The missionary opportunity and open door is not guaranteed to a large church, but to a faithful one. The Lord said to the church at Philadelphia, "Thou hast a little strength." The emphasis in the Greek text is on the word "little." "Little indeed is your strength." You don't have much strength, but while not strong in resources or membership statistics, they were strong in faithfulness to the Lord. "You have kept my word, and not denied my name. So I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it."

This raises the question, What is the real power in the church? We Americans are conditioned by our background and history to be success-worshippers. The American nation in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries expanded across the continent on a tidal wave of prosperity and success, including of course some depression at times. But we believe in statistics. If you don't think so, get out the Minutes of Synod and you will see. Now there is nothing wrong with statistics if you don't rate them too high, or don't pay too much attention to them. The church at Philadelphia had no statistics at all so far as we know. The Lord said their strength was small. But they got the Lord's commendation and an open door that no one in the world could shut. The real power in the church is the faithful witness to the true Word of God; it doesn't depend on equipment. There are churches that have all the modern equipment that money can buy, but they don't have the power of God at work among them. There are other churches that are weak as the world rates them, that have a vital and living message, and people are getting converted to the Lord and saved through their witness.

This does not mean that we need not procure any up-to-date equipment for our church. Some churches seem to think that their pastor can do a better job with a typewriter that is often out of repair and a mimeograph machine that won't do decent-looking work most of the time—it would be better to trust in the Lord and not spend any money on modern equipment. This is surely a mistake; we should see to it that the Lord's special servants have the best equipment we can provide. But let us put our trust in God and in His power working through His Word, not in the mechanical aids. Note Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant," not "Good and successful servant." In the Lord's service, faithfulness itself is success regardless of the statistical outcomes or the numerical products. Faithfulness is success as the Lord rates things. But we live in an age when this is vastly disregarded. And while we Reformed believers know that the real power in the Church is the power of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for us not to be influenced by the spirit of our times. The churches of the present

day that do not have any real grip on the Gospel tend to think that the power in the church is in political pressure groups, lobbying, protest marching and church union regardless of doctrinal agreement or disagreement. The present-day ecumenical movement results in people thinking that super-organization is the secret of success—that the power in the church is human power, and that this can be concentrated and directed and energized so that great things will be accomplished for the Kingdom of God. The church at Laodicea was like that, as we shall see in due time. They said they were increased in goods and had need of nothing; but the Lord said they were miserable and poor and blind and naked.

The Church at Philadelphia did not have fine equipment and money and public relations and worldly strength, but the Lord said he was giving them an open door that no one in the world could shut. You see, the real power in the Church is the power of God, not human power. The open door is also promised to the faithful churches of the present day. Yet we can all see the drift from a faithful but unpopular type of church to an unfaithful but popular type of church. You can see this drift on every hand. People do not want to bear the cross of belonging to a strict and unpopular church, so they leave it and join one that is large, loose and popular. They will leave Philadelphia and join Laodicea. But this is not what the Lord commands and commends. He commends faithfulness, and this involves hardship and reproach; it involves standing up and witnessing for the unpopular truth that people are disregarding and denying; it involves bearing a witness when it costs something to bear a witness, not just when it is easy. This is what rates the Lord's blessings.

Little indeed is thy strength; but you see their faith is not in man but in a Saviour who has all the strength there is—He has all power in heaven and in earth. And if we are vitally united to Him, then we are connected up with the source of the almighty power of God. Surely we can agree on this, that the real need of the church today is not more modern programs, not mere organization, not more equipment, not more methods (though all of these have their place and function), but what is really needed is more vital union with Christ, more of the outgoing power of the Holy Spirit, and in response to this, on our part, more plain downright faithfulness to the Word of God.

Many years ago in New York City I heard a godly minister preach and he said that everybody is talking about the need for more prayer. He did not deny that more prayer is needed, but he said that the real and great need of the church today is more obedience to Scripture. Obedience to the teachings and commands of the Word. Now to the faithful church victory is promised, as well as true security. Victory, in verse

9, "Behold, I will make them of the Synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." I take it the synagogue of Satan here is the non-Christian Jewish community in Philadelphia, which had been opposing and probably persecuting the Christians there. They call themselves "Jews," the covenant people of God, but the Lord said they were the synagogue of Satan; their claim to be "Jews" was a false claim, for they denied everything that the name "Jew" or "Israel" properly stands for. These people evidently were not merely a synagogue of non-Christian Jews off at one side of things, but active and bitter opponents of Christianity, very likely talking the Christian church down and trying to persuade other people not to become Christians. And the Lord says that some of these bitter people are going to get converted and come to worship God in the Christian Church at Philadelphia, so that everybody will be able to see that God loves the Christians and the Church at Philadelphia, weak and insignificant as it is from the worldly standpoint. It does not mean that they will worship the Philadelphia Christians, but that they will worship God before the feet of the Philadelphia Christians. It is a wonderful thing for anyone to be converted to Christ, but when outstanding opponents of the Gospel are converted—like Saul on the Damascus road—this shows in a special and singular way the power of God at work. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Christian, and God did it. The one man in the world of that day who was the most outstanding enemy of Christianity was converted to Jesus Christ, and became the greatest missionary in all Christian history, and author of more than a dozen books in the New Testament. It is perhaps unlikely that Madalyn Murray O'Hare will become a Covenanter, but don't think for one minute that God could not do it—or Fidel Castro, or whoever you want to name. The Lord can do it, if he chooses.

Remember, the open door is promised to faithfulness. Are we faithful in the open doors that we now have? Some of the doors have been closed—Syria, mainland China. Will Cyprus be next? And how about Ethiopia? Maybe if we were more concerned, the Lord would keep some doors that are now open from being shut, and would open up some doors that are now shut.

Security—Philadelphia will be preserved from the hour of temptation. This probably means the Roman persecution. To face the test of having to refuse to say "Lord Caesar" and putting the grain of incense on the glowing charcoal on the altar of Caesar. Would it get your nerves tense to have to live under such a threat? This is hard temptation. Philadelphia is going to be spared most of this; they will survive it and be made a pillar in the temple of God, and the overcomer shall go no more out.

It is a remarkable fact that when the city of Philadelphia was levelled by earthquakes, the great Greek columns or pillars often survived the earthquake shocks

which destroyed ordinary buildings. I suppose the safest place in Philadelphia in time of an earthquake would be to be sitting on the top of a pillar! These massive pillars were so perfectly balanced by the Greek architects that designed and built them that they often remained upright in spite of earthquakes. You can see many places in the Near East where ancient cities were levelled to rubbish heaps, but Greek pillars here and there are still standing upright, having survived the shocks.

The Lord says that the Christians of Philadelphia shall go no more out. These people were always in a state of anxiety, never knowing the time when they would suddenly have to flee from their city to the open country—insecure and anxious because of the recurrent earthquakes. The Lord does not promise the Christian immunity from earthquakes, but real security from other things of a more subtle and more devastating nature, that would cause a constant state of tension and anxiety. He shall go no more out. The Christian has a security that the World did not give and the world cannot take away. He is promised that he will be free from anxiety and fear of sudden calamity. Now, how were they going to get this benefit? Not by being put where they wouldn't know what temptation is, but by getting their eyes fixed upon Jesus Christ—a stronger faith in Christ, a more vital union with Him, so that they will be secure in Christ. The Christian's security does not come from "kidding" himself, not from self-hypnotism, not by community-minded American optimism, but by getting the eyes lifted higher to Jesus Christ as He is in the heavenly places. It is a security that the world never can provide or guarantee.

A minister years ago asked me whether we as Christians should favor abolishing the United States Government and establishing a world government to prevent wholesale death by atomic destruction. He passed out a questionnaire on this to many friends, I think. I decided it was necessary to shock him a little bit if I could, so I said in reply, I don't want to be killed by an atom bomb any more than anyone else. But I still do not consider atomic destruction the worst of all possible evils. For my part I would rather be killed by an atomic bomb rather than to live on after I had lost all my freedoms and had been de-humanized and brainwashed. Do you realize that if a hydrogen bomb were to be dropped on Pittsburgh, this tri-state area would be burned to a crisp in a matter of seconds? We would all be what the world calls "dead." But if you are a Christian it could not really harm you. There shall not a hair of your head perish, even if your entire body is vaporized by a nuclear blast. What the world fears worst cannot really harm a Christian. This surely must be what the Lord meant when He said that the Christians in Philadelphia should go no more out. They need not live in a constant state of panic and anxiety, or to be always on the run from the threat of danger. One of our elderly church members said to me, "I don't expect to live much longer." I replied, "Mr. so-and-so, you are a Christian and you are going to live for ever." And he replied, "Well, I guess that is right."

LESSON 33

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA, Revelation 3:14-22

This is the seventh of the letters to the angels of the seven churches, and it is addressed to the Church at Laodicea. This one contains only reproof, and no commendation, none whatsoever. We would call this the letter to the rich church that was really poor, just as Smyrna was the poor church that was really rich. I wonder, as we begin this study, whether we perhaps think that none of it could possibly apply to us. We could take the attitude of the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, saying, Thank God we are not like that. I am sure we are not in general, for the most part at least, but “he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”—to all the churches, including our own. It is related that the noted evangelist Moody was once visiting a prison, and went past the cell of a specially evil and repulsive looking criminal, and Moody looked at him and said, “There but for the grace of God sits Dwight L. Moody.” So if we are not like the Laodiceans, this is surely no credit to us, but it results from the grace of God, which we should acknowledge with profound gratitude. I read a story about a young pastor in his first pastorate, filled with zeal and idealism, and he soon learned that the church members did not want any of it. We want our children baptized and our dead to be properly buried and our young people to be properly married, and the weekly services continued with decorum, but please don’t rock the boat, do not rock the boat, don’t do anything that will make anyone feel uncomfortable. Finally one Lord’s Day in a bit of desperation he opened the morning service by announcing a hymn and adding, we will stand to sing, and remain standing for the benediction! The deacon board thought he had lost his mind and sent a committee to call on his wife to offer financial help to get him psychoanalyzed! And his wife said, “George, you have had your little joke? now you had better get back in the groove and do things the way people expect again.” And he did. And his ministry was dead, and formal, and bore no real fruit, and no one expected it to. A real Laodicean church!

The Lord introduces Himself to the Laodiceans by saying that He is the Amen, the faithful and true witness. The word “Amen” means “true.” When Jesus on repeated occasions said “Verily, verily I say unto you,” in the original of the New Testament it reads “Amen, Amen, I say unto you. . .” Christ is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the one who sees it like it really is; and this is very different from the people of this world who may reject the true message. So what we have here is a true and faithful view of the Laodiceans and their church, and of course part of it applies to every church of all times. The rich church that was really poor.

One thing that had been discovered about the ancient city of Laodicea is that they had a lukewarm water supply. They had no near source of water so they con-

structed a pipeline or aqueduct. Some remains of it have been discovered—cubes of stone with a round hole through the middle. They cemented these together and made an aqueduct. In the pieces that have been found, the center hole has been somewhat obstructed by calcium deposits, but it is still obvious what they were used for. In the area, some miles away, were two other churches, Hierapolis, which was located by hot springs and had a hot water supply, and Colossae which had a very good cold water supply. But Laodicea had neither. They had to get their water from the hot springs, and by the time it reached their city it was lukewarm.

These people were very proud of their city being wealthy and prosperous. It was partly, but not entirely, devastated by an earthquake about A.D. 60, that is, about forty years before John wrote the Book of Revelation. And the Imperial Government at Rome hastened to offer liberal and substantial aid to rebuild Laodicea, but the citizens in their pride refused the offer. “We don’t need any federal grants,” they said, “We can do it ourselves, from our abundant capital reserves. We are rich.” So they rebuilt their city, and ever after were proud of the fact that they had done this without taking any money from the Imperial Government at Rome. I guess that is all right so far as rebuilding a literal city is concerned, after a damaging earthquake. But the trouble was that the church members at Laodicea came to have a similar attitude about spiritual resources and riches, and felt that they did not need any special help from the Lord—they could do it all themselves. Do you remember the story about the woman who said, “When the Lord saved me, he really did not have to do very much”—? Evidently she had a high opinion of herself. I have known a good many people like that. Paul before his conversion was one of that kind, of course. There is no proof that Paul ever visited Laodicea, though he may likely enough have done so. Probably Laodicea received the Gospel from Ephesus. We are told that “all Asia” heard the Word from Ephesus. This does not mean that Paul went everywhere in person, but that Christians traveling to and fro carried the message to all the Roman Province of Asia, from Ephesus as a center. In Colossians 2:1 Paul mentions his great concern for the Christians of Laodicea. “And for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.” There is no reason to suppose that the Laodicean church was as corrupt in Paul’s day as it was when John wrote the Book of Revelation some half a century later.

Paul also mentions in Colossians 4:12-16 a man named Epaphras, one of Paul’s co-workers, who was also deeply concerned about the church at Laodicea, and constantly prayed for them.

There was a medical school at Laodicea, which had a special patent prescription for eye salve, considered the

best in the world of that day. Whether it was really effective or not I don't know; but the Greeks were the pioneers of scientific medicine. I remember doctors in China who prescribed such remedies as powdered deer-horns or tiger bones (for rheumatism), and had some other remedies that they had stumbled on to. But it was all pre-scientific, though they had some things that really got results. But the Greeks started scientific medicine. And this medicine school at Laodicea was especially famous for their eye-salve.

Dr. Hendriksen calls Laodicea the city of millionaires, brokers, financial experts, people rich and proudly aware of their wealth. And the church there evidently had caught some of this state of mind concerning spiritual conditions. As the city counted on its money, the church members counted on their "good works" or do-it-yourself achievements, to get them accepted by God. Very much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

(To be continued)

Reviews of Religious Books

The favorable reviewing of a book here does not imply approval of its entire contents. Purchase books from your book dealer or from the publishers. Do not send orders for books to Blue Banner Faith and Life.

POWER-WORD AND TEXT-WORD IN RECENT REFORMED THOUGHT, by Harry L. Downs. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Box 185, Nutley, N.J. 07110. 1974, pp. 144, paperback, \$3.50.

This is one of the better books criticizing the Dooyeweerdian-Toronto movement. It exhibits the author's first-hand knowledge and in-depth research of the movement. His task is "to determine whether the leaders of the AACS do in fact separate the 'power-Word' from the Bible as 'text-Word,' and, if so, whether such a separation is legitimate." In developing his thesis he writes clearly and simply producing a book which is well-documented and understandable by both the scholar and the educated Christian. In the opinion of this reviewer the author's thesis is established, and so is his criticism that their separating is unwarranted and unbiblical.

The first chapter of this book presents an excellent treatment of the history of the debate. Many (if not most— of the points of the debate are clearly indicated. This is probably the only such historical survey available. The second chapter briefly outlines the world and life view of the movement. Mr. Downs rightly emphasizes the importance of this theme if one is to understand the movement. To this reviewer, the world and life view of this movement is the real crux of the debate. This is especially true respecting their entire epistemology, as well as their ontology, ethical theory, etc., which flows from that epistemology. What needs changing is not only the AACS view of Scripture but its view of knowing—as Mr. Downs implies. Chapter III is a well-documented presentation of the AACS view of Scripture. The three primary theses thereof are set forth as: 1) the multiformity of the Word of God, 2) the Scripture as one form thereof, 3) the Word of God as power. Mr. Downs intentionally omits some of the deeper philosophical theological problems here in order to allow those who are not technically trained to follow the debate. Chapter IV compares the AACS view of the Word of God and the classical reformed view. The similarities and dissimilarities

between the two views are spelled out clearly. The latter are: 1) that the Scripture is but one form of the Word of God, 2) the AACS denial of the propositional character of the Bible, 3) the lack of clear distinction from neo-orthodoxy in the AACS views. Mr. Downs focuses our attention on the key issue: the AACS' distinction between and separation of power-Word and text-Word. He evaluates that distinction and separation in chapter V documenting the difficulty of his task due to the ambiguity in the use of terms by the leaders of the AACS. Nonetheless, he does establish the fact that they do separate the two concepts without and against scriptural basis. He does not allow them support from classical reformed theologians—Mr. Downs proves his point here by key quotes from leading reformed theologians. The evaluation continues with a positive correction proffered.

This work is irenic and readable. Although the author sometimes confuses the reader in seemingly overplaying the acceptability of the philosophical system underlying the movement the reader emerges with the conviction that this is no discussion for armchair theologians. American tolerationism has permeated the church so much that it seems that many have become neutral to fundamental challenges to the bases of the faith. Surely every serious Christian should acquaint himself with the issues involved in this debate in view of the serious charges against the movement within our ranks. To this end the reviewer would encourage the reading of Mr. Downs' book.

—Leonard J. Coppes

THE LITERATURE OF THE BIBLE, by Leland Ryken. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506. 1974, pp. 356. \$7.95.

Dr. Ryken's treatment of biblical literature is both concise and lucid. That he has a superior knowledge of literary types and a strong sense for the categories into which various types of biblical literature should fall is obvious from this very readable text. The book should be a delight to the Christian literature enthusiast be-

cause of its emphasis on the artistry and design of the Bible, evaluation of the Bible as a superior body of literature, and the continued assumption that in each episode, book, or section of the Bible God has used that mode of literature most suited to the continuous unfolding of the redemptive theme. Ryken's unusual clarity is further enhanced by complete definitions in each chapter of the literary form under discussion, his use of good, familiar illustrations for comparison and contrast, and a glossary of literary terms.

THE LITERATURE OF THE BIBLE summarily demonstrates Ryken's belief that "Christianity is the most literary religion in the world and the one in which the word has a special sanctity." He also achieves his intention to "help readers of the Bible fit their reading of Scripture into their broader experience of literature in general" and thereby increase their enjoyment and understanding of the literary dimension of the Bible. And, as in all superior works, his writing opens up fascinating avenues of interest ripe for further development and research by other scholars. An excellent text for any senior high school or college biblical literature course. —Rachael Crawford

OF CABBAGES AND KINGS, by James D. Eppinga. The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49506, 1974. pp. 190, paperback, \$1.95.

A collection of short articles—of two or three pages each—in which everyday happenings, personal experiences, observations and reflections are used to illustrate and emphasize simple truths. The author has a discerning eye: he tells a story well, with quiet humor and a light, easy style. His points are made with deceptive adroitness, like a boxing maestro's in an exhibition bout. The punches look harmless enough, but they land with a thump that hurts!

A book to pick up at odd moments: it is readable, entertaining and instructive. —John MacIver

OUT OF THE MIRY CLAY, by John Hercus. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 60515. 1968, pp. 136, paperback, \$1.75.

Any book which seeks to expand or embellish the biblical narrative is always suspect. Dr. Hercus takes the life-story of David, and with a rare skill, attempts to fill in the background with reasons, motivation, thoughts, dialogue. The story is told in a modern, crisp, lucid style. But the picture, though intensely interesting, is slightly overdrawn; the inferences from the biblical facts are somewhat far-fetched; and the theorizing at times is just too fanciful. The author is refreshingly honest throughout. "I don't know," he says, time after time. "I don't know. . .but this is what I think."

Read it, but be prepared for a jolt or two along the way. —John MacIver

LORD OF THE UNIVERSE, LORD OF MY LIFE. I. V. C. F. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill. 60515, pp. 40, paperback booklet, \$.60.

This booklet lists four biblical passages for personal or group study under the general theme of Obedience. A list of questions follows each passage—the answers being left to the student.

As far as it goes this is admirable, and there can be no doubt that the booklet would be useful as part of a more comprehensive course of Bible study. An interesting feature is the inclusion of a short article on the "Daily Quiet Time"—a rewarding discipline which is often neglected for one reason or another. This article alone makes the book worth obtaining. —John MacIver

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Can We Still Believe In Miracles?

By J. G. Vos

A student was heard saying: "I am a Christian, but I just can't swallow this stuff about miracles. I just don't believe that God would make a lot of laws and then turn right around and break His own laws!" This statement represents a very common attitude; it also reveals a very common misunderstanding about what miracles are and what the laws of nature are.

A miracle may be defined as an event in the physical world, having a spiritual purpose, which is caused by the direct action of God, apart from the forces of nature. Miracles are recorded in the Bible, but not nearly so many as is popularly supposed. In Bible history, miracles were always emergency treatment reserved for times of crisis; they were never used when ordinary methods would do. Usually, though not always, they were for the relief of human suffering or need. Miracles would be unnecessary and incredible in a world which contained neither sin nor suffering. They would not fit the pattern of such a world, just as hospitals would not fit the pattern of a world where people were never sick. But miracles do fit the pattern of a world cursed by sin and suffering.

Paul and Silas were arrested and accused of turning the world upside down. As a matter of fact, the world was already upside down, and they were turning part of it right side up again. Miracles are acts of God's power giving us samples of the world as it ought to be — as a sinless and painless world would really be, as heaven really will be.

What we call "nature" is simply God's ordinary way of working. The "laws" of nature are simply the observed sequences. "Laws" do not **make** anything happen; they only state what has been observed to happen under given conditions or circumstances. It is the **forces** of nature that make things happen in the natural world. It was not the "law of gravity" that made the traditional apple fall on Newton's head; it was the **force** of gravity that made it fall; then later Newton went back to his study and formulated the **law** of

gravity based on his observations of how the force of gravity operated. It is forces, not laws, that make things happen, and the forces were created by God.

Neither the laws nor the forces of nature were made by God to limit Himself to a particular way of working. Nature was created to be God's ordinary way of working. Miracles are what happens when God does not choose to work through nature. Are miracles possible, then? This depends on what one believes about God. Is there a Person behind nature? Is this Person all-powerful? Does this Person love mankind? If we can answer "Yes" to these questions, then belief in miracles is possible.

Miracles are not a scientific question. Science deals with how nature operates. Miracles are how God operates when He decides not to use nature. It is wrong to think of science as all-inclusive. Can science tell you whether chocolate ice cream tastes better than vanilla? Or whether it is scientific to tell the truth and avoid telling lies? Real science cannot say anything in the field of esthetic values, nor in the field of moral obligations, nor in the fields of theology and philosophy. The proper field of science is the functioning of nature which can be observed, measured and tested by experiment. Whether there is an almighty Person beyond nature, who started nature originally and controls it from "behind the scenes", science cannot say. The scientist who ventures to pronounce on such things is out of his proper field — he is posing as a theologian or a philosopher, while pretending to be just a scientist. Science has accomplished so much that many people are "drunk" on the wine of scientism today — they forget that science has its limits, while vast areas of truth and existence are beyond those limits. It has even been proposed that young people's romances and "dates" be scientifically arranged by electronic computers! Will they take all the joy out of living? The "scientist" who wants romances to be set up by electronic computers is depersonalizing man. The scientist who denies the possibility of miracles is depersonalizing the universe.

—The Goal Post

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Studies in the Book of Revelation

LESSON 34

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA, Revelation 3:14-22, Cont.

The Lord evaluates the church at Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Hendriksen says that this is the only place in the Bible where the emotion of disgust is attributed to Jesus. He doesn't praise them; He doesn't condemn them; He is simply disgusted with them. They are lukewarm. Hendriksen adds that you can do something with people who are stone cold—you can go to the heathen that never heard the name of Jesus Christ, and some of them will always warm to a Christian presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have experienced this many times. Some of them always warm to the gospel. Paul preached at the riverside at Philippi, and not everyone that heard him was converted, but of Lydia it says that the Lord opened her heart, and she became a Christian.

You can do something with people that are cold. In Africa, missionary work among idol-worshipping pagan tribes is vastly more successful than missionary work among Moslems who worship only one God. The idol-worshipping pagans can be brought to see their needy condition, but the Moslems are intensely proud of themselves—they consider themselves the real elite of the religious world. I know the Holy Spirit can do it, but it is like pecking on a rock to get Moslems converted to Christ. I knew of a missionary to Egypt who worked fifteen years to win his first convert. That is pretty discouraging, although one soul is worth all the effort and time. The idol-worshipping pagans of Africa become good Christians, but once they accept Islam and become Moslems, they become hardened and almost impervious to the Gospel. It is a strange fact—the cold are easier to work with than the lukewarm. Hendriksen adds that you can also do something with the hot—Christians who are born again of the Holy Spirit and know the Lord and have a vital Christian experience. Faithful pastors can give such people leadership and you can get wonderful things accomplished with people like that.

I remember once listening—maybe improperly—to a

conversation between my father and a seminary student on the front porch of our home. This student was graduating from Princeton Seminary, and had been offered a job as chaplain of a prison. I am sure that is a worthy calling—if anyone needs the gospel it is the convicts in a prison. But the seminary student said, "Well, it has many advantages and I would always be sure of a full audience to hear my sermons, but I am inclined to decline the offer; I just don't feel it is for me. I feel I need to work in a place where there are some Christians." I am sure he did not mean that being a prison chaplain would in every case be an improper function for a Christian minister—he just didn't feel called to it himself.

You can work with the hot and you can work with the cold, but what do you do about the lukewarm? If you want a drink you turn on a faucet and the water runs. But I have been at picnics in a public park where it was extremely difficult to get a drink of water. You worked a pump handle many times before a trickle of water came out of the spout. Then if you went away a while and later came back you had to do it all over again. And there are people called Christians who do not have any spiritual self-starter in them. They will not come to a worship service until the minister visits them again. One pastoral call equals one time attending church. I knew a man once who never came at all except on communion Sabbath. He was a member, officially, but never came to church except for the Lord's Supper. He wouldn't have come then either except the pastor took the trouble to see that he was informed of the time. He went home after the morning service and did not reappear for six months. The communion service was his religious insurance policy, I guess. This man was lukewarm. He reacted only to some special stimulation. I don't know anything more disheartening for a minister of the Gospel than to try to stimulate the unconverted into living like Christians. If the minister is successful in getting such people to become active in the church, he has only added to the number of members of the sect of the Pharisees. Such people need what Nicodemus needed—to try to make the spiritually lifeless, the luke-

warm, go through the motions of Christian living is a discouraging, hopeless business. I fear this describes the church at Laodicea for the most part. What can you do for the lukewarm, the self-satisfied, the self-righteous? Jesus said that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. This means, of course, the self-righteous, those who deceive themselves into thinking they are righteous. Christ came to call sinners, those who know and admit that they are sinners and therefore need a Saviour.

Christ, the true witness, sees the real condition underneath the surface manifestations of the church at Laodicea and its membership. His reaction is disgust. One writer said that the only use for lukewarm water is as a medicine to induce vomiting. Christianity starts with a sense of need, a special kind of sense of need: a sense of sin, of needing a Saviour and being unable to save oneself. And this is what the church membership at Laodicea quite evidently lacked. 17, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" this is the self-image of the Laodicean church members we are rich, we have got it made, we are increased with goods, we really don't need anything. This smug attitude is similar to that of the city and people of Laodicea in their earlier history—a boast of attainment and riches. And in the second part of verse 17 the Lord looks at them: "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked." As the Lord sees things it is negative on every count. As they look at themselves, they rate themselves high on every count. So we can conclude that these people are either plain hypocrites, or else they are self-deceived. As long as they are blind they cannot see Christian truth aright nor can they see themselves as they really are. Take a blind friend to the Mellon Art Gallery in Pittsburgh and show him the beautiful paintings and other works of art. You can talk about what is there but your friend cannot really appreciate it because he is handicapped by his blindness. And the person who is spiritually blind can talk about accepting Christ and living the Christian life and being born again and so forth, but in reality it is just a torrent of words; he is a stranger to the reality of these things.

When such a person experiences what Lydia experienced at Philippi, then Christianity is no longer a mere torrent of words and phrases; there appears evidence that a person has really been saved. The Lord sees them in this deplorable condition, and if you and I are not really saved, he sees us too in the condition described in the second part of verse 17. But the Lord does not write off these people as hopeless; after all, this is supposed to be a Christian church, and there is hope for it, even though the existing condition is pretty desperate. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of me. . .". Now, how do you buy something if you are flat broke? The kind of money the people of the church of Laodicea had can't buy it, you know, It is not for sale for that kind of money. How do you buy righteousness and salvation and a new heart and the Holy Spirit?

There was a man in the Book of Acts named Simon—Simon the Sorcerer. You will recall that he tried to buy the power to control the Holy Spirit by a money payment. And the apostle Peter said to him, "Thy money perish with thee." You and your money together go into perdition, or hell. Peter says that a person who thinks that the Holy Spirit can be bought for money is going to hell. The Laodiceans needed the grace of God, but you can't get it for money; yet they are told to buy it. Now what is the meaning of buying something if you can't pay for it? I know what it means today to many people—it means a credit card. But what does it mean in Bible terms? I take it, to buy means to gain possession of it, so that it is really yours. But if you have no money? Let's look at a text in the Old Testament, Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." So you see, you buy it and yet you get it free. Salvation is free, but it took the precious blood of Christ to make it free, and as someone has said, it had to be the last drop of His precious blood, so even though free, it isn't cheap. The Laodiceans who couldn't begin to pay for salvation, yet could get it free, and so can we; but you have to want it so much that you commit yourself absolutely to the Lord to be His when you get it.

In Jesus' parable of the wedding feast, the man without a wedding garment could have had the garment free as a gift, but he disdained it and rejected it, so he was excluded from the wedding feast. The Lord also said to the Laodiceans, "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." This is an obvious allusion to the commercial product put out at Laodicea, their famous eye medicine. Anoint your eyes with eyesalve that you may see—it is by grace that we come to see our real condition and to feel our real need. And the Lord said, "Repent." This is not a popular subject today but it is the missing note in much of modern day evangelism. Repent—do a right-about-face in your basic thinking about God and about your own condition in relation to God.

Here Christ stands outside the door of the church at Laodicea, and says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." If things were in their right condition He would be inside that door. It is a metaphor, of course. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." I take it hearing Christ's voice is something more than merely hearing it with our ears. This is accented by John chapter 5 verse 25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." This cannot refer to the resurrection of the body at Christ's second coming, because that is mentioned separately three verses later, in verses 28 and 29; there the phrase "and now is" does not occur, but the Lord speaks not merely of "the dead" but of "all that are in the graves", that is, the dead and buried. But in verse 25 as in Revelation 3, I take it to hear the voice of the Son of God,

and live, means what is commonly called regeneration or being born again—an element in what the Westminster Confession calls “effectual calling”—effectual, bringing about its proper effect. If “hearing” means regeneration, then opening the door would be the person’s response to that, namely conversion.

So you see, the first step in being a Christian is to admit that you are a needy, poor, helpless, blind, miserable, naked, guilty sinner. Then get the spiritual gold and the eyesalve, and after that everything will be different.

LESSON 35

THE VISION OF THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN, Revelation 4:1-11

One thing which is very obvious in reading the Book of Revelation is its tie-in with the Old Testament. Of course we believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God, and that back of the human authors is the Holy Spirit who inspired these men and guided them, so that in a true sense the Holy Spirit is the real author of Scripture, the Old Testament as well as the New. However it is also true that John much have been very familiar with the Old Testament, so that he had large parts of it stored up in his mind, and the Holy Spirit could and did draw on this in inspiring him to write the Revelation. One part of the Old Testament that is specially related to the Book of Revelation is the prophecy of Ezekiel. Now, do you understand everything in the Book of Ezekiel? This is perhaps one of the less familiar parts of the Bible and one of the more difficult parts to understand. I am sure that much in Ezekiel is of great value to us. Let me read a few verses from the first chapter of this book; later I shall refer to other parts to show how Ezekiel is connected with this vision in Revelation chapter 4. Now turn to Ezekiel chapter 1 and read the last three verses, 26 to 28. Note the similarity to Revelation 4, even though the two are not identical. “And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.”

This vision in Revelation 4 has been called the vision of the throne of God in heaven, and apparently there is a break in John’s experience between the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4. He says at the beginning of chapter 4, “After this I looked. . .” It does not state how long after, but the impression we get is that some time elapsed. He had been receiving revelation from God all through the first three chapters; then this was suspended and he returned to his ordinary or normal state of consciousness; then later, in chapter 4, the revelations begin again. There is a vision, then a heightened form of vision or revelation. “After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee

things which must be hereafter.” This ties in with chapter 1 verse 9, “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” So if you want a capsule statement of the content of the Book of Revelation, it concerns what is (from the standpoint of the author’s time) the present and also the future. Although no doubt many things have been fulfilled since John’s time, it is also true that the book contains things which (from our present-day standpoint) are still future.

“And immediately I was in the Spirit.” This recalls chapter 1 verse 10, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a great voice”, and so on. “Spirit” here should certainly be spelled with a capital “S”, referring to the Holy Spirit. The meaning is that John under the power of the Holy Spirit enters a heightened form of consciousness, in which he receives revelation—a deeper state than simply beholding a vision; This being “in the Spirit” is one step deeper into the mysteries of God. The ordinary awareness of his surroundings would fade out, probably, and while in this special state of consciousness the Holy Spirit caused him to see a throne set in heaven. Before this it is said, “Come up hither, I will show thee things which must be hereafter.” He sees a break in the sky—this is how it appears to him—and hears a voice that says, “Come up hither.” This raises the question whether John was actually transported into heaven, body and soul, or was he still on the island of Patmos while in a special state of consciousness he saw things as they are in heaven. I think probably he was still on Patmos, but in this revelation experience he lost touch with the physical surroundings, and became aware of things that man normally cannot see or hear.

There is a statement of the apostle Paul similar to this in his second letter to the Corinthians (II Cor. 12:1-5). He says that fourteen years before writing the epistle he had had a mysterious experience, and he was unable to say whether he was in the body or out of the body at the time, and he heard wonderful words, not lawful for a man to utter. This was evidently a revelation experience something like that of John on Patmos. As Paul could not decide whether he had actually been transported to heaven, so we cannot say about John whether he was actually in heaven, or only on Patmos. In any case, this is stage two of John’s revelation receiving. First he hears a voice saying “Come up hither: I am going to show you things that will be hereafter.” Then he is in the Spirit, and sees the vision of the

throne of God.

A throne is set in heaven, and God is sitting on the throne. It describes the appearance of God in symbolic language. Someone may ask, How can this be; God is invisible, how can a man see God? This raises an interesting problem: can you or can you not see God? A number of Scripture passages speak on this. You might look up some of them with regard to this question of seeing God. John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Philip said to Jesus (John 14:8), "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus replied, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." While it is true that no human being has ever seen God as God really is, still the person who has seen Jesus has seen God as He can be visible to human eyes. Another place says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). What does this mean? Surely it means something; it isn't nonsense. Perhaps we can say that in this life you can see God only by faith, but after you have died in Christ you can see God more directly; but every then you cannot see God as God sees Himself.

There are a couple of places in the Old Testament which we should look at in this connection. The first is Exodus 33, which is very mysterious but surely loaded with meaning. Verse 18, Moses asked to be permitted to see the glory of God, and God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." And the Lord said to Moses, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live." And the Lord added, "Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shalt thou not see." Certainly this is highly mysterious, but also highly meaningful. To see God as He really is, is impossible—that is what God describes as "seeing my face." Still, Moses did see something of God, "my back parts, but

my face shall not be seen." So Moses could say he had seen God. In I Corinthians 13, we now see through a glass darkly, but in heaven it will be face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know fully, even as we are known.

In Exodus chapter 24 we have something even more mysterious. This was soon after the Ten Commandments were given, and the fabric of other laws found in Exodus chapters 20 through 23, commonly called "the Book of the Covenant"—evidently the first part of the Book of Exodus to be actually written by Moses. After this there was sacrifice and blood sprinkled on the book in which these things were written, and then after this we find the strange experience reported in chapter 28 verse 8 and following, involving Moses and certain other people. "And Moses took the blood; and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and it was as it were the body of heaven in his clearness, and upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink." Now I am sure that is not in the Bible to satisfy our curiosity. As you read the verses you may not have a very clear understanding of what it was that Moses and these other people and the seventy elders saw. But it says that they saw God, the God of Israel, and under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness; and they did eat and drink. Mysterious, certainly, but also fascinating. From this passage we may rightly conclude that it is possible for people to see a manifestation of God, which is on a level with human capacity, when God is pleased to grant such a manifestation; but this is not the same as seeing God as God sees Himself. No doubt it is described here as it appeared to Moses and these other people who were with him. The Book of Exodus was written later by Moses, and the description of the experience must have come from Moses who actually experienced it. He describes it as it met his eyes and registered in his consciousness at the time.

LESSON 36

THE VISION OF THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN, Revelation 4:1-11, Cont.

Another place in the Old Testament that we might look at is where the prophet Elijah was parted from his friend and assistant Elisha. You will recall that they were in the canyon of the Jordan River (II Kings chapter 2). Elijah asked Elisha, "Do you have a last wish before I am taken from you?" and Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit to rest on him. Elijah didn't quite dare to promise that, so he said, You have asked a hard thing. It shall be that if you see me when I am taken from you, you will get your wish. At this point there was a sudden short circuit between this earth and the transcendent realm of heavenly glory. Things began to happen. There was a chariot made of flames of fire,

and horses made of flames of fire. No such horses were ever before known in this world! Elijah was suddenly in this miraculous chariot, and Elisha, on the ground below, is utterly dazed and dumfounded as he shouts, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Whatever he meant by this, at least he recognized that God was doing something very noteworthy and remarkable here. Elijah tossed his mantle out of the chariot; it fell on the ground and Elisha picked it up. Ever after, that mantle would serve to convince him that it was real, he had not been having hallucinations or some kind of brainstorm—there was the mantle: Elijah was gone but the mantle was still

there; therefore this was a miracle. This must be described in the Bible as it met the eyes of Elisha—a whirlwind or twister picked up the chariot, horses, Elijah and all, and one second later everything was gone except that mantle. This is an example of how supernatural events are recorded in Scripture—recorded as they meet the eye of the human observer. This happened by the Jordan River. I am sure only God saw it as it really was; and what Elisha saw we are told. He must have repeated his experience to whoever it was that was inspired by God to write the Second Book of Kings.

Elisha was speaking to us about God, and the only way this can be meaningfully done is to use human terminology. The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. If God were to talk to us (I say it reverently) as He talks to Himself, it would be meaningless to us. If God were to describe Himself as He sees Himself, again there is nothing in our experience or psychology to connect it up with so that it would convey meaning. But God takes an idea from human life and uses it as a vehicle to reveal truth about Himself. This is called “anthropomorphism”, speaking of God as if he were a human being, to teach a truth about God. For example, “The arm of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save.” God is a Spirit but the Bible speaks of him as if he had an arm to exert energy or work with. “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth,” etc. This again is anthropomorphism, speaking of God as if he were a human. Stop and think a minute: how else could God reveal Himself meaningfully to us except by speaking in human terms. Other examples are, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” “Our Father which art in heaven.” And Jesus said “I am the door.” This does not mean He is made of wood or iron, but it teaches the truth that through Christ we enter salvation and eternal life. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

When you come across an anthropomorphic metaphor such as these in the Bible, be careful about two things. First, don’t take it literally; if you do you will miss the meaning completely. Secondly, realize that it has a real meaning, therefore search and try by proper methods of Bible study to learn what it teaches about God. In this way we can learn truth about God on a level within our grasp, by the Holy Spirit’s help.

All these things mentioned in Revelation chapter 4, the jasper and the rainbow and all the other things that are mentioned here are figurative. And remember that John saw it in vision form, but we read about it in words. What John experienced could perhaps be compared to watching a television or motion picture screen; he saw opera in real life; therefore this is not describing what God looks like, but what it looked like to John when God revealed Himself to him, and from this standpoint we can learn something from it. “I was in the Spirit.” I would call your attention to the fact that this can and should be translated “I became in the Spirit”—the past tense of the Greek word is used, “became.” It is a change in his level of consciousness

—I came to be in that state, called “being in the Spirit.” The thing that is emphasized here is the throne of God. In chapters 4 and 5 of the Book of Revelation the word “throne” or “thrones” occurs 17 times, most of them referring to the throne of God, but part of them to the thrones on which the 24 elders were seated. Incidentally, the King James Version says “seats.” I don’t know why they did this, for in the Greek the word is “thrones”, the same word that is used for the throne of God. The fact that “throne” or “thrones” occurs 17 times here in two chapters, shows where this is centered and what or rather whom it is centered about.

John saw this throne, set in heaven, and one sat upon the throne. This is God, of course. And He that sat was like to look upon as a jasper and a sardine stone. Jasper today is said to be a dark red quartz which is opaque; there is something in it besides pure quartz which renders it opaque; and it is of a dark maroon color. But here in Revelation it might be transparent, because the same term occurs in chapter 21 verse 11 in the description of heaven, where it speaks of a jasper stone as “clear as crystal.” We may conclude that the “jasper” stone in Revelation 4 must mean a transparent but red colored form of quartz. The next stone is the sardine, which ought to be spelled “sardius”; it has no connection with the small fish called “sardine.” This sardius is what is today called a carnelian, and this also is red, but a different red from the jasper stone. These two together, both shades of red, the jasper and the sardius are thought to represent the judgment of God, as the emerald which comes a little later in the form of a rainbow is understood to represent the mercy of God. We dare not be dogmatic about the detailed meaning of these various items. I hope we will get out of this chapter a true impression besides a lot of details; try to see the forest, not just the individual trees.

Verse 3 then speaks of a rainbow round about the throne like an emerald. Where does the rainbow first appear in the Bible? After the great Flood of Noah’s day. You will recall that God said to Noah and his family, “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13). And the Lord added, “I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant.” There the rainbow certainly stands for God’s mercy. And as the rainbow indicated to Noah and his family that the storm of the Flood was over, so we may say that the rainbow in Revelation 4 indicates to those in heaven that for them the storm of trouble and judgment and suffering is over. Never again can anything harm or hurt them.

And round about the throne were twenty-four elders, seated upon “seats” (properly translated “thrones”). These elders are clothed in white raiment and have on their heads crowns of gold. Now what do these twenty-four elders represent? Why the number 24? Undoubtedly this is a link-up of the Old Testament with the New. The twelve patriarchs, the founders of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel (ten of them were sons of Jacob and two were his grandsons), and the twelve apostles.

Some have objected that the Old Testament tribal patriarchs were not all good men. I must admit that some of them certainly were not good in the earlier part of their life, but like Jacob himself they became good by the effective, sovereign, unmerited grace of God given to them and working in them. Well, the twelve Old Testament patriarchs account for half of the 24 elders; but about the other half: Judas dropped out and committed suicide, and was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:23-26); then later the Lord specially called Paul to be an apostle (Galatians 1:1). Now who is the 24th "elder" here, Matthias or Paul? Really it is foolish to try to identify these 24 elders with particular historical names. What is evidently meant is a linking-up of the Old Testament with the New. The two Testaments are basically the same—there is one continuous covenant, one body of truth, one olive tree, one true people of God. In the Old Testament it was called Israel, and in the New Testament, the Church. They had the Passover;

we have the Lord's Supper; but basically it is the same, a body of people in a covenant relation to God, who have been saved by the redemption of His Son, Jesus Christ. Israel is the Old Testament form of the Church, and the Church is the New Testament form of Israel. Let's say that here in Revelation 4 we see the Old Testament and the New Testament fused together into one, a finished product on display, 24 elders on 24 thrones, all clothed in white raiment and all crowned with crowns of gold. The white raiment obviously stands for righteousness produced by sanctification. And the crowns of gold. There are two kinds of crowns mentioned in the New Testament: the *stephanos*, which is a garland worn by a victor, and the *diadem*, which is the crown worn by a ruler or a king. The word for the crowns worn by the 24 elders is *stephanos*, the emblem of victory. So they have the emblem of righteousness and the emblem of victory. Before God, they are both righteous and victorious.

LESSON 37

THE VISION OF THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN, Revelation 4:1-11, Cont.

Out of the throne of God proceed thunders and lightnings and voices. This is the activity of God. God is represented in the Bible as the most active of all beings. The "God is dead" theology of a few years ago is as dead as a dodo today. "And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God." This is a reference to the Holy Spirit in His manifold activity; it does not mean that the Holy Spirit is plural. The number seven in the Bible stands for the idea of perfection. And the seven lamps of fire burning stand for the intense life and activity of the Holy Spirit.

Next it speaks of a sea of glass like unto crystal. This is a counterpart of the "sea" that was a large container of water before the Tabernacle and later the Temple, in the Old Testament. This calls to our minds the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Then it speaks of four "beasts" (properly, "living creatures"). The word "beast" has changed its meaning or usage somewhat since the King James Version was produced. We think of a beast as an animal, but here in Revelation the Greek word does not convey any idea of anything low or base or sub-human. Living creatures, creatures having life. These are certainly identifiable with the cherubim in Ezekiel chapter 1 and again chapter 10, even though there is a difference in the details of the descriptions. (The word "cherubim" is plural; the singular is "cherub"; therefore the form sometimes found in the King James Version, "cherubims", is incorrect. Similarly we say "one mouse" and "two mice", not "two mices").

While the cherubim are represented as an order of angelic beings, it is not the purpose of either Ezekiel or John to give a description of them. They are spiritual beings, who do not of themselves have material or physical bodies. Obviously if Ezekiel or John were to see them, it would be in a vision, and they would have to have some appearance, so they are recorded as they ap-

peared to these inspired writers. But this is a description in metaphorical or figurative language. The six wings stand for activity in the service of God. The description has meaning concerning the different characteristics of these living creatures, but surely the details are not to be understood literally.

Cherubim are first mentioned in the Bible in the Garden of Eden, right after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin and come under judgment, and had been expelled from the Garden of Eden. The Lord placed cherubim at the entrance with a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. Whatever this flaming sword was, it was something that would frighten Adam and Eve and anyone else later on who might attempt to get into the Garden of Eden again. People have raised the question, How long did the cherubim and the flaming sword remain there? Was it until the time of the Flood, or if not, until when? This question cannot be answered. But the Edenic incident gives a key to the functions of the cherubim. They judge and frustrate beings which scorn God: they stand guard to protect the manifestation of God's holiness. And they rest not day nor night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." If their wings stand for activity, surely their eyes stand for knowledge or awareness: they are intensely aware and alert as to what it is their function to be alert about, and then they shout or cry out Holy, Holy, Holy. This triple "Holy" emphasizes the holiness of God. We should realize that when the Bible speaks of God as being holy there are two distinct meanings of this. One meaning is "holy" used to mean God's infinite greatness. If you are not afraid of a philosophical term, the metaphysical holiness of God—God's transcendent greatness and infinitude. By this holiness God is lifted up so that no created being could be compared to God in point of greatness or majesty. This is the first meaning.

In describing God, theology distinguishes between His incommunicable attributes and His communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes belong to God alone, and cannot be shared by or imparted to any creature. For example, to be infinite, eternal and unchangeable, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent—these are incommunicable attributes of God. These are summed up in the Bible under the term “holiness” in the first sense of the term.

Secondly, there is the moral or ethical holiness of God. This is a communicable attribute. A human being by God’s grace can become truly holy; he can partake of holiness. This means, in God’s case, his separation from and opposition to everything that is evil, wrong or sinful. God says to His people, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” This is the ethical holiness of God. His moral purity in distinction from sin and everything that is sinful. (Other communicable attributes of God are His justice, mercy, love, rationality, wisdom).

The strong emphasis here in Revelation 4 is on the eternity of God, which is a part of His metaphysical holiness, or His incommunicable attributes. Note that three times in chapter 4 God is spoken of as the eternal one, which was, and is and is to come (verse 8); the one who lives for ever and ever (verse 9), and again the one who lives for ever and ever (verse 10). Where were you a thousand years ago? You were just a thought in the mind of God; your life and mine had a beginning. Even if you as a Christian are going to live forever, so that you have a kind of creaturely eternity projected into the endless future, still you cannot count your life backwards to the infinity or eternity of the past. God is spoken of here as eternal, transcending time.

Saint Augustine grappled with the problem of the relation of God to time, attempting to answer the question, What was God doing before He made the world? It is in Augustine’s Confessions; you can read it if you wish, but I assure you it is heavy reading. He finally says that the question cannot be answered because it is a meaningless question. When you say “before” or “after” you have already assumed that the person you are speaking about lives in the dimension of historical time, that he is a citizen of the kingdom of time, with its past, present and future. But God does not live in the dimension of time; He created it for us to live in, but it does not apply to Him. Therefore to ask what was God doing before He did something else is really to ask a meaningless question. God transcends time and we do not. Space and time form the field which God created,

in which matter and energy and personality can act and interact. But God Himself is above all this. Thus Revelation strongly emphasizes the eternal nature of God.

Now notice in the last part of this chapter the God-centered character of everything. The four and twenty elders cast their crowns down before the throne of God. They had crowns, the garlands of victory, but in heaven all recognize that this victory is only by grace. Casting their crowns before the throne of God is surely a dramatic effect to bring out strongly the glory and majesty of God. Some years ago there was a piece in a popular magazine by a woman who claimed she had died and gone to heaven, and then came back to this earthly life again. She described heaven as pale blue, fragrant, and with nice background music playing all the time. But she never mentioned God and she never mentioned Jesus Christ. Now, I ask you, what kind of heaven is it that is without God the Father and our Saviour Jesus Christ? It is the presence of God that makes heaven heaven. The loving, favorable presence of God among his redeemed people. But I wonder how many of our modern-day fellow Americans there are who expect to go to heaven when they die, who yet have no special sense of the need for the presence of God. The presence of God makes heaven, and the absence of God makes hell. I know that everybody, barring a few atheists, expects some kind of life after death. The sense of immortality is built into us and is not easily gotten rid of. You ought to be sorry for the poor atheist—he is fighting on all fronts, not only against Scripture and moral reason, but against something that is built into his own make-up too. Belief in life after death is all but universal in the human race. Yet millions of people live without awareness of God, and when their funeral is held, some preacher will say they have gone to be with the Lord—people to whom in this present life God meant nothing, or perhaps nothing but an occasional profane oath on their sinful lips. Now if God means nothing to people in this life, how could such people be comfortable and happy in heaven where God means everything? In this vision of heaven, you see, God is the center of everything.

Question about the cherubim. Like God, the cherubim are spirit-beings. They appear in vision to John as visible forms; this is to teach truth, and it is done in such a way that the role of God and the centrality of God (and in chapter 5, the redemptive work of Christ in His glory and kingship) are brought into high relief by the description. We should remember that it is symbolism.

LESSON 38

THE VISION OF THE BOOK SEALED WITH SEVEN SEALS, Revelation 5:1-14

Here we have another vision, or else a continuation of the vision in chapter 4. “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.” The one sitting on the throne was God the Father, of

course. As to this book, you should not think of our bound books that you open up and turn over pages that are numbered. This book would be a roll or scroll, and sealed with seven seals along the edge on the outside of the roll. Many scrolls of this kind have been found

from ancient times. An ordinary one would have only one seal; perhaps for something important there would be three; but this one has no less than seven seals. This would indicate that it is thoroughly sealed. Nobody will learn what is inside that book, or have anything to do with it, until someone arrives having the right and power to break these seals open. It was written within and on the reverse side also; that is, the parchment was written on both sides, so there is no space left, everything is written full. What is this book?

As you follow along and see what happens to this book you can see that this is the book of God's eternal plans and purposes for history, especially the history of the redemption of his people. In fact, this involves the history of the world as a whole. This is "Operation History," and it is sealed orders. In time of war, sometimes a battleship goes out to sea with sealed orders, to prevent the enemy from possibly gaining any information prematurely about the destination of the ship. They go out to sea, possibly two or three hundred miles, and then at the appointed time the captain will break the seal and open the orders and find out where they are to go and what they are to do. Now this book in Revelation 5 is God's sealed orders—His plan for this world, or, if you will, His blueprint or His decree. It is written full, on both sides of the parchment, indicating that it contains all that is relevant or involved here.

Now the question is raised, Who is able to break the seals and open and read the book? Notice how everything is set up here to bring Jesus Christ into high relief, to bring out His power and His person very strongly against the entire scene, even the throne in heaven. Jesus Christ gets the prominence here: a strong angel proclaims with a loud voice. Here is a broadcast announcement over the angel's loudspeaker: Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof? Surely this is put in for dramatic effect; don't think for a minute that this strong angel didn't know who was going to open the book, or that he thought that maybe there might be a volunteer from among the 24 elders, or something like that, who would come forward and say, "Well, I'll try it," or something like that. The question is a powerful question, asked here so that when the answer comes it will emphasize the qualification of Jesus Christ to do this. Christ was worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof; He was adequate for this, in person and in character and in every possible way, He was worthy. He is the one in the whole creation—the whole universe—who can open the book of God's eternal plan, and this involves, as you will see, not only opening the book but actually performing or executing the contents.

As each of the seals is opened, there is a further vision. The first seal is opened, and John sees certain things; and so on with the second and following seals. This, however, if our understanding of the nature of the seals is correct, cannot be the contents of the book. You see, the contents couldn't be read until all seven

were broken. Therefore the actual content of the book comes after the breaking of the seven seals, and what we have here in connection with the opening or breaking of each of the seven seals is a sort of preliminary vision that has some bearing on the content which will come later.

Now no man in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book or to look thereon. This book is so exclusive and so holy that not only is nobody qualified, but actually no one is fit or even able to look at it—let's say, no one ventures or dares to look at it. Who but Jesus Christ can implement the eternal counsel of God in the created universe? No one in heaven or earth, or under the earth, none of the 24 elders, none of the cherubim or four living creatures, none of the great host of angels that are mentioned, no one. And John wept much, because no one was able to open the book or even to look at it. This again is surely put in for dramatic effect. You see, if it really turns out that nobody, literally nobody, can open the book or look thereon, then this would be another way of saying that God's eternal plan has stopped, it has failed, it cannot be carried into execution. There will be no redemption, and therefore no salvation. There will be no God-given favorable outcome of history. So John wept much, and then one of the elders, not this time one of the cherubim, but one of the elders comes to him and says, "Weep not. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." The Lion of the tribe of Judah is of course Jesus Christ. There is a reference to this in Genesis 49:9,10 where Jacob, shortly before his death, giving a blessing to his sons, speaks about Judah: "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up; he stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up; 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." Certainly this is a prophecy of Jesus Christ, a messianic prophecy. Jesus Christ is of the tribe of Judah, and of Jacob's sons. And it speaks there of the sceptre—kingly authority, reigning as king—and this is a figure of Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and then afterwards it says "the root of David"—David, who also was of the tribe of Judah. Christ is the Son of David; He is the greater David, He is the fulfilment of the prophecies given to and through David as king.

The lion is spoken of in the Book of Proverbs as the strongest among beasts, that turneth not aside for any (Proverbs 30:30). We have no lions in this country outside of circuses and zoos; we have wildcats and mountain lions, but this speaks of a real lion. As applied to Christ the idea is of His power as king. C.S. Lewis in his children's story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* uses the lion as a figure of Christ. Lewis didn't invent that; he got it out of the Bible.

Now the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed. In

the Greek, the word is “conquered.” It indicates overcoming enemies and overcoming difficulties. Not that He is waiting to do something, but that He has already prevailed in a conflict or battle to open the seven seals of the book. This is what one of the 24 elders told John. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will do it, and John turns to see what this is. And he saw in the midst of the throne and the elders and the cherubim, a Lamb as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (5:6). He turns to see a lion, and sees a lamb! Furthermore, no one ever saw any other lamb like this one, with seven horns and seven eyes, and it appears as slain. Can you picture in your imagination a lamb that has been slain and also is alive? It is of course a reference to Christ, the Lamb of God who was dead and is alive again. He was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead, as the “Apostles’ Creed” states it. The imagery of the vision here in Revelation is contradictory, but it is used regardless of logic, to teach a truth here about Christ—the slain but ever living lamb of God. When Jesus rose from the dead not everyone recognized Him immediately; He was evidently the same and yet different; the same body that was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb rose from the dead and ascended to heaven—the same and yet changed to suit the status of eternity and transcendent glory. Yet we read about Jesus after His resurrection that the mark of the nails and of the Roman soldier’s spear were still there in His body. Jesus appeared to His disciples and Thomas was absent, and later Thomas said he would not believe unless he could feel the print of the nails and of the spear. And when Jesus appeared again Thomas was present, and Jesus said, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). “Jesus stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said he showed unto them his hands and his side”

(John 20:19, 20). Even though Jesus’ body was transfigured into heavenly glory, it was His identical body, and the memorial of His sufferings and death on the cross remains forever in heaven. Surely when we get there, we can see what Thomas and the other disciples saw! A lamb as if it had been slain, a lion but a slain lamb. The seven horns are a symbol of power, and the seven eyes are a symbol of absolute knowledge. So here is absolute power and absolute knowledge, and the possessor of these is the Lamb of God who was crucified, dead and buried, and who rose again from the dead.

Now the Lamb comes forward to take the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. Don’t take it literally! How does a lamb pick up a book? It doesn’t mean that the lamb got the book in its teeth. Don’t expect the imagery to be logically explainable point by point. The Lamb took the book, which certainly implies more than merely having contact with it and looking at it. He is the Lamb who is qualified and has won the victory, and therefore has the right, not only to know what is in the book, but to carry it out and make it an actuality in real life. What we have here is commonly described in the Bible as the enthronement of Jesus Christ the Mediator as the King of glory.

There is a problem about the genuine Greek text in verses 9 and 10. Here the four living creatures and the 24 elders are speaking, and they say “hast redeemed us to God. . . hast made us unto our God kings and priests. . . we shall reign upon the earth.” Now the 24 elders could say this, but it would not be true of the cherubim or living creatures—they never fell into sin nor were they redeemed by Christ. The most authentic and accurate Greek text here has “redeemed them to God. . . hast made them unto our God kings and priests. . . they shall reign upon the earth.” The statements apply to humans who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but not to the sinless “living creatures” or cherubim.

LESSON 39

THE VISION OF THE BOOK SEALED WITH SEVEN SEALS, Revelation 5:1-14, Cont.

Rev. 5:11ff. The voices of many angels round about the throne, the praises to God of the redeemed; and in the beginning of chapter 6, the opening of the seven seals. The ascription of praise to God at the end of the fourth chapter has been called the song of creation. It isn’t actually called a song in the text itself, but you will notice that in it God is praised as the Creator of the universe and of all that it contains. Note the last verse of chapter 4, “Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Note that there is nothing said in this about redemption from sin. So this is the psalm or song of creation, not of redemption. But when we get into chapter 5, we have what may be called the song of redemption, and incidentally now it is called a song (5:9). This is after the angel has one of the elders announce to John that the Lamb who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered or prevailed to open the seven seals and to look

at the book of God’s counsel or purposes for redemption. Then after the Lamb takes the book, the cherubim and the 24 elders fall down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of perfumes, which are the prayers of the saints, and now this is called “a new song.” The harps are a symbol of joy, joyful praise to God, and the golden vials or bottles are full of the prayers of the saints. Suppose someone were to open a little vial of costly perfume—the sweet fragrance of it would gradually fill the room. When Mary of Bethany broke the alabaster box of ointment—perhaps her most treasured possession—and poured it out on the feet of Jesus, it is recorded that the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. You will recall there were some hard-headed people there who suggested it would have been better to sell the perfume and put the money in the budget. But Jesus said, No. She has done a good work. He valued this kind of devotion, and said it was a preparation

for his burial in advance, before His death. Now the prayers of saints rising to God in heaven are pleasing to God, even though our prayers are rather feeble and miscellaneous and often mixed up and somewhat distracted. Still they reach the throne of God as sweet incense, pleasing to God.

This is called "a new song." Why is it called new. What is new about it? I take it, "new" here means "different." We should say it is different from what went before. It is different from what we have in 4:8 ("Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come") and it is different from what we have in 4:11 ("Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power"—because of God's great work of creation. This song is new because it has a new theme, and the theme is redemption by the shed blood of Christ. 5:9, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed men to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and hast made them unto our God kings and priests; and they shall reign on the earth." I mentioned before that there is a question about the genuine Greek text in these two verses. The four living creatures are cherubim or angels—for them there is no redemption. It is the human race that are the subjects of redemption, not the angels. The most authentic Greek texts leaves the "us" out, and it is so translated in recent versions: "Thou hast redeemed men to God by thy blood," etc. The theme here is redemption by blood shed, which means by life sacrificed in death. We should realize that this is the very heart of Christianity—blood shed, life sacrificed—without this it is not Christianity at all. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). We might try to consider what is the most important single verse in the Old Testament. One important text would certainly be Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman shall destroy the serpent—a preview of all that follows in the whole Bible. And certainly Isaiah chapter 53, the suffering Servant of the Lord who is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. This is atonement by the shedding of the blood of a Substitute. The poet Robert Browning wrote a poem with the title "Saul," in which he says:

"It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand,
That salvation joins issue with death. . ."

Whatever you think of the rest of Browning, and he was not really orthodox as a Christian, at any rate the words cited above show a true insight into the very heart of the Christian faith.

Leviticus 17:11 deals with this same matter of redemption by shed blood: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." "The life of the flesh is in the blood," is not intended to be a scienti-

fic statement, but it comes close to being one anyway. Why do we have blood banks? Perhaps some of you here in this room are alive and well today because you received blood when it made the difference between life and death. In Leviticus the blood of the animal of course stands for the blood of Christ, which really effectively atones. Another text is Exodus 12:13, "When I see the blood I will pass over you."

Without shedding of blood religion is not Christianity; it is only a miserable hopeless moralism which can only end in despair. Every form of works religion that represents salvation as essentially an attainment or an achievement, inevitably leads to one or the other of two possible results. Either the person vainly supposes he has achieved it, like the Pharisees, producing spiritual pride and self-righteousness; or the person comes to realize that he cannot achieve it, and ends in the most abysmal depression and despair. Pride or despair—but real Christianity leads to neither. It leads to new life and righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

"Redeemed to God by the blood." We should realize what this word "redeemed" means. To redeem something is to buy it back by the payment of a ransom price. There was a man in one of our western states who got his wife back safe and sound from kidnapers. This was a ransom, paid in this case to kidnapers. Now to whom did Jesus Christ pay the ransom for His people? In Mark 10:45 Jesus said he came to give His life a ransom for many. The word "ransom" is a form of the same Greek word, translated "redeemed" in Rev. 5 and elsewhere. So the idea of redemption in the Bible is linked up with the idea of the payment of a ransom price. In the early centuries of the Church there was a very common and popular heresy which held that the ransom was paid to Satan, to buy him off and get the human race free from his grip. This strange idea is still found sometimes; I have found it in children's Vacation Bible School lessons.

Ignorant Christians have repeated this idea over and over so it is still in circulation. There is no such thing as a heresy that is completely false. The heresy that is 100 per cent false deceives no one, it gets no following. The heresies which have really troubled the church have been ideas which were basically false, but had some minor elements of truth mixed up with them. The element of truth in the heresy we are considering is the truth that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. But He did not do this by paying a ransom-price to the devil. The devil has no lawful claim on the human race. Satan is a kidnapper, he is like pirates who seize control of a ship. The ship does not belong to the pirates, and the human race does not belong to the devil. He holds no mortgage that must be paid off and cancelled. According to Scripture the ransom price is paid to God, to satisfy His divine justice, and this payment of the ransom to God breaks the hold of Satan on the human race. So Jesus could and did say, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." The ransom was

paid to God whose justice had been outraged. As the Shorter Catechism puts it, Christ offered himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God.

In Romans 3:25,26, we learn that the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins, emphasizing God's righteousness, so that God could both be just and also the justifier of those who believe in Christ Jesus. Christians are not smuggled into heaven by some kind of dubious shady deal; they are gotten there authentically because the debt of the broken moral law of God has been fully paid by someone who was able and also had the right to do it. Christ paid the ransom, then, not to Satan, but to God.

"Redeemed them to God"—this implies that they were previously lost. We often speak about people who were lost being saved. What is the meaning of "lost" when the Bible refers to a sinner who is without Christ? One day a little child was wandering around in the Beaver Valley Mall, crying, lost because he couldn't find his mother. After a while here came an announcement on the loudspeaker, heard in all parts of the mall area, "Child about 3 years old, blond hair, is at the mall office. Will the parent please come to the office and claim this child." The child was lost because it didn't know where its mother was. It had strayed. I was lost in Tokyo once, an easy place for an American to get lost in. Dr. E. J. Dickson was with me and he got lost

too. We got in a taxi and gave the taxi driver a paper with the address we wanted to go to written on it in Japanese, and the taxi driver got lost too. He had to stop and get out two or three times to ask people for directions. Finally we arrived at our intended destination, a medical supply company. I also got lost once in New York City and another time in Youngstown, Ohio, on my way to preach at the R.P. church there. You can see I get lost quite easily, and not merely in Tokyo!

But in the Bible, being "lost" means more than having strayed or become confused and unable to find your way to where you want to go. In the Bible a person is "lost" when the true Owner is deprived of the person's fellowship or service. The three parallel parables in Luke chapter 15 bring out this idea strongly. The shepherd was deprived of his sheep, the woman of her piece of silver, and the father of his younger son. We were created to love and know and rejoice and serve and have fellowship with God, and while we are in our sins and not redeemed God is deprived of what He had in mind in creating us. This is what we should think of when the Bible says that the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Not merely the human confusion and panic and frustration, but the fact that God is missing what belongs to Him and what He ought to have. All humans were created with the capacity for fellowship with God, but not all were elected to be redeemed.

LESSON 40

THE VISION OF THE BOOK SEALED WITH SEVEN SEALS, Revelation 5:1-4, cont.

The universal element in Christ's atonement is that it is world-wide—it includes people of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. The Greek preposition used means "out of"—redeemed "out of" or "from among." This shows that it is not redemption of the total world population, but of a definite selected number that is involved. On the other hand, this is no small number. It is world-wide in scope and included a tremendously great number. When the roll is called up yonder there is going to be a representative world-wide assembly. Note that the text does not say that every tongue and kindred and people and nation will be redeemed, but a great multitude of people redeemed out of each of these categories.

Redeemed unto kingship and priesthood, verse 10. "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth. It certainly does not appear that Christians are ruling the earth today. But do not judge by the temporary existing situation or the outward appearance. Now I think we can in a true sense say that Christians today are ruling the world through their prayers. Look back to verse 8—golden vials full of perfumes which are the prayers of the saints. Someone has said that prayer offered here on earth pulls the rope that rings the bell in heaven—the bell that God will surely listen to. Someone else has said that prayer moves the

hand of God who rules the world. Surely this is true, and the prayers of the saints have much to do with the outcomes of world affairs. Do not be deceived; the ultimate decisions on which history turns are not made in Moscow or Peking or Washington or London or the United Nations. They are made at the throne of God and the Lamb in heaven, and the prayers of the saints affect this. How do they affect it? By the saints becoming revolutionary activists and going on the warpath to change the world by revolution, as some people seem to think today? Surely not. But we can learn something about how the prayers of the saints affect the outcome of the world. Note Psalm 149 verse 5. "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgment written: this honor have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord!" Does that sound a bit blood-thirsty? Have you been going around lately with a sharp two-edged sword in your hand executing judgment upon wicked people? Is that what the Psalm means? I take it this is not to be understood literally. Yet it has a meaning. To execute judgment upon kings and nobles with a sword: is that mere rhetoric or is it true? And if it is true, how do

Christian people do it? The saints do this by prayer. They pray and this moves the hand of God and He determines the outcome on the field of world history, so that wicked people get what they deserve and righteousness prevails and the saints and their God are vindicated. This may be a long range matter, of prayer and answers to prayer; it may not happen suddenly according to our history timetable; but surely it is real, and surely we should pray along such lines as these. It doesn't mean to go and get yourself a sword or a handgun and go out and start establishing the kingdom of God; you do it by prayer.

Note also Jeremiah, chapter 1 and verses 10 and following. "See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." This is Jeremiah's commission to be a prophet, and it contains six items, of which four are negative and two are positive. Four are destructive and two are constructive. Surely this does not mean that Jeremiah was called to be a political activist and to go around plotting the overthrow of the government of his own or any other country. He is to preach the Word of God. Repent and believe the Word of God, or else. . . If people do not repent and believe, then things will happen which the prophet said would happen. He is the instrument of God in announcing all this to the world, and when the people did not repent, then all these things happened. So in this way you could say that the prophet Jeremiah overthrew kingdoms, etc. And surely he was a man of prayer, and by prayer he moved the hand that moves the world, just as the hand that moves the world was moving him. So this is something, at least, of the meaning of the saints reigning with Christ. Of course there may be a more visible and literal fulfilment of this in the future, yet it is also true in the way I have been explaining, at the present day.

The next thing here is the great number of angels—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. How many angels are there? I take it this is a symbolic number, not a mathematically exact number. But the emphasis is on the fact that it is an exceedingly great number, indicating the tremendous forces that God has created to help carry out His plans in the world. They speak in praise to God and the Lamb, verse 12: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing." If you count these you get seven, starting with power and ending with blessing. Can you think of anything that would be a good or worthwhile that is not included somewhere under one of these? This is a way of saying "Everything"—everything, no matter what, that is good and honorable and right, no matter what it is, belongs to the Lamb that was slain, Jesus Christ. Worthy is Jesus, the second Adam, true man yet also the eternal Son of God, who was crucified, dead and buried, to receive all this.

And in verse 13 the whole animate universe, in heaven and on earth and in the sea—everywhere—scribes blessing and honor and glory and power to him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. From here on it is not just the throne of God, but the throne of God and the Lamb. We should realize that a member of our human race, of our flesh and blood, is seated on the throne of the universe at the right hand of God the Father. And the four living creatures, the cherubim, said, Amen. And the 24 elders fell down and worshipped Him that lives for ever and ever. Chapter 5 thus ends in a universal chorus of praise to God. Maybe the missing element in present-day Christianity, which has become very much man-centered, is the element of praise to God. People think of Christianity today largely in terms of "What can we get out of it?" rather than "What praise and honor belongs to God?"

LESSON 41

THE VISION OF THE OPENING OF THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK, Revelation 6:1ff

The words "and see" at the end of verses 1, 3, and so on, are not found in the most authentic Greek manuscripts. So it is one of the cherubim that says, "Come," and then a horse and rider comes, and so forth. The phrase "and see" was evidently added later by an editor or copyist, and should be omitted, especially as this changes the meaning to some extent.

Each of the cherubim says "Come" and in turn the four horses with their riders appear. Remember this is not a book as we visualize books; it is a roll or scroll. The seven seals are one above the other down the outside. Nothing in the roll can be read until all seven seals have been broken open. But something happens as each seal is broken open. The first seal is opened and John heard a noise or voice like thunder, a terrifying noise, and a noise that gets attention. God is speaking and getting men's attention.

It does not mean that the four horses and their riders

come historically in succession; it may be that they are simultaneous and all riding through the scene at one time, but they are mentioned one after another. They say nothing and do nothing. Imagine a motion picture or television screen, or a stage in a theater. The four horses and their riders appear, cross the field of vision, and vanish again at the other side. The things that are said are spoken by the cherubim or by someone near the cherubim. Each horse is told to "Come." This command is addressed to the horses, not to John, if we regard the words "and see" as an interpolation.

"A white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer. Note that in the case of each of the four horses, what they have is spoken of as "given" to them. What is reported here is within the providential control and permission of God. Everything that is going on here is within the over-ruling providence of God. The first rider is given a bow and a crown, and this along

with the color white, should be enough to indicate to us that the rider on the white horse is Christ. (This has been disputed by some commentators. Hendriksen agrees with it and gives convincing arguments for this; Dr. Albertus Pieters holds the contrary, but his reasons do not convince the present writer). We should compare this passage with Revelation chapter 19 verse 11, where the rider on a white horse is certainly Christ. Also in 5:5 Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah and is said to have "prevailed"; this word "prevailed" is the same Greek word as "conquer" in 6:2. We should realize that in Bible times horses were used only for war. For ordinary transport they used donkeys, camels or mules, and for farm work, oxen. But horses were used both for cavalry and also for drawing war chariots to battle. This is why Israel in the Law of God was so strongly forbidden to greatly multiply horses—horses meant a military build-up (Deut. 17:16).

White no doubt stands for righteousness or victory. The crown that is mentioned here is a *stephanos* (crown of victory) not a *diadem* (crown of reigning power). Then he is given a bow—a symbol for effective action, putting his attack on his enemies right on the target. Recently archery was restored to a place in the Olympic Games, and some of us saw some of these people practicing for the Olympics, on television. It seemed amazing how some of them could hit a mark right on the dot from quite a distance. While fighting is not done with bows and arrows in most parts of the world today, still before the invention of firearms bows and arrows were very effective, and a person killed by a well-aimed arrow is every bit as dead as a person killed by an atomic bomb. Arrows were an instrument of death. "Conquering and to conquer"—activity against the enemies of God. Christ will conquer and keep on conquering according to the plan and time-schedule of God. If you look around the world today, it appears that the devil has had things pretty much his own way, and the world seems to have forgotten God. But we should realize that Christ is not a helpless bystander. God's plans are being carried out, and the Lord will be absolutely victorious in the end.

Next comes the red horse. Power was given him to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another, and there was given unto him a great sword. The word for "sword" here is not the sword that is used in battles, but the sword that is used in executions and in offering sacrifices—used to decapitate a man. This is the kind of sword given to the rider on the red horse. This red horse obviously stands for war—"to take peace from the earth." Hendriksen says this does not refer to war as such, but rather to the slaughter of Christians in the Roman persecutions that were beginning in the time when John wrote Revelation, or soon to begin. Later Hendriksen says that the riders on the red horse and the black horse are symbolic of the affliction suffered by Christians, because they are Christians. The "pale" horse affects Christians as people, as members of the human race, not simply as Christians, but

as humans. Notice that the rider on the fourth ("pale") horse is given power to kill with sword, hunger and death in connection with the "pale" horse, strongly suggests that the sword and killing in connection with the red horse refers to the slaughter of Christians especially. However there is a difficulty here too. The phrase in verse 4, "to take peace from the earth" (not just to take life from Christians), seems to refer to warfare, battles fought with arms. Perhaps we should conclude, then, that the rider on the white horse stands for Christ and His gospel, and the other three that follow him are God's dealings with a world that has rejected His Son, a world that does not expect Jesus Christ or think it possible ever to come under the judgments connected with the red horse, the black horse and the "pale" horse. Put these together and they spell the word "calamity." God's dealings with a world that does not repent and does not believe on God's Son. The world was at peace during the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, but it has been said that since the crucifixion, nearly two thousand years ago, there has been war going on somewhere other all the time except for a dozen years or so. Think of it—right in our own lifetime we have had the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. There will not be peace except by the Prince of Peace. The world has been trying to get peace by every method and from every source except the one and only true source of peace—the Lord Jesus Christ. Today we are trying to get a warless world by organization, diplomacy, technology, "detente." But wars really come from the lusts in the human heart, not from an inadequate form of international organization. General Douglas MacArthur said that wars are caused by undefended wealth. That is certainly part of the truth, but we should add that wars are caused by the greed and selfish lusts that have driven people to take the undefended wealth. In our time, the blind are leading the blind, trying to get a warless world by negotiation and organization. Neither the old League of Nations, after World War I, nor the present United Nations, nor the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, nor the South East Asia Treaty Organization—not to mention the Communist Warsaw Pact—is going to safeguard world peace. I don't say these organizations are useless, but they cannot prevent major conflicts between the major powers. Anyone who knows and believes the Bible could have predicted this from the outset. President Woodrow Wilson's dream of a warless world through the League of Nations was nothing but a dream. It did not and could not touch the real causes of war. As well try to treat cancer with band aids. The notion many people have today that the real trouble is misunderstanding and that everything could be settled and smoothed out by "understanding"—this notion is contrary to Christian principles. Someone has remarked that once in a while twelve good men and true come to such a complete understanding of one of their fellow citizens that they unanimously vote for him to be hanged! Remember when the Paris peace talks were beginning. Our friends in some foreign countries seemed to believe overwhelmingly that if we could just sit down with the represen-

tatives of North Vietnam and talk things out, peace could come. Do you remember how many months the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong made fools of us by endless arguing about the size, shape and construc-

tion of the conference table; And when a sort of agreement was finally reached, it was broken almost right away? Peace will come only by Jesus Christ who is the Prince of Peace.

LESSON 42

THE VISION OF THE OPENING OF THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK, Revelation 6:5ff, cont.

"A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny" (6:6). You may think that these prices are amazingly cheap. This would be quite wrong, however. You will recall from one of Jesus' parables that a "penny" was wages for a day's hard work. Therefore "a measure of wheat for a penny" indicates high prices, extreme inflation, extreme scarcity of the bare necessities of life. A man might be able to live and keep his family alive by using barley, the cheaper grain, but it would require skimping and economy. On the other hand, the luxury items of life are still available: "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine." These are not necessities but luxuries, and they are available to the people with money—the great and successful and prosperous of this era, while the poor and downtrodden and Christian believers are economically underprivileged and constantly face the fear of poverty and scarcity symbolized by the black horse. The wheat the barley will get sky high so that common folks can barely afford enough of them to keep alive. Think of a Christian who is a member of a trade-guild. He can't ply his trade without being a member of this guild which involves participation in idolatrous rites, so he has to resign, with the result that he is unable to earn a living. He and his family are reduced to poverty and dire need—this is the kind of thing that is represented by the black horse. Christians and their families face economic boycott—something we see more about in Revelation chapter 13 where only those with the mark of the beast can buy or sell.

The rich and powerful get what they want, however, and it has always been so since sin entered the world.

Next comes the "pale" horse. Did you ever see a "pale" horse? "Pale" here is translated from the Greek word *chloros* from which we get our word "chlorine." "Pale" is not a very good translation of it. It has been translated "livid," also "a sickening greenish gray color," livid like a corpse. The rider on the pale horse is death, and he is followed by what the King James Version calls "Hell." This should be translated *Hades*—not the place of eternal damnation, which would be *Gehenna*, but the state and realm of death, or we might say the other world, the beyond, without implication as to its qualities. Disembodied existence follows Death. Think of the millions of people who have lived on this earth before our time, and where are they now? Dead, as far as this world is concerned. And where will you be 100 years from now? Dead, so far as this world is concerned, if the Lord doesn't come first.

Note that these calamities connected with the pale

horse affect the fourth part of the earth—they are not total, but vast and extensive. Different kinds of calamity: war, hunger, death (pestilence, probably) and the wild beasts of the earth. It is recorded that the "black death" in the middle ages in Europe wiped out 50% of the population in some countries. All this comes on a world which will not accept the Rider on the white horse. "Power was given unto them." Therefore this is not evil running wild out of control, but it remains under the providential control of God, and in the end can only accomplish His wise and good purposes.

Certainly we should support the government of our land, pay our taxes, perform our duties as citizens, and seek better laws and more honest government. But let us not be deceived into thinking that we are going to get the real problems of the world solved apart from the teachings of the Word of God and apart from the kingship of Jesus Christ, the program of Him who is the conquering king on the white horse. After all, political change is very much like a kaleidoscope; the pattern changes again and again, but nothing new is added; it goes on and on, over and over; it is man against man, group against group, demand against demand, pressure against pressure. But where are the rights of God recognized? What evidence is there of people really turning to God and seeking help from Him? "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:9)—to us of the present day this surely means put your trust in God, not in the government. The government has a function and God can use it, but don't make it the object of your Christian hope, because it will let you down, it will let you down terribly. According to Romans 13 we should support the government so far as we can in good conscience; we should no doubt also support our country's foreign policy and the United Nations for what they may be worth, and for the limited good that they may sometimes by God's common grace accomplish. But let us beware of becoming blind leaders of the blind, deceiving ourselves and others into thinking that the government or any human organization can really solve our problems and underwrite our future. The real problem is the lusts in the fallen, sinful human heart. The Fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. And the misery is the consequence of the sin, and only that which can cancel the sin can really effect this remedy—only the redemption of Jesus Christ, the rider on the white horse. War and calamity are parts of God's moral government of this sinful, fallen world. When we pray for peace we must at the same time pray that people will repent and believe the gospel. If we pray for peace apart from men accepting the Prince of Peace, we

are praying for God to do the impossible—we are asking for God to treat a wicked world as if it were righteous. We are asking God to stop being God and start being Santa Claus. As surely as God lives, the riders on the red, black and pale horses are going to gallop across the world bringing trouble and calamity.

Revelation 6:9-17. As the fifth seal is opened we have the vision of the souls of the martyrs under the altar, and the opening of the sixth seal introduces the consummation or end of the world, verses 12-17. Note that the seventh seal is not opened until the beginning of chapter 8.

The scene from 6:9 is not on earth but in heaven. John sees an altar in heaven and under the altar the souls of the Christians who had suffered the death of martyrdom. Do not take this scene literally—surely it is highly symbolic, but also highly important and meaningful. Souls are invisible and cannot be literally seen, but in John's vision they could be. As it mentions only souls, not complete persons with bodies, this must be in the Intermediate State in heaven between death and the resurrection. "Under the altar"—evidently the slaughter of these early Christian martyrs was considered in a sense a sacrifice. Of course the only truly effective sacrifice that can cancel the guilt of sin is the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. But we are commanded to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). The souls cried with a loud voice, and John heard this in the vision experience. It is a prayer: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Verse 10). They call for judgment to be executed upon those who killed them. Now you know some people think they are more righteous than God, and they object to this verse, and say that it is unchristian to cry for vengeance. They say that when Jesus was crucified He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and Stephen when he was being stoned to death prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." So these critics claim that it is unworthy of the souls of the martyrs in heaven to cry to God for vengeance. Now, are we going to say that the Bible contradicts itself, or how shall we reply to such a claim as this? Is it right for the martyrs to cry to God for vengeance? A college professor who is stumped by a student's question will say, "That's a good question," and if he can't put his questioner off by that, he will add, "It depends." So I will say here that it depends. Why are they crying to God for

vengeance? Is this simply because they are angry at those who have killed them, and trying to get even with them—you killed me, so I will call on God to kill you? This, I feel sure, cannot be the case. This is a cry for the cosmic justice of God to be put into execution, a cry that cannot fail to be answered. God would not be God and there could not be a universe based on moral law if a prayer like this were improper and could remain unanswered. Back in Genesis 4:10, where Cain had killed his brother, God said, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." What we have here in Revelation 6 is not a vindictive wish on the part of the martyrs, they are perfected in holiness in the state of heavenly bliss; this is a desire for the justice of God to be manifested. We live in an age in which men underestimate the justice of God, and correspondingly overemphasize the love of God. The common idea is that God is nothing but love. This started nearly 200 years ago in New England, and reached down a long, long trail from consistent Calvinism to inconsistent Calvinism to Arminianism to Unitarianism to Universalism—and in many places to religious indifferentism, with closed and empty churches. It is true of course that God is love—the Bible says so—but that is not the same as saying that God is nothing but love, that love exhausts the nature or character of God. God is holiness and righteousness and justice as truly as He is love. God will forgive sinners who come by His appointed way, but this does not cancel the judgment of God upon those who do not come by God's appointed way, have not repented, but remain stubborn in wickedness. This is a prayer not contrary to that of Jesus. It is the same Jesus who said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" who also predicted that He would separate between the sheep and the goats, and say to the goats, "Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The same Jesus said both of these things. Therefore the two ideas cannot really be contradictory. This is not personal revenge that the souls of the martyrs are seeking. They are voicing an earnest plea for the vindication of the name and justice of God. It is the blood that demands retribution, and this prayer cannot go unanswered if God is what the Bible says He is and if the universe created by God is based upon moral law which recognizes the distinction between right and wrong. Because God is holy and true, as the martyrs affirm him to be, He must and will execute judgment on those who have slaughtered the saints.

LESSON 43

THE VISION OF THE OPENING OF THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK, Revelation 6:1-17, cont.

In verse 11 there is an answer given to the souls under the altar. In the first place white robes are given to each and every one of them, surely symbolizing righteousness and victory. Dr. Hendriksen adds a third item—festivity—but I do not find this convincing. I doubt that the Intermediate State is represented in the Bible as a state of festivity, but it is represented as a state of righteous-

ness and victory. And they are told that they should rest yet for a little season. Now that "little" season" is until the end of the world. From our standpoint here on this earth in terms of world history. From the time John wrote these words on a parchment scroll till now has been over 1800 years, and the Lord has not yet returned, and the end of the world has not yet taken place

and the Judgment Day has not crashed down upon a wicked world yet, but the souls of the martyrs are told that they should rest yet "a little season." I wonder, is it possible that what from the standpoint of this world's calendars would be hundreds or thousands of years, to the souls of the blessed dead who are with the Lord in Paradise or heaven, it might be just "a little season?" From the standpoint of world history the Judgment is the end of things, when Christ comes again. But from the standpoint of the departed Christian dead, who are with the Lord, this will not seem long. They are not said to be unconscious, or asleep, but to take rest. It will not bore them with endless waiting.

We cannot compare the dimension of time as we experience it on this earth, with what it will be in eternity in heaven. In this life we could not very well get along without clocks and calendars, but they would be completely meaningless and irrelevant in heaven. Do you suppose that the saints in heaven have to look at a calendar to see what day it is, or look at a wrist-watch to see what time of day it is? Of course not. There must be something in eternity in the bliss of God's people comparable to time as we know it. As created beings we are not eternal in the sense that God is eternal, transcending both space and time. That the characteristics of the physical universe—space, time, matter, energy—are meaningful in the eternal state is an assumption which we dare not make. But I think there is comfort in this, that the souls of believers, represented here by the martyrs while they are waiting for the Judgment Day, will feel that only a little season has gone by.

History isn't over yet, so far as this world is concerned, and persecution isn't over yet either; so we will wait until the rest of the martyrs are slain. Do you realize that it is certainly possible that more people have been put to death for the Christian faith and their testimony in our own day than in the whole period of the Roman Empire—it is going on today under the Communist countries of the world. The whole story has not been told; what has been told is terrible enough. The martyrs are to wait until their fellow servants that shall be slain as they were should be fulfilled. Incidentally, this implies God's decree of election—that there is a definite number that must be completed, the number of God's elect. The Judgment Day cannot come until God's plan is completed, and that means until the very last one of His elect children chosen to eternal life is brought to faith in Christ and becomes a Christian believer. Some of them will be killed; others will die a natural death; but the Judgment Day cannot come until God's Plan of Salvation has run its course, right down to the very end. Meanwhile the dead in Christ are to rest. To depart is to be with Christ, which is far better than this present life. The Bible meets our need for comfort but does not in any way satisfy our prying curiosity. And Scripture teaches that the human personality is not complete without the body, and therefore the Apostles' Creed (not written by the Apostles, but by far the oldest Christian creed outside the Bible itself) affirms, "I

believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." The body is necessary for the completeness of the personality, as the organ of the soul. "The spirit without the body is dumb, and the body without the spirit is dead." These two complement each other, they belong together. The old Greeks regarded the body as the prison of the soul, but the Bible treats the body as the organ of the soul or spirit. It was created by God for our full self-expression; it will be raised from the dead, the same in identity but changed in qualities to suit the conditions of eternity. That will be when Christ comes again at the end of the world or end of the age. In the meantime the souls of believers, being at their death made perfect in holiness, immediately pass into heavenly glory, while their bodies remain united to Christ and rest in their graves until the resurrection. This Intermediate State, between death and the resurrection, is what is spoken of in Revelation 6. They are at rest, they have peace, they have comfort; they have perfect righteousness, but they are waiting for something. There is something more, the capstone and real, absolute completion of their redemption is still future. So they are waiting for this until it is time for it to come. It is foreign to Christian thought to represent the Intermediate State as the object of Christian hope. Everywhere the Bible, and especially this is clear in the New Testament, represents the resurrection as the real object of Christian hope. The Intermediate State is just that—an intermediate state—preliminary and temporary, until world history comes to an end.

Next comes the opening of the sixth seal, and here we have conditions on this earth portrayed—remember it is a vision—what John sees here is not the real earth and the real sky, but a vision. But he is in a trance state induced by the Holy Spirit, and he sees things in vision form that you don't see in real life. In a later chapter in Revelation we have the description of a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns flying across the sky, with other features, which if taken literally would contradict each other. What John sees here is not the real earth and the real sky, but a vision of earth and sky, and in them he sees terrible things happen. One thing after another, everything mentioned here is calculated to strike mortal terror into the hearts of men who are without Christ. If you are a Christian, there is nothing to be afraid of. To the Christian death is not what the world thinks it is, and it cannot harm the one who is in Christ. But to the world, unspeakable terror.

It has been pointed out here that this a symbolic preview of conditions in this world just a little while before the second coming of Christ, or as His coming and the Judgment Day are approaching. One thing we should note about the Book of Revelation is what has been called the "principle of recapitulation" (Stonehouse) or the "principle of progressive parallelism" (Hendriksen). It covers the same ground again and again, and repeatedly it describes world conditions from one standpoint or another, and brings you down to the brink—not the actual event, but the brink—of the Judgment Day, the very verge of the end, and that is what we find at the end of

this chapter. "The great day of his wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?" If you go on to chapter 11:19, you will find that again the book has gone through the periods and visions, and again at the end of chapter 11 the Temple is opened in heaven, and there is seen in the Temple the ark of God's covenant (testament), and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail" (11:19). The verse just above that says that the nations were angry, and God's wrath has come, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewards to be given to the saints, and for God to destroy those that destroy the earth. Note the close parallel with the end of chapter 6. And again we have a similar thing in the closing verses of chapter 14. The Book of Revelation repeatedly brings you to the verge of the end, but instead of describing the actual end, it starts in again and goes over the same ground from a different angle or point of view.

It has been noted in chapter 6 that seven events are mentioned: 1. an earthquake; 2. the sun is darkened; 3. the moon becomes red like blood. 4. the stars of heaven fell unto the earth; 5. the sky disappears like a scroll rolled up; 6. the mountains and islands are removed from their places; 7. the people of the world who are without Christ are smitten with utter panic, fear.

As we look at those things, we should realize that there are other places in the Bible that say the same thing. One is in the Book of Acts where Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost. He quotes from the Old Testament prophecy of Joel, and states that it has been fulfilled. (Joel 2:28ff). He speaks of wonderful signs in heaven and earth, blood, fire, smoke, vapor, the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood, prior to the coming of the Day of the Lord, and so forth. Peter says it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples had been speaking in other tongues, and 2,000 people were converted to the Lord in one day. Peter said it was fulfilled. We should realize that Bible prophecy is like concentric circles; it can have repeated fulfilment on different levels or in different dimensions. Joel's prophecy was truly, though only partly, fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. What happened that day fulfilled the prophecy but did not exhaust it. It would have a more complete and absolute fulfilment at a future time. The sun was not blotted out on the day of Pentecost, nor the moon turned into blood. So Peter quoting Joel was speaking of these cosmic and astronomical disturbances as metaphors for a spiritual revolution that was going on and is still going on in our own day. It means at least that. Jesus said something similar to that in Matthew 24:29,30. The sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, the stars shall fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. . ." Incidentally no one on earth knows what this "sign of the Son of man in heaven" means. Now all of these passages are using the language of prophetic vision; they describe cosmic and astronomical disturbances to indicate the terrible condition of fear

and panic in the human race. Now, if the sun would really be blotted out of the sky and become black like a sheet of black cloth, do you think people would be frightened? I do not question that the second coming of Christ and the end of the world will be accompanied by real cosmic and astronomical disturbances. There will be a new heaven and a new earth; the Lord will roll the present universe up and it will vanish away. This present physical universe was not created to last forever. God has other plans for the eternal future. Incidentally this little "planet Earth" that we live on is not large enough to be the eternal home of God's redeemed. It is the kindergarten and first grade of God's great school—there will be much more beyond.

John speaks of the frightening, terrifying phenomena that will grip the people of the world who are without Christ. Seven events are spoken of and seven classes of people are said to experience and react to them. Check them out in your Bible and make a list. All humanity from the top to the bottom, from kings and dictators down to serfs and slaves—all except Christians, who have a total security—are in mortal terror at the time of Christ's second coming. People will hide themselves in the mountains and the rocks and dens of the mountains, and will say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us, from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (6:15-17).

Just a bit north of the Pennsylvania-New York boundary, not far from Bradford, Pennsylvania and Olean, New York, there is a place called "Rock City." There are immense rocks and boulders there—four times as big as the biggest at McConnell's Mill (Pennsylvania). Just the immense size is terrifying. If one of these were to fall on a person he would be instantly crushed to death. Now when Christ returns the wicked and unrepentant sinners of this world will cry out in their panic to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the Lamb, Jesus Christ. They would rather be crushed by the great rocks than face Jesus Christ whom they have rejected. I remember hearing Dr. Cornelius Van Til in a class lecture say "There are no mountains or rocks big enough to hide those who have rejected Christ." We know that the world is contemptuous of Christ today; His name is used as a by-word or swear-word on many people's lips. The world continues in its unbelief. But this will not go on forever. God is not mocked. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Someone has said that if it were not for the Gospel of divine grace those would be the saddest words ever spoken. In the end cosmic justice and the very name of God Himself requires that these scoffers be brought to face moral reality. It cannot be evaded or pretended about forever. And when they face it they are going to be utterly panicked. You can't imagine the choking fright and utter panic at the time of Christ's return, the utter fear that is described here. This is what Jesus Christ has saved us from, but it is what the Christless world will have to face in the end—"the wrath of the

Lamb." What a metaphor! Do lambs have wrath? Christ is the Lamb of God in atoning, saving grace to His own, but He is also the rider on the white horse, the one who is going to execute justice according to truth and righteousness. Absolute judgment, and no one can escape it. This is what the world is afraid of. We need revival desperately today, but it will not come just by preaching

an invitation to accept Christ. People need to come to fear the judgment and the eternal damnation of hell. They need to know from the law of God that judgment will crash upon them unless they are in Christ. And remember, there are no rocks big enough to hide those who are without Christ.

(To be continued)

Toronto Scholarship

By Gordon H. Clark Ph.D.

The Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, by its very title, claims to advance scholarship. Various articles in several periodicals have questioned its commitment to Biblical Christianity; this short article aims to make just one point about its scholarship.

To *Prod the Slumbering Giant* (Wedge Publishing Foundation) contains essays by seven authors connected with the AACS and its kindred organizations. On page 101 the following is found:

"This dualism has been aggravated by individualism. What is individualism? It is a view of man that goes way back to the ancient pagan Greeks. It is the idea that men are really only individual islands, and that each is on his own. They must cooperate of course, but only because of necessity. The ideal man is the individual, independent man, who stands on his own two feet. In North America individualism found fertile soil. Who doesn't know of the ideal of rugged American individualism?"

The point of this paragraph in its context is to connect American rugged individualism with pagan Greek philosophy and thus lower the American ideal in the eyes of Christians.

With the interests of scholarship in mind, let us ask who were those pagan Greek advocates of American individualism? The remaining fragments of the Presocratics are so sparse that one cannot be sure what their views were on this subject. Heraclitus sometimes seems arrogant, but his theory of hylozoism and the universal divine fire is far from individualistic. One can only guess the views of the other Presocratics.

The Sophists might be thought of as individualists; but Protagoras—and he is the only one whose views on this subject are known—pictured man, not so much as an individual human being, but rather as a disconnected aggregate of sense organs inside a wooden horse of Troy.

Plato's doctrine that each individual soul is eternal may sound like individualism; but the school he found,

culminating in Plotinus, developed his views by arguing that all souls are one. Each of us is a part of the World-Soul. Then, so far as politics is concerned, Plato was as anti-individualistic and totalitarian as one could wish or fear.

Aristotle indeed held that the primary realities are individual things, like Mount Olympus and Socrates. But he also held that the individual being is born in a family, out of which grows civil government; and the State, the all inclusive community, controls every effort to achieve the all inclusive highest good. Aristotle too was more of a totalitarian than a rugged individualist.

Maybe the Epicureans were individualists. Epicurus advocated celibacy and recommended taking no part in civil affairs. If this can be called individualism, at least it is not very rugged. Surely it is doubtful that North American Puritans sought their doctrine of man in Epicureanism.

Stoicism, the most vigorous Greek school from 300 B.C. to A.D. 200, developing the views of Heraclitus, considered man as a spark of the universal divine fire. This is pantheism, not individualism. And as mentioned above, the culmination of all Greek philosophy in Plotinus taught that all souls are one.

A more scholarly search for the source of American individualism might better terminate on Martin Luther and the priesthood of all believers, in opposition to papal corporatism. Or a close origin might be found in the Puritans themselves. A.A. Hodge, though he lived too late to be the source of individualism, belies the Greek thesis by arguing from Scripture that every soul is an immediate individual creation. But whatever factors contributed to the Protestant American view, a sloppy reference to pagan Greek philosophy is no sign of scholarship.

Finally, if individualism is to be disparaged by association with Aristotle or the Epicureans, why cannot anti-individualism be associated with the pantheism of Hegel and the communism of Marx?

Some Noteworthy Quotations

"The whole family in heaven and earth.' The difference betwixt us and them is, not that we are really two, but one body in Christ, in divers places. True, we are below stairs, and they above; they in their holiday, and we in our working day clothes; they in harbor, but we in the storm; they at rest, but we in the wilderness: they singing, as crowned with joy, we crying, as crowned with thorns. But we are all of one house, and are all the children of one Father."

—John Bunyan

"It is a great dishonor to God to trust Him no further than we see Him. You trust the ground with your corn, and can expect a crop out of the dry clods, though you do not see how it grows, nor which way it thrives in order to the harvest. It is a great folly to distrust the Lord, because the mercies we expect do not presently grow up and flower in our sight and apprehension."

—Thomas Manton

"It is a usual observation, many parents go to hell in getting an estate for their children, and their children go to hell afterward in spending that estate."

—Thomas Manton

"Religion, in all its manifestations, waits, like all other human functioning, on the operation of ideas; here too the line of action is from perception, through emotion, to volition. And nothing can be more certain than that if the theology of the Bible is discarded, the religion of the Bible is discarded with it. We shall certainly have religion: we cannot avoid that: man is a religious animal. But our religion will not be the religion of the Bible unless — among other elements of it — our religious conceptions, that is, our theology, be the religious conceptions, that is to say, the theology of the Bible."

—B. B. Warfield

"There is a wicked man that goes blinded, and a wicked man that goes with his eyes open, to hell; there is a wicked man that cannot see, and a wicked man that will not see, the danger

he is in; but hell-fire will open the eyes of both."

—John Bunyan

"A true repentance, being not only a turning from sin, but a turning unto God, supposes the soul to be enlightened to understand something of the way in which God can alone be acceptably approached, through a Mediator. No soul ever comes to God, unless it has some apprehension of His mercy IN CHRIST. The exercise of faith in Christ is included in a genuine repentance."

—Archibald Alexander

"Men are considered in Holy Scripture, as in bondage, under the slavery of sin, and subject to the tyranny of Satan. From this state of thralldom, they can be delivered only by an almighty Redeemer. But POWER alone is not adequate to the work of redemption. A PRICE — a ransom sufficient to satisfy divine justice must be paid. Silver and gold, and all earthly treasures, avail nothing in the redemption of the soul. Blood must be shed, and life sacrificed . . . The blood shed, and the life given, must be divine. But how can this be? The eternal Son of God offers Himself to be the Redeemer, and to pay the price required . . . 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.' He was named JESUS because He should save His people from their sins."

—Archibald Alexander

"Do these things. See sin to be the worst of evils, and depart from it. See Christ to be the best of goods, and choose Him, and cleave to Him. See the world passing away, and set not thy heart upon it. See the ways of God to be the best ways, and His people the best people; and walk in those ways, and with those people. See heaven and hell before you, and conduct accordingly. Love the Word of God; make it your guide, your food."

—Philip Henry

"God reserves three things to Himself: the revenge of injuries, Rom. 12:19; the glory of deeds, Isa. 42:8; and the knowledge of secrets, Deut. 29:29."

—Philip Henry

Bringing Up Children

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2). In too many homes in America today the heartbreaking cry of this verse could be echoed. Juvenile delinquency

seems to be still on the increase. Not merely from broken homes or homes where the parents themselves are delinquents, but from so-called respectable homes come young people who rebel against their parents and other authority. It is not merely the aftermath of war

and the by-product of divorce. More and more it seems to be well-nigh universal in America. More and more we are reaping the fruit of an educational system that leaves God out of the picture. How can we expect children to obey and respect constituted authority when they are given no basis for obedience other than the arbitrary word of the parent or other person in authority? By excluding religion completely from the school, God-ordained authority cannot be taught, and ethics are left hanging in the air. Rebellion follows as a matter of course. The only remedy is a school where every hour sees each subject in its proper relation to

the Triune God, and commands are to be obeyed because God has ordained it. Merely adding the teaching of the Bible to a pagan system is not sufficient. Each subject must be seen in its true relation to God's government of the universe, otherwise the correct impression cannot be made on the mind of the student. No sacrifice is too great to organize and support the Christian school.

—Rev. Floyd E. Hamilton
in Daily Manna Calendar

Religious Terms Defined

RAPTURE. The supernatural event which will immediately follow the resurrection and the transformation of living saints, in which the redeemed shall be caught up to Christ in the clouds, and set on His right hand (Larger Catechism, 90).

RATIONALISM. The doctrine that the human faculty of reason is the supreme authority for faith and life.

REDEEMER OF GOD'S ELECT. "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever" (Shorter Catechism, 21).

REDEMPTION. Christ's work of meeting all the requirements of God on behalf of the elect, by which He laid the sure foundation of their salvation.

REFORMATION. The great religious movement of the 16th century, beginning with the work of Martin Luther, by which the original truth and purity of Chris-

tianity, which had become corrupted by grievous error during the Middle Ages, were in large measure restored. The Protestant churches which arose out of the Reformation are not new churches, as maintained by Roman Catholics, but a return to the true Christianity set forth in the Word of God. The fact that the Protestant bodies do not have a formal history before Luther's time does not prove that they are new and therefore false. What counts is not mere continuity of organization, but identity of teaching with that of the apostles.

REFORMED FAITH. That interpretation of Christianity which gives full recognition to the absolute sovereignty of God and to man's absolute dependence upon God for every factor of his faith, salvation and life. Also correctly called "Calvinism," "Augustinianism," and "Consistent Biblical Christianity."

REFORMED THEOLOGY. The system of theology which sets forth the Reformed Faith, Calvinism, or Consistent Biblical Christianity.

Reviews of Religious Books

The favorable reviewing of a book here does not imply approval of its entire contents. Purchase books from your book dealer or from the publishers. Do not send orders for books to Blue Banner Faith and Life.

TRUMPETER OF GOD: A BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN KNOX, by W. S. Reid. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974, pp. 353. \$12.50.

The title of this biography of the Scottish Reformer of the 16th century was suggested by an idea often expressed by Knox himself that his vocation was to "blow his master's trumpet," that is, to preach the evangelical gospel in opposition to Roman Catholicism. Perhaps those who know little else about John Knox have heard of the blast of his trumpet against the contemporary queens who ruled in Scotland and England: Mary of Guise, Queen Regent of Scotland, and Mary Stewart,

Queen of Scots, who with their allies among the nobility were determined to perpetuate Romanism as the religion of his native land as it was in France where the rulers were trying to suppress Protestantism; and Mary Tudor, Queen of England, who vigorously followed the same policy by burning Protestants at the stake.

The author of this book is Professor Stanford Reid of the history department in the University of Guelph, Canada, who is also an evangelical Presbyterian minister. So, unlike several other biographers of Knox, he writes with understanding and sympathy with his subject. He does not gloss over the rough aspects of Knox's personality, who was a man of the 16th century, but he does not write with animosity towards the Scottish reformer.

The author follows Knox throughout his life from his birth between 1513-1515 at Haddington to his death in

Edinburgh in 1572. He recounts the events that led to his conversion to the Reformed religion and call to preach; his captivity as a galley-slave in the French navy; his subsequent travels and ministry in England; and then, when Mary Tudor was enthroned and began to persecute Protestants, in France and Switzerland, where at Geneva, he found what he called "the most perfect school of Christ." In 1559 he responded to a call to return to Scotland, and in the turbulent years that followed he blew his trumpet with such vigor from the pulpit of the Kirk of St. Giles in Edinburgh that he became the leader of the Reformation movement and eventually succeeded against great opposition and in spite of wavering support in having Protestantism established as the religion of the land by action of the Scottish Parliament in 1560 and reaffirmed in 1567. But this book is not merely the retelling of the story of Knox's life. It sets the life of Knox against the background of the social and political conditions of 16th century Europe, and gives a penetrating interpretation of the motivation of his actions and the basic principles of his writings and sermons. Knox is revealed as a man of single-minded determination, forceful personality and great courage. At his burial in the Kirk of St. Giles, Edinburgh, James Douglas, Earl of Morton and Regent of Scotland, by no means a staunch supporter, said of him, "Here lies one who never feared any flesh." John Knox's influence in history from his own time down to this 20th century, 400 years later, is assessed in a final chapter.

This is a work of first-rate scholarship. The author's statements are fully documented in 33 pages of Notes which incidentally show his wide reading in the primary sources. These and the 13 pages of Bibliography listed primary and secondary sources, both books and manuscripts, disclose that this Biography of Knox is the fruit of a life-time of research and writing on the subject.

—Alexander N. MacLeod

ADVENTURES OF SANDY AND ANN, by Irene Stewart. The Knox Press, 15 North Bank St., Edinburgh EH1 2LS, Scotland. No date. Paperback, pp. 28, illustrated. 15 Pence.

This is an attractively produced story for children. The reviewer finds the teaching Biblical with one exception which will be noted below. The book would make a suitable gift item for children ages about 8 to 12 years.

We must register an objection to the section entitled "If It's Doubtful, It's Dirty." (Pages 22-23.) This reflects a common Fundamentalist or Pietist attitude which tends to make conscience rather than Scripture the standard of right and wrong. This very common attitude overlooks the teaching of Paul about the weak brother in the Epistle to the Romans. The weak brother is the one who has doubts or scruples about matters which should not bother him at all. His doubts or scruples are immaturity; they indicate an inadequate grasp of Christian truth. This weak brother has a diffident or doubting type of mind. He should not be encouraged to do any-

thing about which he has doubts; but on the other hand, he should be encouraged to get his doubts resolved in the light of further study of Scripture. If this weak brother does not get relief from his diffident frame of mind, he may become obsessed with the idea that he has committed the unpardonable sin. We commend the treatment of the subject by John Calvin to the author of the book and our readers. **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, Book III, Chapter XIX (in Beveridge translation, Volume II, pages 130-142).

—J.G. Vos

HISTORY OF THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, 1893-1970. Free Presbyterian Publications. 427 pp. \$7.95 (cloth).

The F.P. Church was a secession from the pre-1900 Free Church, over the Declaratory Act of 1892. Its *raison d'être* ever since has been the maintenance of the polemic against the Free Church that it has never repented of that Act, nor freed itself from its consequences. The reviewer, as one who has a real soft spot for the "F.P.'s", and was at one time a member of the Free Church, is inclined to feel that there is some real justification for the charge of the F.P.'s that the Constitutionalists who "stayed in" in 1893 somewhat seared their consciences to do it. On the other hand, the attempt to keep the issue of 1893 alive in the closing years of the twentieth century is a startling example of ecclesiastical irrelevance and can only harm both denominations in their witness to today's world.

This 'History' is in some respects a most refreshing volume. It is almost the recent history of Scotland through F.P. eyes, for on virtually every page there is some testimony borne toward some aspect of "current affairs." In this respect, the F.P.'s put to shame even the Reformed Presbyterians, with their much-vaunted, but little heard, 'testimony bearing'. Read this book if you want to know what the Church Militant is supposed to be doing. A fascinating volume!

—Gordon J. Keddie

THE HERITAGE OF OUR FATHERS. G. N. M. Collins. Knox Press (Edinburgh), 1974, 171 pp. \$3.45 (cloth)

"The Free Church of Scotland: Her Origin and Testimony" is the sub-title of this volume. Professor Collins, with that "pen of a ready writer" for which he is so well known, has given us an up-to-date account of the history of the Free Kirk and the current rationale for its independent denominational existence. He has done so with an admirable blend of popular style and scholarly precision.

The Free Kirk was born in the "Disruption" of the Church of Scotland over the question of Patronage in 1843. Led by Thomas Chalmers, and a host of other eminent Reformed theologians—Cunningham, Smeaton, Candlish, Bannerman, Buchanan, etc.—the church became a force in the land, soon boasting several hundred

thousand members in a country of not much over two million people. A generation later, theological liberalism reared its ugly head, and the Free Church moved toward modification of her subscription to the Westminster Standards. The notorious Declaratory Act of 1892 paved the way for union with the United Presbyterians in 1900 (forming the United Free Church, which in turn united with the Established Church in 1929). The present Free Church represents the continuing "Constitutionalist" party after 1900. They returned to historic orthodoxy, rescinded offending church law and since then have claimed to be the inheritors of the mantle of the Disruption and, before it, the Scottish Reformation itself.

This book is very much an historical vindication of the Free Kirk and it will appeal more to those with an antiquarian interest. Insofar as it avoids discussing the problems facing the Free Church as it seeks to bear its Reformed testimony today, it will disappoint those who wish to see some concrete applications of the lessons of the past.

The format is acceptable but unimaginative, while the binding, especially in the paperback version, leaves a lot to be desired. Recommended as the best "run-down" available on the Free Church of Scotland.

—Gordon J. Keddie

MAKING AND MARRING THE SCOTTISH PSALTER. J. L. Clugston. (Box C 100, Clarence St. P.O., Sydney, N.S.W., Australia 2000) 1974, 60 pp., 65c Australian post free.

An extremely well-documented survey of the development of psalmody in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. The author is a member of the psalm-singing Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

The thesis of the booklet is that psalm-singers must return to the 1650 Psalter as the vehicle of their praise. All other versions are marred to a sufficient degree to make them less desirable. Evidently the 1650 Psalter is the "textus receptus" of psalmody for Mr. Clugston.

While the booklet is fascinating and a very useful source of information of psalmody, the arguments and conclusions are often quite fallacious. The new R.P.C.N.A. **Book of Psalms for Singing** is written off as a dangerous innovation on account of everything from addressing God as "You" to having 417 tunes. (An F.P. church in N.S. Wales only uses 12 tunes in a year!) It is all reminiscent of the story told in Millar Patrick's **Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody**, about the aged preceptor who turned over his duties to his son, with the sage advice, "Resist all change!" —Gordon J. Keddie

SAY YES TO MISSION, by Ralph D. Winter. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill. 60515. pp. 28, paper cover. 25c.

This little booklet is a challenge to those who may be

thinking of taking up mission work, or to those, even, who may be questioning the usefulness and validity of missions at the present time.

Such questions as: Are missions not, in any case, a lost cause? are answered in the light of what is taking place in mission fields throughout the world. It is pointed out that there is throughout America, as in other places, much ignorance as to what is happening in lands of which we hardly ever think in connection with the Gospel.

The author confronts us with truths that we need to hear constantly in order to jolt us out of our complacency and remind us of the duty laid upon the Church to preach the Gospel to every creature. —Donald Gillies

THE ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF MAN, by Francis Nigel Lee. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey 07110. 1974, pp. 119. \$2.95.

This is a fascinating book. The author is a master in so many fields that his work will prove profitable to anyone interested in any field of learning.

The questions of "primordial creation" and then of "formation week"—the six days described in Genesis chapter 1, up to the creation of man, are first dealt with, and while the author acknowledges that much there is shrouded in mystery, much also is to be learned from his tackling of the problems.

When he goes on to deal with the question of man's origin he bases his conclusions on Scripture, but at the same time shows how much he is abreast of present-day psychology, and how much he knows of the chemical constitution of the human body.

After dealing with "The Essence of Man," "The Plight of Man," and "The Hope of Man," the author sums up under the heading "The Destiny of Man" something of what is involved for man in the return of Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of the Redemptive Purpose of God. —Donald Gillies

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH, by Arthur W. Pink. Reiner Publications, Swengel, Pa. 17880, pp. 192.

Readers of the late Arthur Pink's magazine, **Studies in the Scriptures** will welcome these studies in book form. The author was ever careful to warn against superficial views of the Gospel, and against shallow views of sin. Here he treats of the difference between saving faith and everything that on the surface may appear like it, but is not saving.

After carefully distinguishing between faith and its counterfeits, the author adds chapters on what it means to come to Christ, and on the assurance of faith. This is a book we heartily commend, for a careful reading of it

will not fail to edify.

—Donald Gillies

ISRAEL TODAY: FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY?
by Louis A. DeCaro. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Box 185, Nutley, New Jersey 07110. 1974, pp. 241, paper cover. \$4.50.

This is distinctly a work of superior merit. I am impressed with its high degree of Biblical scholarship, good sense, and sound point of view. The author is fully committed to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. This book is much needed today when the evangelical public is being flooded with books and articles presenting highly debatable positions in the interpretation of prophecy as indubitable truth.

In recent years there has been a great proliferation of books on the subject of prophecy, and especially books setting forth the idea that the present-day Republic of Israel is a fulfilment of prophecy and an indication of the nearness of the return of the Lord. The present intense continued crisis between the Republic of Israel and the Arab nations is bound to result in a profuse new crop of this type of books. Most of this literature will be without value to Christians who adhere with mature conviction to the historic Christian Faith and its expression in the Church's historic confessions, because the literature is and will be based on unwarranted presuppositions characteristic of Darby-Scofield Dispensationalism—the imminent secret rapture, the great tribulation, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, restoration of the ritual sacrifices, and so forth. Those who have examined this popular and energetically promoted scheme and found it unconvincing and not supported

by sound exegesis of the Scriptures, will certainly not be impressed by the type of literature just described. In addition, many if not most of these books will fall naively into the error of confusing the **meaning** of Scripture prophecies with **identification of the fulfilment**, thus introducing an element of fallible human opinion in dealing with statements of the infallible Word.

If it is true that ALL the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20), it follows that there are NO promises of God addressed to those NOT in Christ. Zionism and the Republic of Israel today are nationalistic and secular movements and certainly do not involve being in Christ. Popular writers on prophecy overlook this most important consideration, and assume that Bible promises and prophecies can pledge benefits and success to a nation and a movement that is certainly in unbelief.

It is the merit of Pastor DeCaro's book that he handles the question of "Israel Today—Fulfilment of Prophecy?" in a truly Biblical manner. While holding firmly to the plenary inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures, and the reality and relevance of predictive prophecy in the Bible, he avoids the prevalent errors in the popular—and even sensational—books which are becoming common today.

It is a pleasure to recommend this book. May the Holy Spirit use and bless it, and by it enable many to think clearly and soundly on this very important subject.

—J.G. Vos

Christian Verse by Esther Belle Heins

The Warmth of a Prayer

"I pray for you each night," she said,
And thus made bright my day,
The sky had never been so blue!
The song of birds was gay.
My heart felt warm and rich and sweet,
So dear a friend can be!
How value prayer that soars to God
On wings of love—for me?

The Secret Place of God (Based on 91st Psalm)

There is a blessed Psalm I read
That's lovely in my sight,
It gives me joy throughout the day
And comfort in the night.
God's angels have charge over me,
This Psalm has told me so,
I have this sweet assurance now
Wherever I may go.

In the secret place of God is peace
The world can never claim,
Since I set my love upon my Lord—
My heart holds dear His Name!
In the secret place of God, beneath
The shadow of His wings—
He has made my habitation sure;
My soul rejoices, sings!

My Prayer

God grant today that I be kind,
That those I meet may see
The loveliness of Christ my Lord,
Revealed somehow in me.

God help me be compassionate;
If someone in despair
Should cross my path—perhaps You plan
Through me, to show You care.

God help me go the extra mile;

Your Son went all the way,
God grant within my little soul
That I be big today!

Journey's End

How can each thought be faced with love
Save Thou dost make the seam?
How can we build except Thou art
Foundation, Column, Beam?
How can our anchors hold if not

Bound to the solid Rock?
If we would pasture safely, Lord,
Must Thou not lead the flock?
What way is found to God's great throne
Save faith the ladder be?
How may we lodge within Thy gates
Unless the cross we see?

Thou art our Maker, Builder, Port
Our Shepherd, Way and Friend;
Because of faith in Thy shed blood,
Thou art our journey's end.

Contributions Received

The following contributions have been received since our last issue went to press (March 31, 1975):

April, 1975. No. 2806, \$2.50. No. 2807, \$22.50. No. 2808, .50. No. 2809, \$2.50. No. 2810, \$7.50. No. 2811, \$25.00.

May, 1975. No. 2812, \$18.00. No. 2813, \$30.84. No. 2814, \$2.00. No. 2815, \$25.00. No. 2816, \$5.00. No. 2817, \$69.00. No. 2818, \$5.00. No. 2819, \$5.00.

June, 1975. No. 2820, .50. No. 2821, \$22.62.

Later contributions will be reported in our next

issue. Without such generous contributions as these it would hardly be possible to continue publishing the magazine, as subscriptions and sales of back issues and reprints provide only about half of the amount needed. We are trying to resist the tide of inflation by not raising our subscription rates. Many thanks to all who have helped. Your contributions are deductible from your Federal taxable income if you live in the United States.

J.G. Vos, Manager
3408 Seventh Avenue
Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania
15010 U.S.A.

Reprints, Xerox Copies and Microfilm Copies

We are out of copies of the Syllabus on Old Testament History. If and when it is available again, we shall inform our readers. Much of the same content was published some years back in the magazine. We may be able to provide it in the form of back issues. Write for information if interested.

Back issues of recent years, and some of earlier years, are available at 50 cents per issue, postpaid. For some earlier years only used copies are available.

Xerox and microfilm copies of everything that has ever been published in this magazine are available. Write for circular telling how to order same.

Reprints of particular articles are available as follows. Most of these are issued at approximately the cost of production or less.

Available from Crown and Covenant Publications, 800 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15221

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The Burial of Moses

By Mrs. C. F. Alexander

By Nebo's lonely mountain
On this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab
There lies a lonely grave.
And no man knows that sepulchre,
And no man saw it e'er;
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
And laid the dead man there.

That was the grandest funeral
That ever passed on earth;
But no man heard the trampling
Or saw the train go forth —
Noiselessly as the daylight
Comes back when night is done,
And the crimson streak on ocean's cheek
Grows into the great sun,

Noiselessly as the spring-time
Her crown of verdure weaves,
And all the trees on all the hills
Open their thousand leaves;
So without sound of music,
Or the voice of them that wept,
Silently down from the mountain's crown
The great procession swept.

Perchance the old bald eagle
On gray Beth-Peor's height,
Out of his lonely eyrie
Looked on the wondrous sight;
Perchance the lion stalking
Still shuns that hallowed spot,
For beast and bird have seen and heard
That which man knoweth not.

But when the warrior dieth,
His comrades in the war,
With arms reversed and muffled drum,
Follow his funeral car;
They show the banners taken,
They tell his battles won,
And after him lead his masterless steed,
While peals the minute gun.

Amid the noblest of the land
We lay the sage to rest
And give the bard an honored place,
With costly marbled rest,
In the great minster transept
Where lights like glory fall,
And the organ rings, and the sweet choir sings
Along the emblazoned wall.

This was the truest warrior
That ever buckled sword,
This the most gifted poet
That ever breathed a word;
And never earth's philosopher
Traced with his golden pen,
On the deathless page, truths half so sage
As he wrote down for men.

And had he not high honor —
The hillside for a pall,
To lie in state while angels wait
With stars for tapers tall,
And the dark rock pines, like tossing plumes,
Over his bier to wave,
And God's own hand in that lonely land,
To lay him in the grave.

In that strange grave without a name,
Whence his uncoffined clay
Shall break again, O wondrous thought!
Before the Judgment Day,
And stand with glory wrapt around
On the hills he never trod,
And speak of the strife that won our life,
With the Incarnate Son of God.

O lonely grave in Moab's land;
O dark Beth-Peor's hill;
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways that we cannot tell;
He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
Of him He loved so well.

BLUE BANNER FAITH AND LIFE

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NUMBER 4

Studies in the Book of Revelation

LESSON 44

THE SEALING OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD, Revelation 7:1ff.

Chapter 6 ended with a scene of mortal terror. Now here in chapter 7 is the other side of the matter. Here the people of God are under special divine protection. In the first part of chapter 7 they are described as being "sealed." You can "seal" your car to prevent metal parts from getting rusty. Now sealing is described here in the Bible as indicating ownership and therefore God's protection of His children. They are sealed with a seal or mark on their forehead indicating that they belong to God in a special way and therefore are under His special protection. So the seal here (not to be taken literally, of course) indicates God's ownership and protection of His own redeemed people.

These passages are closely related to some in Ezekiel. The Holy Spirit who inspired the book of Ezekiel is also the true author of the Book of Revelation. So in a way the Holy Spirit is quoting Himself here. Note Ezekiel 9:1-11. In Ezekiel's vision God commands the man with the inkhorn to place a mark upon the people of Jerusalem who have remained faithful to Him. Then all others are to be slain. Ezekiel is grieved that the great majority of the people are to be slain, but the Lord tells him that this is because their iniquity is very great (Ezekiel 9:9). Note how closely all this in Ezekiel is tied in with the Book of Revelation.

In His great High Priestly Prayer, John chapter 17, Jesus prayed for His own people, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). So the godly may suffer outwardly, but the meaning and purpose in their suffering is entirely different from the case of wicked people.

A Christian and a non-Christian may experience the same things outwardly, but the meaning and purpose are not the same. Paul tells us in Romans chapters 5 and 8 that to the people of God tribulation can bring blessing. It is hard to think of it in this way, but I am sure it is true. We can even glory in tribulations, for their final outcome is for our great good—we attain the hope that makes not ashamed—the hope that does not disappoint the believer. And in Romans 8:28 we are taught that

all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose. Perhaps you don't feel that way when trouble and affliction strike, but you can believe the Word of God by faith and know that it is true.

Here in Revelation 7 we have the twelve tribes of Israel listed. There are four angels described standing on the four corners of the earth. This of course implies nothing as to the shape of the earth—it simply means the points of the compass, north, south, east and west, that is, everywhere. They are holding the winds of the earth. The wind in the Bible is a symbol of destructive force and power. These angels are restraining the winds of calamity on the earth, until the servants of God have been marked.

John heard the number of the sealed, the total being 144,000. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this means them, but actually they have far more than 144,000 members in the world today. Revelation 7 lists the total as 144,000 and then lists the tribes and says that 12,000 were sealed from each tribe. Twelve times twelve equals 144, and 12 times 12,000 equals 144,000. This is taken by some people to mean the literal people of the tribes of Israel, or the Jews; it is also claimed that the great number mentioned later in chapter 7 refers to the Gentiles. But this interpretation about the 144,000 runs into a difficulty in connection with the listing of the twelve tribes. Nowhere else in the Bible is there such a listing of the twelve tribes as this. The names of the twelve tribes are the names of ten sons and two grandsons of Jacob. There was no tribe of Joseph, but each of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became a tribe. The tribe of Levi was not ordinarily counted as they did not receive a block of territory. If you count Ephraim and Manasseh and Levi, and leave out Joseph, you get a total of 13, but Levi was omitted giving the traditional total of 12.

Here in Revelation 7, however, Levi is included, contrary to other listings of the tribes in the Bible. Also Dan is omitted; and Joseph is included although this overlaps his son and Manasseh. Ephraim is omitted.

Another irregularity is that Judah is mentioned first, not Reuben, who was the firstborn of Jacob's sons. Reuben was the son of Jacob and Leah, and is ordinarily listed first because of being the firstborn. But according to God's plans the Saviour of the world was to be descended from Judah, so Judah gets listed first here.

Also at the time when John wrote the Book of Revelation, some of these tribes were virtually non-existent; they had been virtually extinct for a long time. The New Testament mentioned scattered individuals of the various almost-extinct tribes.

I take it the unusual listing of the tribes in Revelation 7 was intended by the Holy Spirit to be a warning signal to us not to take the matter literally. If it was to be taken literally there would be no irregularities and no overlaps, and certainly Reuben would be mentioned first. And if intended to be taken literally there would not be exactly twelve thousand from each tribe, for the twelve tribes varied greatly in population; some had many times more people than others.

Surely the meaning here is that the redeemed or the elect of God are a definite number, known to God and determined by Him. And these are under His special protection, with no regard to time or space of other circumstances. There is a definite number that God knows, and these must be sealed and protected by God, and the Judgment Day cannot come until every last one of God's chosen in Christ has been counted. So they are protected from God's judgments on the world. God said to Adam and Eve, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." If you take that literally, the Judgment Day would have come as soon as Adam and Eve disobeyed God. God deferred the Judgment thousands of years—who knows how many thousands?—in order that human history could take place and that Christ could come in the fulness of time and work redemption. The Judgment Day cannot come until this reaches its climax and consummation. The four angels that hold the four winds hold back the ultimate manifestation of the power of God's wrath. So these terrible things cannot come fully and absolutely on the earth until Christ's second coming when all the children of God shall have been brought to Him. This time of course is known only to God.

LESSON 45

THE VISION OF THE GREAT WHITE-ROBED MULTITUDE, Revelation 7:9-17

Now we come to the second vision of Revelation chapter 7, from verse 9. John saw a great multitude clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb. This multitude is said to be so great that it would be humanly impossible to count them. This is certainly meant to bring out that the redeemed are not only a definite number but also a very great number. God said to Abraham that his descendants would be innumerable, as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. Sit down on an ocean beach and start counting the grains of sand on the seashore. You will run out of time long before you run out of sand.

As we look around the world today, we certainly do not get the impression that the redeemed are innumerable as the sand. Christians in the world today seem to be a sort of down-graded scoffed-at minority; I mean real Christians who show by their life that they are believers. We should realize, however, that God's plans and our ideas are not the same. We are very near-sighted as we look at historical events; we are very limited in our horizon as to times and events. God, on the other hand, is above history and He sees the whole process and product from above, all at once and in its completeness. When the roll is called up yonder, and the number of the elect is complete, and they appear in eternal glory, it will be seen that they are indeed a very great company that no man could number.

It cannot be absolutely proved from the Bible that all who die in infancy are saved, but this is generally

believed by Bible-believing theologians on a number of general grounds such as God's mercy and compassion. We should realize that those dying in infancy constitute by far the greater portion of the human race. It has been credibly estimated that more than 50% of the children born in China and India and several other countries, in past times, have died before they reached the age of two years. So even leaving adults out of consideration, the number of humans dying in infancy through the ages of history would easily make an innumerable throng.

Notice the universality of the vision. This is not just the people of Israel; this company of people includes all nations, kindreds, peoples and tongues. The redeemed of God include people from all parts of humanity, not just "white Anglo-Saxon Protestants." And all these people are before the throne of God, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. And they cry with a loud voice and praise God. This is the praise of the redeemed, and we should note that it is praise for salvation. This is in verse 10. In verse 12 the angels praise God, and they do not mention salvation, only the attributes and perfections of God. There is no salvation for angels. But with the redeemed of humanity it is salvation that is emphasized. Note that this praise is directed to God and to the Lamb, that is, Jesus Christ. Those people who think it is enough just to believe in God, that we don't need to believe in Jesus Christ, are not on Bible ground. There is no name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, except the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

You can't get to heaven by being a good Jew or even a good Covenanter. You get to heaven in one way only—by the redemption of Jesus Christ.

In the praise of the angels seven things are mentioned: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, might (verse 12). All these are ascribed unto God for ever and ever. These are the attributes and qualities of God; this is what God is. He is all these things combined, and absolutely. But the angels say never a word about salvation. The holy angels never needed salvation, and as for the fallen angels, there is no salvation for them. "For ever and ever. Amen." What does Amen mean? Amen is the Greek spelling of a Hebrew word meaning "truth" or "truly." In the Gospels when Jesus says "Verily, verily I say unto you. . ." in the Greek this is "Amen, Amen, I say unto you. . ." The meaning is "Truly, truly, I say unto you." We say Amen at the conclusion of a prayer to certify that we meant what we said. If we didn't mean anything, this is formalism and dishonoring to God.

Now one of the 24 elders addresses John. You will recall that these 24 elders represent the Church of the Old and New Dispensations. This elder is himself one of the redeemed. He asks John, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" Of course he himself knows the answer to this question; he asks it as a teaching device to get John's attention to a particular matter. John replies, "Sir, thou knowest," and the elder then says, "These are they which came out of great tribulation (or great trouble) and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." That is how they got to heaven: by having themselves washed in the blood of Christ, the Saviour of the world.

This present life at its best is a time of tribulation. God's people who are faithful to Him suffer in the present world. But each one of God's people in his time is lifted out of the great tribulation to a place and a

life where there is no tribulation, and where they are before the throne of God and the Lamb. Back in Exodus (12:13), God said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." This is the center, heart and core of the Gospel. It is so easy for us to fall for the devil's lies and believe in salvation by good works and human goodness, but in the Bible it is by shed blood, and there is no other way.

Notice that the blessedness of the redeemed is described here both positively and negatively. Negatively, it includes deliverance from all evil of whatever kind. There is no death, there is no suffering, there is no grief in heaven. All these things in heaven are the opposite of the state of the redeemed in this present world. And on the positive side the thing that is emphasized is the presence and favor and fellowship of God. They are in service to Him, they are before His throne and they praise Him day and night in His temple.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. So it shows that heaven will be wonderful far more than we can imagine. But the real meaning and value of it will be in the center, the presence and fellowship of God. Heaven without God would not be heaven, and of course heaven without Jesus Christ would not be heaven. And all the suffering and tears will fade away like a dream. You will wake up and find yourself in a life just the opposite of this present veil of tears. The sadness and the pains, the disappointments and heartbreaks of this life will all be healed.

You will realize, of course, that what is spoken of here in the second part of chapter 7 is not the ultimate bliss of the redeemed. This is the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. These are the souls of the redeemed in heaven. And chapter 7 ends with this beautiful statement: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

LESSON 46

THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL AND WHAT FOLLOWED, Revelation 8:1ff.

Chapter 8 begins with the opening of the seventh seal. The first six seals are in previous chapters. The sixth one is way back at 6:12. Now we have in chapter 8 the opening of the seventh seal. This is followed by silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

This is followed by the blowing of seven trumpets. Trumpets in the Bible are warnings of judgments to come. Trumpets are warnings; the bowls which come later (in chapter 16) go beyond the trumpets; they are not mere warnings of impending judgments, but the actual outpouring of the wrath and judgment of God on the earth. Here in chapter 8 it is only warning in the form of trumpet blasts. The trumpets are synchronous with the seals; we should not suppose that the seals

come first and the trumpets later; they have to be in sequence in the book, of course, because you can't say everything all at once in a written book. But I think it is correct to say that both the seals and the trumpets describe events which can and do happen again and again throughout the history of God's people between Christ's ascension and His second coming. These are things which can and do happen repeatedly, perhaps with increasing intensity. By these trumpets God calls the wicked to repentance.

These are certainly not the ultimate judgment of God. This is shown by the contrast of the bowls of wrath in chapter 16. Also as you have read chapter 8 you may have noticed that every one of them speaks

of destruction being partial, not total—the third part of the world and its contents. These are therefore not the ultimate and total destruction that the judgment of God will finally bring. Only one third. The function of trumpets in the Bible is primarily to warn; they are not primarily musical instruments, but symbols or signals of warning to the ungodly and wicked. This can be seen in many places in the Bible, but especially in Ezekiel chapter 33. You will realize that there are many similarities between Revelation and Ezekiel. Note the first six verses of Ezekiel chapter 33. The watchman is set by God to warn the people of approaching danger. He warns them by blowing a trumpet. If he fails to sound the trumpet, he is held responsible. And later in the chapter the Lord says He has set Ezekiel as a spiritual watchman for the people of Israel, not primarily to warn them about invading armies, but to call attention to their sins and need for repentance, to warn the people to turn from their sins and turn back to God. This is the basic idea of blowing trumpets in the Bible. In Revelation 8 four trumpets are blown, and in each case the blowing is followed by devastation affecting some part of the world system. Various parts and elements of the world are affected. Thesea, the land surface, the trees and vegetation, and so on. Thus the devastation is complete in its extent but not total in its degree. But there is no place to which the wicked can escape or get away from the judgments of God, neither on land or sea. There is no place that is exempt from the pouring out of the devastating judgment of God.

The first four trumpets bring pain and physical suffering and injury on wicked people. Trumpets 5, 6, and 7 (in the next chapter) bring spiritual distress. Hendriksen says that when it comes to trumpets 5, 6, and 7, pure chaos is on the earth.

Taking this as a whole it is strongly reminiscent of the ten plagues in Egypt in Moses' day. You will recall that there was a plague of blood, a plague of hail, a plague of darkness, a plague of frogs, a plague of locusts, and so forth, and finally after the first nine there came the tenth, the death of the firstborn. So here in Revelation several of these same things are mentioned under the seven trumpets, which remind us of the plagues that God brought upon the land of Egypt back in the time of Moses, which meant divine judgment on the Egyptians and divine redemption for Israel. In view of all this the Lord could later say to them, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:1). This was done by power, the power of God. He put a pressure on Egypt to make it possible for the people of Israel to do what they never could have done themselves, to get free from the tyranny and bondage of Egypt. In a wider Bible sense we can understand this as God's freeing us from the tyranny and bondage of sin. The power is from God; we accept it and believe it, but the power which delivers us from the tyranny and dominion of sin is the power of God.

Notice that the world described under the seven trumpets is worse off than Egypt was under the ten plagues of Moses' day. Egypt had hail and fire, but here in Revelation we read of hail and fire mingled with blood, indicating not only the destruction of property and economic values, together with comfort and tranquility, but actually the destruction of life itself. None of the plagues in Egypt destroyed human life until the tenth and last plague, the death of the firstborn. The previous nine discommoded the Egyptians in their pocketbooks and bank accounts, general comfort and economic stability, but did not destroy human life. But when the tenth plague came, with the death of the firstborn, there was a great cry throughout the land of Egypt, such as had never been heard before. This plague destroyed the firstborn from the firstborn of Pharaoh, the king, to the firstborn of the lowest convict in the dungeon, and even of animals. And it brought about the real release of Israel from Egypt. The plague in Revelation is mingled with blood. These are things that destroy the life of wicked people. The locusts not only damage the foliage of the trees, and destroy it, but in the next chapter they actually bite and damage people. So what we see here in Revelation is worse than anything in the Old Testament.

Coming back to the beginning of chapter 8: there was silence in heaven for half an hour. Does this prove that they have clocks in heaven and count time by hours? Here at Geneva College you can hear the chimes in the tower of the McCartney Library ringing out the quarter hours, not always accurately. Now John is on earth, and the half hour of silence is in heaven, and he experiences it in vision or revelation form. It is as if he was no longer on Patmos but actually in heaven. I take it the half hour of silence is introduced here for dramatic purposes. This kind of silence prepares the reader and heightens the terrible character of the judgment to follow. Now is there such a thing as dramatic silence? If our minister were to stop in the middle of his sermon and stand in dead silence for five minutes, do you think this would produce any unusual effect? There are occasions when absolute dead silence is more effective than speech. And you see, this silence here is quite a contrast to what is to follow. It calls attention to and heightens the effect of the terrible character of what is going to come next, the judgments that are to fall on a wicked world. There is a place in the Old Testament which is parallel to this in Revelation; it may be where the Holy Spirit took the idea which he inspired John to write here. Habakkuk 2:20, "The Lord is in His Holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." Here the silence of the creation is in contrast to God who is going to do something. Then also in Zechariah 2:23, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation." God is raised up out of His holy habitation. This is a metaphor, of course, but it indicates action to come. In the Psalms when the Psalmists call on God to "rise up," this means, "Do something." The rest of Zechariah no doubt tells something of what the impending events are to be. So here in

Revelation 8 silence is introduced for dramatic effect; it foretells the drastic actions of God which are to follow.

Now seven angels are given seven trumpets. These angels did not have the trumpets from their creation; they are given seven trumpets. And who but God could give the seven trumpets to these angels? This indicates to us that the whole business here is not a haphazard series of events that are frightening. They are events planned by God, and it is God who gives the seven angels the seven trumpets. What follows the blowing of the trumpets is the implementing of a plan of God, it is the executing of the justice of God upon a wicked world. This is surely implied here in the word "given."

Note also that these angels are said to "stand before God," certainly a great honor and privilege. You will recall that when Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, disbelieved the word of the angel Gabriel about the coming birth of a son, Gabriel said, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19). The name "Gabriel" means "God is Great." There are ranks and degrees among the angelic hosts.

Next it mentions "another angel", Revelation 8:3, that came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer. This would not be the same altar mentioned in a previous chapter, where we noted the souls of the martyrs under the altar. That would be the altar of burnt offering, on which animals were killed in sacrifice in the Temple and their blood was shed. Here in chapter 8 it is obviously the altar of incense on which was kept red hot charcoal, and the priests would come and place incense powder on this, resulting in a cloud of fragrant smoke. There was given such incense unto this angel, that he should offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. As the smoke of the fragrant incense rises upwards, so the prayers of the saints rise toward the presence of God in heaven.

Now this angel takes his stand by the altar of incense

with his golden censer, and pours the incense out on the charcoal on the altar. It says that "much" incense was given him. Note both the word "much" and also the word "given." The prayers of the Christian believers of the world will rise to God and effect the release of His judgments on the wicked who have persecuted Christians and slaughtered the saints. Not just the prayers of the martyrs in heaven, but the prayers of Christians still on earth who are still under the stress and the agony of persecution and injustice. But their prayers are imperfect, mixed with sin and error. You know it is better to pray an imperfect prayer than not to pray at all; but who of us would say that our prayers and our praying are what they ought to be? They are imperfect, always imperfect. The best we ever do is always imperfect in God's sight. They do not meet God's standards of purity and holiness. Being mixed with error and evil, they must be processed before they can come before the throne of God. So they are mingled with incense by the angel, who pours out the incense with the prayers of the saints, thus making the prayers what they ought to be, and fit for presentation to God. The prayers treated with incense rise as sweet perfume from the altar to the presence of God. The prayers of the saints on earth reach God in heaven in a form that is sure to be heard and answered, because they have been mingled with the incense from the altar.

Now, I take it, this has a theological meaning. It is not put in here simply for dramatic effect. The incense almost certainly means Christ's heavenly intercession, as our great High Priest, which is added to our feeble and imperfect prayers, to make them really acceptable to God. We are imperfect in all that we do; our very religious devotions and prayers are imperfect; but Christ is perfect. He is our advocate and representative and High Priest in heaven, and what He does is fully acceptable and totally pleasing to God. And so when we fail and fall short, the intercession of Christ picks up the slack and the defects, and presents our prayers to God as perfect. It is just as if we were perfect beings that had never fallen into sin; this is what Christ's intercession does for us.

LESSON 47

THE ANGELS AND THE TRUMPETS WARNING OF JUDGMENT, Revelation 8:5ff.

In chapter 8 verse 5 the angel takes some of the fire or glowing charcoal from the altar and fills his censer with it, so that the incense powder and the fire are both in the censer. Then he casts this mixture into the earth. Note that he casts it. This word "cast" implies a decisive action; it cannot mean an accident, nor something merely incidental. It is a definite action performed for a definite purpose. Cast into the earth: something really decisive is about to happen. This is the "go ahead" signal for the judgments that are to follow. An angel here is pushing the button, and from this point on things happen one after another. Four of them happen in this chapter, and three in the next.

Casting the contents of the censer into the earth is immediately followed by voices, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. All of these are acts of God, even in present-day legal terminology. All this is God's reply to the angel casting fire into the earth. God is saying, "All right, I have noticed this and this is going to be done, from here on out." That I take it is the meaning of verse 5. At this signal the seven angels prepared themselves to sound. These trumpet blasts are emphatic and inescapable warnings of judgment to come upon the world. Already in our day and age there are obvious warnings of the judgments of God about to come. Matters are getting beyond human

control. People are filled with fear and anxiety and apprehension.

One of the scientists that developed the atomic bomb—many of these men are terribly ridden with guilt feelings today—said, “I feel like humanity is in a dark tunnel; it is impossible to go out the way we came in, and there is no light at the far end.” The tragedy of possible atomic destruction. And you should realize that if you leave God out, then all that holds us in life is human diplomacy, treaties, negotiations, talks between ambassadors, and so forth—all of them together a foundation of sand. Man has gotten control of the power that could utterly destroy this earth and make it uninhabitable. And unless we believe in the power of God to hold this in abeyance, where is our real safety and protection anymore?

Now note that in each case it is the third part of things that get destroyed. All except the green grass, verse 7, which is totally destroyed. I can’t explain this exception. But the third part of the trees was burned up. Hail and fire mingled with blood, verse 7, burning up the third part of the trees and all the green grass. This is worse than the plagues in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. This first judgment, following the blast of the first angel’s trumpet is upon the earth, the land surface of the world. Next comes the sea, and the trumpet blast is followed by as it were a great mountain burning with fire being cast into the sea. The result of this is terrible devastation. One third of all living things in the sea perished; one third of all ships in the oceans of the world were destroyed. This certainly implies the loss of the lives of the crews, passengers and their possessions. Then comes the third angel, and there fell a great fire from heaven, burning like a lamp, upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of water. The first calamity was on the land surface of the earth; the second on the seas or oceans, and now the third comes upon the land-based waters: rivers, lakes, fountains, and so forth, land based surfaces of water. This great star burning like a lamp fell on these. The name of this star is Wormwood, meaning bitterness. One third of the earth’s water supply becomes contaminated, polluted and made bitter, and destructive of human life, so that many people died because the waters had been made “bitter.”

It is a temptation to stop here and say that this passage is a prediction of a terrific nuclear explosion that will contaminate the land-based waters of the world with radioactivity so that they become lethal. Perhaps that is not intended here, but such a calamity would certainly look like a remarkable fulfilment of this passage. Somebody wrote a book about the first atom bomb, dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, with the title “Brighter than a Million Suns.” And today there are nuclear bombs much more devastating and terrible, that have been tested out in the far Pacific. So it is quite tempting to say that this passage predicts an atomic blast that contaminates the waters that people have to

have in order to live.

Next, the fourth angel sounded, and this trumpet blast brings cosmic and astronomical calamity, such as we noticed in chapter 6. This recalls Peter’s quotations from the Old Testament on the Day of Pentecost, about the sun turning to darkness and the moon into blood, and so forth. Jesus predicted something like this in Matthew 24:29. These cosmic and heavenly disturbances are terrifying and calculated to call people to repentance, although repentance does not seem to result from them. Yet from God’s standpoint this is certainly a trumpet call to men to repent of sin and turn back to God.

In verse 13, the last verse of chapter 8, there is a question about the genuine text of the Greek original. The word “angel” here is almost certainly a manuscript copyist’s error for “eagle.” The most ancient and authentic Greek manuscripts have “eagle.” And in the Greek it is not just “an eagle” but “one eagle,” (*henos aetou*) which could well be translated “one eagle” or better yet, “a single eagle.” This eagle is flying through the midst of the sky, saying something with a loud voice. This eagle is flying high, visible to all mankind. This is an announcement from God, by this single eagle, as he speaks with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!” In other words, the four trumpet blasts of chapter 8 are pretty bad, but the three which are going to come in the next chapter are much worse. So people are warned that what has already happened in the judgment of God is not all, there is more and worse yet to come. This eagle is God’s way of announcing this.

Now we see the world today more or less going to the devil. Godly people seem to have less and less influence in world affairs. Wicked people who have repudiated the Gospel of God’s grace and who think nothing of Jesus, seem to be running things. But this chapter will teach us not to judge by the superficial appearance—not just by what you get from your television screen and newspaper and radio broadcasts. Behind the scenes there is reality. God has not abandoned this world, neither has He forgotten it. He is there watching and preparing for action. His plan is going to go through and there will be the results He planned and intended. The judgments which wicked people have brought on themselves by their sins and unbelief and refusal to repent, will surely crash on their heads. As the poet James Russell Lowell wrote, a bit before the Civil War here in America, in his indignation and concern because of the awful injustice of slavery:

“Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.”

LESSON 48

THE TRUMPET BLASTS OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH ANGELS, Revelation 9:1ff.

Chapter 8 ended with an eagle flying high and wide over the world crying "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" Of the seven trumpets, four have been blown and three are yet to be blown. Now the fifth angel sounds his trumpet. These trumpets are warnings of impending judgments; they are not the absolute and final judgments, which are to come later. The intent is to motivate people to repent and turn back to God. As we shall see at the end of chapter 9 the repentance does not take place, however.

As the fifth angel sounds John sees a star fall from heaven or the sky on to the earth (9:1). This star apparently is Satan, who was an angel of light before he fell into sin and became the great enemy of God. Jesus in Luke 10:18 said "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" This of course is figurative language. The meaning is that through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ Satan has lost his last inch of standing ground in heaven. Back in the Old Testament we find Satan appearing among the sons of God (Job 1:6), and daring to bring an accusation against Job. Now Satan, you see, engineered the crucifixion of Christ, and Jesus said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). Satan is never quite intelligent enough to contend with God. No doubt he thought he had performed a master stroke when he got Jesus crucified, but this event turned out to be a large piece in God's jigsaw puzzle, and it marked the doom of Satan, so that Jesus could say "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven." From the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Satan is utterly doomed. He is still somewhat on the loose, though within strict limits set by God, but he is the champion of a lost cause, and he also knows this. God permits Satan and the evil spirits to do some things. You can look at these events from two viewpoints. You can see these terrible calamities and atrocities and so forth as acts of Satan, and in this respect of course they are unspeakably wicked. On the other hand none of this calamity happens apart from the decree and permission of God. Satan cannot do anything without God's permission. Even in the case of Job we see that this was true. He had to get God's permission at each step of the process. So we can see that these evils which fall on the world become increasingly terrible, but they are not only acts of wickedness and malice on the part of Satan and his agents, they are also parts of God's moral government of the world by which He is accomplishing His purpose, which will finally be achieved, and Satan will finally lose out utterly.

It says a key was given to him, the key of the bottomless pit. He does not have this key and power to open the bottomless pit and unleash these forces on the world

of himself; the key is given to him. Remember, of course, that this is a vision. Satan doesn't actually go around carrying a key to a pit that could be locked with a padlock or some other kind of lock. John sees it as a vision, but what the vision represents is true and real. Dr. Hendriksen says he receives power to open the abyss and let the imprisoned demons out, and turn these hellish spirits loose among the unbelieving and non-Christian people of the world.

The abyss or bottomless pit in the Bible is a name for hell before the Judgment Day. Look at Luke 8:31 where the demons cast out of a man by Jesus asked that they be not sent to the abyss. Note also Revelation 20, verses 1 to 3, where Satan is cast into the bottomless pit and a seal put on him. After the Judgment Day hell is no longer called the bottomless pit, but the lake of fire. But before the Judgment Day it is the abyss or the bottomless pit. Now Satan by being permitted by God to unlock the abyss and let these forces out incites the world to evil. He fills the world with invisible wicked spirits that cannot touch or harm Christians but which certainly affect wicked people. Satan has been called the prince of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, and so on. (Ephesians 2:2). He is permitted by God to have a terrible malignant influence on people who are not Christians, who have not been sealed, who have not been marked off as those that truly belong to God. The world then becomes evil in a way that it previously was not. We can see the development of this in our own day. Wickedness is becoming bolder and more open. In many different aspects and places the devil is getting over his inferiority complex and becoming furiously bold. His is the desperation of a cornered wild beast that realizes hope is gone and doom impends. We see evil getting bolder and bolder and more desperate. Things that even non-Christians would have been ashamed to speak of in our grandparents' day, and maybe even when we ourselves were young, people today are not even ashamed of. It is just their life-style and they do not even consider whether it is right or wrong. So there is an increasing and increasingly obvious work of the devil. You don't see the devil himself, and least of all do you see him in the popular cartoon caricature with a pitchfork and belching smoke. You see him by his footprints, as indeed God is seen by His footprints in the world. You see what the devil has done and is doing.

Now as the abyss is opened a great fume of foul dirty black smoke comes out, "like the smoke of a great furnace", which darkens the sun and clouds the earth. Dr. Hendriksen interprets this as the smoke of deception and delusion, sin and sorrow, moral darkness and degradation, that is constantly pouring up from hell. If you drive down the Ohio River Boulevard towards

Pittsburgh and see what is coming out of those immense steel mill smokestacks on the west side of the river and sometimes on the east side, you wonder whether they are doing what they can to avoid polluting the atmosphere that we have to breathe. I understand the government has given them a time limit to clean that abominable pollution up, but progress seems to be very slow. I confess that I sort of choke and put up the car windows on driving past on some days when the clouds of industrial smoke are hanging low. But here in Revelation 9 it is the moral and spiritual smoke and pollution of evil that blocks out the sun and darkens the air. Now note that the power to do this is "given" to the devil. It is included in the providence and permissive decree of God; otherwise Satan could not do it. God could prevent it but for wise reasons of His own He does not choose to prevent it. So Satan is permitted to corrupt the world and men's minds and hearts. Here we enter the realm of mystery before which human reason falters. Satan and not God is responsible for all this. Do not blame this or anything on God. God is not tempted by evil nor does He tempt any man (James 1:13). We are tempted by our own sinful nature, which Satan when permitted stirs up. This increase of evil is one of the warnings to people to repent as shown by the last verse of chapter 9.

Chapter 9 verse 3. Locusts come out of the smoke, locusts which have power to sting and bite like scorpions. These are not insect locusts, they are hellish locusts. They are commanded not to harm the trees or vegetation, so they are very different from the natural locusts of Palestine. They hurt only people, the people that do not have the seal of God in their foreheads. In Bible lands locusts were and still are a terrible plague; a description of this is given in the book of Joel (1:6-12), pictured as an army invading a country. Such locusts come by the million and go through the country like a wave or like you might run a vacuum sweeper over a carpet. When they get through there is not a leaf or blade of grass left. Joel was probably describing a literal plague of locusts which destroyed all the crops and vegetation, but here in Revelation locusts are used figuratively for spirit realities that are equally real, but invisible, which corrupt and ruin the world. As Dr. Hendriksen says, they are the powers and in-

fluences of hell operating in the hearts and lives of wicked people. Note that they harm only those people that have not been sealed by the seal of God. (Chapter 7:1-8). And this plague of hellish locusts is limited to five months. Nobody that I know of, that has studied this knows for sure what this term of five months means. There are all sorts of speculative answers. You know in medicine when fifty remedies are recommended for some disease it is a pretty sure sign that none of them is really effective. There used to be that many remedies for malaria, and then quinine was discovered which is really effective in checking malaria, and after that all the quack remedies faded out. So when we find many different interpretations of something, it may be a fair guess to start with that none of them is right. At least, that not more than one of them is right, and maybe not even one. Nobody has come up with a really convincing explanation of this period of five months. Why not four months, or six months, or five and a half months, or a year? I think that we can only say that like some features in some of the parables of Jesus, this five months is part of the stage setting. If we want to go beyond that we can say that perhaps it stands for a definite but comparatively short time. It is not permanent, it does not go on forever, it comes to its time limit and then stops. Then there would be a period that would be better, and then maybe later the trouble would come on again. As you read the Book of Judges in the Old Testament, you read of one terrible calamity or campaign after another, and you might get the idea that the entire period of the Book of Judges was a period of unbearable trouble and agony. But as you read in Judges you come here and there on statements like "The land had rest forty years," and even "the land had rest eighty years."

So we may say that these terrible things that we are reading about in the Book of Revelation happen over and over during the period between Christ's ascension and His second coming—the inter-adventual period. Perhaps having said that we should also admit that these things may happen with increasing severity and increasing intensity as time goes on, so that toward the end of this age of God's plans, these things may become more obvious, more intense, more visible and more terrible than they were before.

LESSON 49

THE TRUMPET BLASTS OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH ANGELS, Revelation 9, continued

"And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man" (9:5). Were you ever bitten by a scorpion? Or a rattlesnake, perhaps? It is said that the bite of a scorpion does not usually cause death, but it is extremely painful. The scorpion looks like a small lobster, and the bite is so painful, and lasts so long as pain, that it is universally feared. The scorpion had a stinger in its tail, containing a powerful poison. It has

been rated as more poisonous than several species of poisonous snakes. And this is so painful that the victim would prefer to die than to live on with that pain. But in verse 6 we read that these victims will seek death but not be able to die; death shall flee from them. I suppose it is always possible to commit suicide in some way or other; but this statement in verse 6 is a way of emphasizing the intensity of the painfulness of this plague.

Verses 7 to 10 are a description of these hellish

locusts. Remember, they are not insects, but demonized people who are being used by Satan, the god of this world. They look like horses prepared for battle, and they had crowns as it were of gold. Christ has a crown of real gold, but these beings have crowns of imitation gold—"as it were of gold." You see every work of Satan has on it the mark of counterfeit or imitation, it isn't the genuine. Their faces are human, their hair like women's hair. I take it this means long hair, perhaps waist long, perhaps also flowing behind them in the breeze. Their teeth are like lions' teeth; their breastplates were of iron; and their sound like chariots and many horses running to battle. Perhaps we might say in modern terms, they sounded like jet planes roaring and taking off at an airport; a terrific noise. And they were given power to hurt men five months: painful and burning, but not in itself fatal.

We should realize that men who do the work of Satan may be quite unaware of the fact that they are being used by Satan. Something can be put across as a wise human plan when actually it comes from hell, and people don't realize this.

Verse 11. "And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon." This is Satan, of course, and both of these names, Abaddon and Apollyon mean the same thing: Destroyer. God creates and Satan seeks to destroy.

Verse 13. The sixth angel sounded, and now we see something from God's standpoint. John heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. So God is going to step in and do something, and we can now see not merely activities of Satan, but something of what God intends by all this. God is working through all this, or against it, or over it, to accomplish His purpose. We have two kinds of smoke here. First, there is the fragrant smoke of the prayers of the saints mingled with the incense of Christ's intercession, rising to God from the altar of incense. The other kind is the foul black hellish smoke that comes out of the abyss or the bottomless pit. The angel speaks to the sixth angel with the trumpet saying "Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates" (14). The Euphrates is one of the great rivers of the world, especially in Bible history. It starts in what is today Turkey, flows through Iraq, and finally into the Persian Gulf and so into the Indian Ocean. Roughly parallel to it flows the Tigris River. The two rivers merge a few miles before they reach the sea. Two great empires that were utterly against God and contrary to God's people, were located on these rivers: Babylon on the Euphrates and Assyria on the Tigris. These two empires, though themselves wicked and against God, were used by God in performing his moral government of the world in their time. Assyria and Babylon became symbols of the anti-God movement in the world—symbols of the world system as opposed to God. The earth is the Lord's and

the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. But there is a sense in which the term "world" is used in the Bible as something bad, as for example when Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world." And he is called "the god of this world." It is a system in the world that is anti-God, that is fighting against God and against the work of God in the world. This is symbolized here by the great military empires of Old Testament times, Assyria and Babylonia, and the name of the river Euphrates is the key to this.

These are not the same four angels that we read about before in chapter 7 verse 1. Those were the four angels at the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of the earth. Those are holy angels used by God to maintain the status quo for a time, to prevent evil from bursting out and flooding the world without limits and too soon. But these in chapter 9 are evil angels, evil spirits, as shown by what they do. They are devils or evil spirits, fallen, wicked angels. The Euphrates stands for the anti-God world system, and the angels (devils) that have been holding the power of this system are to be released from restraints so that they can turn this torrent of wickedness and immorality loose upon the world. This certainly predicts war, not one particular war but all wars, especially all world wars, and the increasing world conflict which may come in future times until the Judgment Day arrives.

Here war is a punishment permitted by God, inflicted on the world, and at the same time it is a warning to unbelievers and wicked men. These four evil angels have been under some restraint while there is a comparative world peace for a long period of time, off and on, coming and going. Now these evil angels are to be released and they are glad to plunge mankind into war. If you have read C. S. Lewis' book *The Screwtape Letters*, you will recall that this book discusses wicked people who finally go to hell, and the devil says to his apprentice, "They are our meat. What else have we got to eat except the souls of these wicked people?" They delight in cosmic destruction and pain, in destroying all that is beautiful and lovely and holy and pure; they want to make everything foul and vile like themselves. This is their nature in their fallen condition. Still they can do nothing until and unless God permits it. War has repeatedly been turned loose on the world, and we have seen two world wars in our own lifetime, World War I from 1914 to 1918 and World War II from 1939 to 1945. But it can happen any time in history, but never without the permission of God, and this is shown by the fact that these evil angels have been under restraint in the River Euphrates until the appointed day, hour, minute and year. This is permitted by God and it is under His control; it cannot happen until God turns on the green light for it.

The very number is terrifying. Can you form in your mind a mental image of 200 million people? The present population of the United States is just over 200 million. Two hundred million means two hundred thousand

times a thousand. Two hundred times a thousand times a thousand. This is an army such as the world has never seen. Of course the number is symbolic, not literal, but it is intended to impress upon us the vast number of the forces and people that are under the dominion of Satan and opposed to the rule of God. Two hundred million, and their sole purpose is to destroy.

Verse 17. Hendriksen says that they are called locusts, but this concerns their features, breastplates of fire, and so forth. We cannot help thinking here about the instruments of destruction that are built for war today—artillery, aircraft, missiles, atomic bombs. And some of what exist today are much worse than the worst when Hendriksen's book was written. By these terrible beings and forces the third part of men were killed, by the fire, the smoke and the brimstone which issued out of their mouths. Their power is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails were like unto the heads of serpents, and with these they do hurt. There was an article in *Time* magazine about the use of laser beams in warfare. It is enough to make your blood run cold just to read it. You can hit somebody in the eye with a laser beam at a distance of three to five miles, and the fluid inside his eye will boil and burst his eyeball. This laser beam can also burn a hole right through a person at a distance of three to five miles, and of course that would be fatal. The power that is today in human hands and the destruction that this could cause if not restrained in some way, is just past our imagination.

Yesterday I saw a billboard with a cigarette advertisement on it which said, "You've come a long way, baby!" I recognized those words; I have heard them on the television, "From Adam's rib to women's lib." I am not sure that I buy that, but at any rate you could say that human warfare has come a long way since the time when fighting was done with bows and arrows, swords and spears and throwing rocks at people and the like of that. Surely this vision in Revelation 9 pictures an intensifying of the calamity of plagues and especially war that comes upon the world and is permitted by God to come upon a world that rejects the rider on the white horse, which is Jesus Christ. For the persecuting world has here become the impenitent world; God permits these things, the partial judgment of a world that crucified His Son and slaughtered His saints. God is not dead, neither is He blind, and the blood of the martyrs is precious in His sight. Now we live in what is being called a post-Christian world. I am not ready to admit this absolutely, but there is some

truth in it. An article in *Christianity Today* described present day trends and conditions in the country of Sweden. I hope none of you are Swedish, because if you are you have my sympathy. Sweden is going back to devilish paganism. Christianity is almost fading out of the life of Sweden.

Evil and calamity close in on an apostate and rebellious human race. But who sees in calamity the hand of God? Who reads aright the handwriting on the wall? Who is moved to turn to God and confess sin and plead for mercy while there is yet time to plead for mercy? No, on every hand, high and low, we see man trying to cope with problems and evils and calamities, and failing to cope adequately, and never turning to God. So the shout of God to a demonized world becomes louder and louder, so that even to read about it in inspired prophecy frightens us. The only remedy for humanity's problems, crises and troubles is in God. He is the source of all good. A world cut off from right connection with God is sure to go on and become worse and worse in unbelief and abandonment to sin, and sure to come under increasing affliction and judgment.

What can we as Christians do? We cannot of ourselves turn the tide of world public opinion, neither can we of ourselves control the forces of the world and the policies and programs of the world's rulers, for our numbers are insignificant in comparison with the world's population, and as a "pressure group" Christians are insignificant. Then what can we do? Must we simply resign ourselves to doing nothing while the sinking world goes down around us? Surely not. No such pessimism is encouraged or permitted by the Word of God. Then what can we do? Well, in the first place, we can place all our hope in God, and make sure that our hope is not based on a foundation of sand, that we are not putting our hopes for the future in the United Nations Organization, or the United States Government, or any human plans for betterment, but only in God. Secondly we can witness, we can witness about the world as Jesus did, that its works are evil; we can witness to the only way of escape, and the only way of correcting the evil, which is Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and the redemption that is found in Him. And we can pray. Mary Queen of Scots said she was more afraid of the prayers of John Knox than of an army of ten thousand men. We can pray. We are here for a purpose; are we fulfilling the purpose that God has put us here for, or are we simply drifting and being moved along by the tide of the times?

LESSON 50

THE MIGHTY ANGEL, THE SEVEN THUNDERS, THE SWORN OATH AND THE LITTLE BOOK, Revelation 10

At the end of chapter 9 we noted that the terrible judgments described there did not result in repentance on the part of the world's people. The evil continues. Note the last verse of chapter 9, and the forms of sin that are mentioned there: idolatry, sorcery, demon-

worship, theft. These sins existed when John wrote the book, and they exist in our world of today. Not just the little sins like forgetting to read your Bible for one day (though that is not unimportant), but these terrible sins, worshipping evil spirits, sorcery, immorality, forni-

cation, theft, and so forth, were not repented of, in spite of the fact that God sent trumpets to warn people to turn from their sins, and in spite of the Gospel that was and is preached to call people back to God. The fact is that the world's people in general are not turning back to God. The sins and the evils continue and even get worse. There have always been such sins as murder, ever since Cain killed Abel. But today we have religious authorities, bishops, professors of theology in important seminaries, members of the clergy rising up and telling us that these things are not necessarily wrong, and thus blotting out the distinction between right and wrong. This is a very bad sign of our times. That is the end of chapter 9.

Now in chapter 10 John saw another mighty angel come down from heaven. Dr. Hendriksen says that this is a giant of an angel. I don't suppose that angels can really be measured in feet and inches, but this one as seen by John in his vision was simply tremendous. Note that several features of this angel recall the description of Christ in chapter one verses 14-16, "His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters; and he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." Now this is similar in several particulars to the description of the angel in chapter 10; so similar, in fact, that some writers on Revelation say that this angel must be Christ Himself. The better opinion, however, is that this is not Christ, though similar to Him in part, but a created angel. The word "angel" means "messenger", and this is a messenger of Christ, not Christ Himself. Another striking parallel is found in the Book of Daniel chapter 10 verses 5 and 6, "Then I lifted up mine eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude," and so on. Daniel tells how terrifying this was to him. This is a similar vision to that in Revelation 10, but not identical.

We might note the appearance of this angel as described here. He is clothed with a cloud; this is symbolic in Scripture of the judgments of God. At the same time there is a rainbow on his head. The rainbow in Scripture regularly stands for the mercy of God, as we see first in the time of Noah, at the end of the Flood. The face of this angel was bright like the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. This may mean feet like red hot bright metal, standing for the unapproachable holiness of God. So here we have God's judgment, His mercy and His holiness. This angel stands with one foot on the ocean and the other foot on the land. This is truly gigantic. Try to picture it in your imagination, as if by a single stride the angel could step

across the world from one part to another. And he cried with a loud voice like the roar of a lion. Did you ever hear a lion roar, really roar? "The lion hath roared: who will not fear?" (Amos 3:8). Then this terribly loud noise is followed by seven peals of thunder. What shall we say about this angel who roars like a lion and has such a terrifying appearance yet in a way such a comforting appearance? Commentators have let their imaginations wander on these things. The trouble is that the various suggested interpretations cancel each other out, so we are left unsure of what the full meaning is. Dr. Hendriksen, whose book I have followed quite closely and who is in my opinion one of the best and wisest commentators on the Book of Revelation says that we cannot tell exactly what all this means, but that it seems to portend something of tremendous importance is coming. We do not have to figure out a specific meaning of every particular detail.

Evidently the seven peals of thunder had a meaning which John understood. He heard the peals of thunder, and was about to write down what they meant, when he heard a voice telling him not to write it down. It was to be sealed; only the fact that there were seven thunders is made known to the reader of the book. What they said or just what their significance was is not made known to us. The implication here may be that we can never fully understand all the factors of God's counsel and His providence. Any attempt to rationally and fully analyze the acts of God is bound to be futile, not to say irreligious. We have to allow an element of unrevealed mystery in the plans of God. This is involved in the Creator-creature relationship. We can see this throughout life in the big things and the little things of the world of our own limited lives. Why did such and such happen? Sometimes maybe we can discern some partial reasons. You can try to find some good reasons for God doing what He does, but we cannot say whether these are the real reasons or the only reasons, and God doesn't tell us. Of course, God does not have to tell us why He does what He does. Why did God choose Jacob and reject Esau? The decision was made before they were born, therefore it was not based on their conduct or moral qualities (Romans 9:11-13). The Book of Job in the Old Testament is a searching inquiry as to why a godly person suffers, and the book does not fully answer this question. It answers it negatively; it shows that Job is not suffering because he has committed some special sin, as his three loving "friends" thought. In the Gospel of John there was a man born blind. Jesus said that the reason for this affliction was not special sin on anyone's part, but "that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). That is, there is a reason rooted in the unrevealed sovereignty of God, which we cannot know and which God is not obligated to reveal. I will add a comment on this incident in John chapter 9. A man visited a school for deaf and dumb children, and went to the blackboard and wrote on it, "If God loves you, why did He let you be born deaf and dumb?" In my opinion a heartless thing to write on the blackboard. A child about ten years old went forward, took

the chalk, and wrote on the board, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:26). That recognizes the inexplicable element of the sovereignty of God in our human experience, especially those experiences that are painful and hard for us to take. It may be something like this that explains why the meaning of the seven peals of thunder was not to be written down. There remains a hidden and mysterious factor that is beyond our grasp. In this life we know in part; our knowledge is fragmented and fractured. There is a poem you may have seen, by a Scottish lady, called **The Burial of Moses**, which is often quoted and is really quite moving and beautiful. The last stanza of the poem speaks of the mysterious ways of God's working. You know Moses died in a region called "the Land of Moab," and the location of his grave was unknown except to God, a very remarkable and mysterious fact considering the greatness and importance of Moses in the Old Testa-

ment. This is the last stanza of the poem by Mrs. C. F. Alexander:

O lonely grave in Moab's land;
O dark Beth-Peor's hill;
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways that we cannot tell;
He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
Of him He loved so well.

This I commend to you. We must always be cautious about interpreting prophecies and making judgments on the rightness of God's actions and plans, which are ultimately beyond our grasp and understanding. It is part of a religious attitude toward God to recognize this. Faith does not depend upon complete rational understanding, but upon the surrender of our hearts and wills to God. So much for that.

LESSON 51

THE MIGHTY ANGEL, THE SEVEN THUNDERS, THE SWORN OATH AND THE LITTLE BOOK, continued, Revelation 10:5ff

Chapter 10 verse 5. The angel that was standing straddled between earth and sea raised his hand to heaven, and swore by Him that lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer. This is evidently an important element, when the angel raises his hand and swears an oath in the name of the eternal God, that there shall be time no longer. This word "time" here certainly does not mean time in the abstract, as when we say "space and time." It should be translated, as it is in recent versions, "delay no longer." No more waiting for God to carry out His plans and His judgments. In other words, things will move on from here to the conclusion, without long and indefinite postponements or delays. Now, do we get things delayed in this world? It took almost one calendar month for two parcels of surplus copies of "Blue Banner Faith and Life," sent by insured parcel post, to travel one thousand miles from Winchester, Kansas, to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. An ox-cart could do it faster! We are getting used to this kind of delays, but we also get impatient with God sometimes and think He should work faster, answer our prayers sooner, not keep us waiting. We should realize, of course, that God knows best and He knows all the factors which we do not know.

Now the angel says, in his solemn sworn statement, that there shall be no more delay. Verse 7: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." Predictive prophecy in the Bible is never simple history written beforehand. There is always a mysterious element in it which is not fully understood until the time of fulfillment. There are many prophecies, in both the Old Testament and the New, that have been fulfilled

in particular events. But often the prophecy can be fully understood only when the fulfillment comes.

The six trumpets have sounded; the seventh is still to come, and when it does come, the mystery of God is going to be finished. We should realize that in the Bible the term "mystery" often has a meaning different from our common usage of the word. We use the word "mystery" to mean something that is inherently baffling, something that we cannot comprehend or get hold of. But in Biblical usage a mystery is often something perfectly understandable after it has been explained or revealed, but which was previously hidden in the mind of God and not revealed. Here in Revelation 10 "the mystery of God" apparently means the plan of God for human history, which raises a mystery in our minds because we know the outcome only by faith; much of the "when" and "how" remains hidden in the mind of God, concealed from us.

No more delay: as you read the Book of Revelation there seems to be a great deal of delay. And this is only chapter 10, so we aren't even halfway through the book. So how can this angel say, at this point (the seventh trumpet) say that there shall be delay no longer, and that the seventh trumpet marks the completion of God's plan as it had been revealed to the prophets? I think we should say that the delay is only apparent. The chapters in the book are consecutive, but in real life many of these things may be simultaneous, and so what comes after chapter 10 verse 6 as well as the part of the book before this point, all look forward to the great terminal point of the consummation, the Judgment Day.

In verse 8 another voice is heard by John. The speaker is not identified, but it is called a voice speaking from heaven. John is told to take the little book from the

hand of the angel which stood on the earth and the sea. This is parallel but not identical with Ezekiel 2: 8-10. Ezekiel also in a vision experience was commanded to take and eat a book (or scroll). He did so, and found it was as sweet as honey in his mouth (Ezekiel 3:3).

This is not the great scroll of Revelation chapter 5, sealed with seven seals, but a "little" book and it is not sealed but open. John ate the book, and in his mouth it was as sweet as honey, but it turned his stomach sour or "bitter" after he had eaten it. Now the Gospel is sweet; people hear the Gospel preached and are converted to Jesus Christ, and are filled with joy and gladness. I have known people who were so happy in their new-found salvation that they almost danced. So this little book, in the eating, is sweet like honey. They didn't have sugar in the ancient world; honey was the sweetest thing they knew. But after the eating there was a bitter reaction.

The Gospel itself is sweet; it is good news, it is the revelation of the love and favor of God to us sinners. Some modern day evangelism tends to give people the idea that being a Christian is all sweetness and joy. But there is more to it. Sweet at the beginning, but bitterness may come later. There may be persecution

and suffering for Christ's sake. We won't always have the joyous sensation of sweetness. John ate the sweet book, and afterwards it turned bitter. In chapter 1 verse 9 John tells us that it was for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ that he was a prisoner on Patmos. Down through the ages Christians have had similar experiences. If you are living faithfully for Jesus Christ, the devil will not leave you alone; you will have problems and troubles that you will have to face in faith and prayer until the day when God relieves you of them all, and takes you to where there are no problems and troubles. So I take it that the meaning of the book turning bitter after John ate it is that in spite of the sweetness of salvation, those who are identified with Christ will have sufferings and conflicts in this world. These sufferings could likely be avoided by not being a Christian, but the Christian avoids the ultimate evil and calamity. Now as long as the church is in existence in this world we must witness to the whole truth of God, and this inevitably brings suffering. He that is a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4). The world in its anti-Christian aspect is set against God. You cannot conform to the world's pattern and still be doing the will of God. Bitterness is coupled with comfort and consolation. God has both of these for us. He has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (II Cor. 12:9).

LESSON 52

THE TWO WITNESSES, THEIR TESTIMONY, DEATH AND VICTORY, Revelation 11

Revelation 11 is regarded as perhaps the most difficult chapter in the book of Revelation. It is closely tied in with the rest of the book, and the view that people take of certain other parts of the book will inevitably affect what they think this chapter means. In view of this difficulty, we should be very cautious while we try to understand as fully as possible what this chapter is about. We shall try to maintain a reverent reserve. On the other hand, it is part of God's Word and certainly He intends us to read it and try to understand it.

In this chapter we have the first mention, or at any rate the first mention by that name, of the character called "the beast." In verse 7 it says that the beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. This figure appears repeatedly after this point in the Book of Revelation, and especially in chapter 13. Just who or what "the beast" is has been a very controversial question. There are several serious opinions that are worthy of our serious attention, as well as any number of implausible "crackpot" opinions. Those who believe that the beast mentioned here, and later in chapter 13, is the Roman Catholic Church will have one view about the meaning of chapter 11. Those who like Dr. Albertus Pieters hold that the beast is the pagan persecuting Roman Empire will have a different view. Those who believe that the beast is a personal antichrist, of any type, who is still future, will have a different view again. And those who believe that the Bible predicts the return of the Jews

to Palestine, to be followed by the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and the restoration of the animal sacrifices are bound to have a specific view of the meaning and fulfillment of chapter 11.

Dr. William Hendriksen's book, originally published in the early 1930s, before the establishment of the present-day Republic of Israel, held that the return of the Jews to Palestine was only a possibility. But today we know that it is a fact. Whether it is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy is another question entirely. On this we refer our readers to a new book: **Israel Today: Fulfilment of Prophecy?** by Louis A. DeCaro, reviewed in the last issue of *Blue Banner Faith and Life* (July-September 1975), published at \$4.50 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, P.O. Box 185, Nutley, N.J. 07110. This 240-page book by a Beaver Falls pastor and friend of Geneva College gives thorough and convincing reasons for holding that the present-day Republic of Israel is NOT a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. We commend it to all our readers.

Dr. Hendriksen says that after a diligent search he finds no prophecy of the Bible predicting such a return to Palestine. You can find prediction of spiritual revival among the Jews and their conversion to Christ. This is certainly a possible and even probable interpretation of Romans chapters 9 through 11. But a national return in unbelief is something else again.

We read in 2 Corinthians 1:20, that all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ. ALL the promises of God. God therefore has NO promises to those who are not in Christ; He has made no promises to those in unbelief, which is what the present-day Israelis are. Many of them are even unbelievers from the Jewish standpoint—just secular, not religious. Pastor DeCaro holds that the present day Republic of Israel exists by God's providence, and this we must accept. It is no doubt part of the seven thunders uttered in chapter 10 which John was forbidden to write, that is, part of the secret plans of God which have not been revealed to us. We know it not from studying Ezekiel, for example, but by reading the newspapers and listening to the news broadcasts on the radio.

Dr. Pieters in his well-known and very able book, *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, holds that the opening verses of chapter 11 concern the condition of the Jews in the early time of Christianity. He says that this was a serious question among the early Christians: what about the Jews? Has God abandoned them? What about the Jews that are Christians, and what about the Jews that are not Christians? He holds that the first part of this chapter deals with this matter. I think he is mistaken, but that is his view. He says that the measured temple, measured by John with a rod like a reed, stands for the Jews who are Christian believers. They are marked off in the mind of God. And the outer court that was left unmeasured stands for the great majority of the Jews, who were not Christian believers. Accordingly Dr. Pieters held that most of this chapter has already been fulfilled. Also after canvassing the possibilities with great care he holds that the beast is the pagan persecuting Roman Empire which threw Christians to the lions and did other terrible things to God's saints. On the other hand Dr. Pieters readily admits that the last verse of chapter 11 refers to the future. The temple of God in heaven was opened, and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail. He holds that this verse views the course of history down to the Parousia or second coming of Christ, or rather, down to the verge or brink of that great event. At the same time Pieters held that the beast faded out of the picture about A.D. 300 when the Roman Empire became nominally Christianized and persecution from that source came to an end.

Over against this view there is the so-called "continuous historical" school which finds in the Book of Revelation a kind of veiled portrayal of the course of church history from the time of Christ's ascension to His second coming. This school was very prominent one hundred years ago, and some very able Bible scholars advocated it. It is less commonly held today, and today

those that hold this general view hold that the beast is the pope, or the Papacy as an institution, or the Roman Catholic Church as a system. These hold that the body of this chapter concerns the Roman Catholic or papal persecution of Bible Christians during the Middle Ages of the Christian era, and that the death of the two witnesses refers to the death of prominent martyrs like John Hus, and that the resurrection of the two witnesses refers to the rise of the Protestant Reformation, when truth once lost or obscured was brought to light and widely proclaimed again.

I think we should realize that all these different interpretations are heavily loaded with special ideas about the fulfilment. We should realize that there is a basic distinction between the meaning of a prophecy and the identification of the fulfilment of it. Earlier in this course of lessons we had a very simple illustration of this basic distinction. Let us say Revelation 13 predicts the rise and career of a world dictator who will persecute Christianity. That purports to state the meaning. Then when someone comes and says "Napoleon Bonaparte is the dictator," he is trying to nail down the fulfilment. This is hazardous because we have to depend on ordinary human sources and reports for information about Napoleon, or whomever we name as "the dictator." All of the interpretations I have cited are loaded with special ideas about the identification of the fulfilment. From their general religious background, and the general structure of their faith, people have certain ideas about the Jews going back to Palestine, setting up the Jerusalem temple, etc. They consider these ideas not expendable, certainly proved and absolutely not debatable any more. So when they come to Revelation 11, they are bound to see these events tied in with what they believe, in the first verses of this chapter.

Similarly, those who believe that the Papacy or the Pope or the Roman Catholic system is the antichrist spoken of in Scripture, are bound to read and interpret this chapter along that line. now I do not mean to speak unkindly of any Christians, and I am sure many of them are wiser and better Bible scholars than I myself, but it seems as I read these people's views that they are thinking first about what the fulfilment must be, then going back from this and deciding what the meaning must be. I remember a new Christian in China who said, "Oh, I get it. In looking up Bible references, first you find the book, then the chapter, then the verse; if you try to do it the other way around it won't work!" Obviously we must first try to figure out the meaning as well as we can with the help of God and by using sound methods, and then as a secondary and subordinate question we can attempt with reasonable caution to identify the historical fulfilment. It is not a sound method to start with an assumed fulfilment and then work backwards to decide what the meaning is.

LESSON 53

THE TWO WITNESSES, THEIR TESTIMONY, DEATH AND VICTORY, Revelation 11, continued

As I started out by saying, this chapter is very difficult and we should exercise great caution in making statements about it. Dr. Pieters said he presented his views with diffidence. I shall present mine with double diffidence. Certainly above all we should beware of the know-it-alls, who claim that they have all the answers, and everyone else is wrong. Anyone who can talk like that about this chapter is intolerably conceited. The greatest Bible scholars in the world would not dare to talk like some of these relatively ignorant people.

We cannot trace out the details of all the different interpretations, so I shall present my own (with double diffidence). Remember that, as Dr. Hendriksen reminds us, it is possible that no one in the world understands fully the meaning and fulfilment of this chapter. Yet surely there is much in it that can help us and strengthen our faith.

You will remember that in chapter 10 John ate a little book, which first tasted as sweet as honey, but turned bitter after he had eaten it. (10:10). This statement is followed at the end of chapter 10 with the statement that John must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. That is, carry out Christ's great commission as a witness. The book turns bitter, but he is told that he has this job or assignment to carry out. The Christian Church has this job to do. Chapter 11 begins to tell us about the bitterness, that is, the suffering, the troubles that inevitably follow when the Church faithfully implements Christ's Great Commission. As long as no witness is being borne to Christ the devil can take a siesta. But wait until a real, vital witness for Christ gets underway, and then the devil gets stirred up and aroused. A dead church that doesn't witness doesn't stir the devil up, but a living church that is bearing a faithful witness and preaching the Gospel and doing missionary work arouses the devil and he goes into action to try to wreck it any way he can.

Now, John is given a reed to measure with, and told to measure the temple of God and the altar and them that worship there. There are two words for "temple" in the Greek New Testament, *naos* and *hieron*. *Naos* means the sanctuary or holy of holies, the inner sanctuary, which only the high priest could enter on the day of atonement. This is the word (*naos*) used here for the temple of God. On the other hand, the word *hieron* means the whole complex including the wall, the courts, the porches, and so forth—the property as a whole. Now, he is to measure the sanctuary without measuring the outer court. Only the sanctuary and people connected with the altar are to be measured. We may take this measuring as probably equivalent to the "sealing" mentioned in the previous chapter. Something is marked off as God's property and special possession, hence under His special care and protection. I have heard many times that this verse is a Biblical warrant for having written

"Terms of Communion" for a church denomination. I believe in the Terms of Communion but I think that it is taking this verse somewhat out of context to use to establish a point like that.

Now the outside court is not to be measured; it is given unto the Gentiles or nations, who shall tread it under for 42 months. I believe the most plausible interpretation of this is as follows: The sanctuary with its altar and people is the true church, made up of those who truly know, love and serve God, the real Christians of the world. These are known to God; they are specially His possession and under His special protection. The outer court which was left unmeasured may mean merely nominal Christians, those who say they have been baptized, and maybe gotten their names on a church rolls somewhere, but they don't have the real life that comes from being born again. The lifeless, apostate, unconverted church members, and churches made up largely or entirely of that kind of people, with no vital witness. Dr. Hendriksen says that the world invades the church and takes possession of it, and the church members are worldly people who love the world. This condition lasts 42 months, that is, throughout the Gospel age. The outer court is left unmeasured—it is the nominal church that is without Christ and without real life, and is left out of consideration in this chapter.

Chapter 11 verse 2 speaks of 42 months, and verse 3 speaks of 1260 days. 42 months is equivalent to 1260 days or three and one half years. In chapter 12 verse 6 we again read of 1260 days. In chapter 12 verse 14 it speaks of "a time, and times, and half a time." This is presumably the same length of time: "a time" would be one year; "times", two years; "half a time", six months; total 3½ years or 42 months or 1260 days. This is of course debatable, but probably we may be correct in holding that all these references deal with the same period of time, namely, the period that ends with the Consummation or Judgment Day. Verse 18 of chapter 11 tells us that the time has come for God's wrath to be poured out, and the dead to be judged, and so forth. So the 42 months may be taken as a symbolic number meaning the entire Gospel age from the ascension of Christ to His second coming in glory. Now this relatively long period is contrasted with a short time, chapter 11 verse 9, "three days and a half." This would be a very short time compared to 1260 days. Again in chapter 11 verse 15 the 1260 days is shown in contrast with all eternity to follow, mentioned at the end of verse 15, "and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Now during this Gospel age that we are living in, God raises up two witnesses who shall prophesy in sackcloth. "Prophesy" here does not mean "Predict," it means *witnessing*, delivering a message to the people. They shall witness in sackcloth 42 months, until Christ comes

again. You may think I am making this up, but I have read an exposition which held that these two witnesses are the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the National Reform Association! It is comforting to think of your own importance, maybe, but really, I consider this rather far-fetched. And why didn't they include the American Bible Society? These two witnesses are probably meant to be understood as the true believing Church used as an active and effective missionary organization. Now why two witnesses, why not just one, or why not three? Hendriksen says this means organized effort, not mere free-lancing. In Luke 10:1 Jesus sent out His disciples two and two; that indicates some organization, you see. Two and two, they can supplement each other and spell each other in the effort. At least that is a possible meaning here, organized evangelistic effort, not mere free-lancing.

"Clothed in sackcloth." In Scripture this is regularly connected with repentance. Sackcloth is the very symbol of repentance in the Bible. We can easily think of many examples. They show by what they wear how they feel inside in relation to God. Now there are also two

olive trees and two candlesticks, which seems a firm indication that the Church as a missionary organization is meant. Olive trees bear fruit, and candlesticks give light. This may be a reference to the ordained officers in the church, ministers, elders, and deacons. God blesses the Church through these offices and ordinances, especially through the Word and the sacraments which the ordained officers minister.

This witnessing on the part of the Church is opposed and hated by the world. But their witness will result in the destruction of their enemies in the end—note verse 5. As Tertullian said, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. "We are of yesterday, but there is city of the Roman Empire that does not have the graves of the honored martyr dead. Where you kill one, there are soon ten; where you kill 100 there are 1,000." No truer statement was ever made. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Those who persecute and attack Christ's messengers seal their own doom.

(To be continued)

Blue Banner Question Box

Readers are invited to submit Biblical, doctrinal and practical questions for answer in this department. Names of correspondents will not be published, but anonymous communications will be disregarded.

Note: Because of the increasing trend toward toleration of the view known as "Theistic Evolution" on the part of Christians, and the increasingly bold advocating of evolution as "proved scientific fact" in the public schools, colleges, and universities of our country, we are reprinting the following material written by the late Dr. Robert Park. This was originally published in *Blue Banner Faith and Life* for April-June 1956, pages 95-96. This answer is as true today as it was when Dr. Park wrote it years ago, and if anything even more relevant now than it was then.—Editor

Question:

Is belief in "theistic evolution" or "creative evolution" consistent with acceptance of the doctrinal standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church?

Answer:

Belief in "theistic evolution" or "creative evolution" is not consistent with the doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. A false theory or interpretation of God's work of creation cannot be corrected or nullified by labeling it with a label of the truth. Those who claim to be "theistic" or "creative" evolutionists hold virtually to the same basic ideas and claims as the Darwinian evolutionists. I shall give several excerpts from a recent book by Ralph Sadler Meadowcroft, pastor of an Episcopalian congregation in Charleston, South Carolina and from all evidences a "theistic" evolutionist. In his book, "Postlude to Skepticism," on page 11 he writes: "The liberal calls for the right of increasing knowledge. According to him, the first sentence of Genesis is true, 'In the beginning God made,' but the explanation which then follows is the ancient Baby-

lonian myth, the best explanation of the creation process known by the Hebrews at that time of writing. If, however, a modern theologian were writing the account he would use the same opening words, 'In the beginning God made,' but would follow that sentence with a contemporary scientific explanation of sun-spots, star-dust and heat, while man would emerge not out of dust and breathe, but as the climax of a tediously long evolution. Yet the liberal would not demand that his explanations become sacrosanct. On the contrary, he anticipates that three thousand years hence men may have other explanations of creation that our knowledge will then seem as important as we consider the Garden myth to be."

Now another excerpt from the same on page 125: "For many centuries the Genesis myth of human creation was accepted as a correct account. Actually the only religious fact in the first three chapters of the Scriptures is contained in the first phrase, 'In the beginning God,' for so far as religious truth goes, it does not matter how creation occurred. Yet many religious people rose up in great indignation when Darwin's the-

ories gained popular attention.: and among religious groups it is still averred that if evolution is accepted as a factual account of human origin, the whole structure of belief will come tumbling down, which is palpably ridiculous.”

Now one more quotation to reveal the mind of the “theistic” evolutionist, and this quotation is on the origin of sin (page 141):

“The origin of sin is not traceable to an event in human history, but rather is born out of the conflicting tensions (Darwin’s survival of the fittest) which compose the life of mankind. To account for man’s depravity by the mythical fall of Adam, by which Adam’s descendants inherited the same fallen nature, is to make the first man in a sense responsible for all the human evil which has occurred through history. In so doing, men in history cease to be equally responsible with Adam for the sins they commit. Such a conclusion must also mean that man is less truly human than his original parent. . . . If, however, the fall of Adam is understood as a representative condition which occurs inevitably in the life of every individual, the responsibility and the fullness of human nature are alike the property of all men.”

These excerpts may well represent the teaching of those who call themselves “theistic” evolutionists.

Now let us quote several statements from the **Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America** to show what our Church believes concerning the creation of man and the fall and depravity of man. On page 11: “After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.” On pages 130-1 are answers to several questions in the Shorter Catechism. “Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.” Gen. 3:6, 7, 8, 13. “The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created was their eating the forbidden fruit.” Gen. 3:6, 12. “The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression.” Gen. 3:16, 17. Rom. 5:12. I Cor. 15:21, 23.

No one can consistently hold these two opposite beliefs concerning creation, the origin of sin, and the consequences of sin. One could go on and show that there is just as great an inconsistency in relationship to all the great doctrines of the Faith. —Robert Park

Question:

Why do Bible-believing Christians have to make such a point of being opposed to evolution? Can we not believe that God could have created man by evolution from lower animals?

Answer:

It is the responsibility of Bible-believing Christians to bear witness to truth at the points where truth is being challenged or denied. As Martin Luther said, we are not really confessing Christ unless we witness faithfully for the precise point of truth which the world and the devil are attacking. The Biblical doctrine of Creation is such a point today—it is under serious, sustained attack from many directions, and many Christians have, it would seem, grown weary of defending it, and seem to be ready to surrender to the false teachings of a non-Christian philosophy.

It is not a question of whether God could have produced mankind by evolution. God is almighty and can do anything which does not involve a contradiction of his own nature. The real question is not whether God could, but whether God did. The Bible teaches the direct creation of mankind and it teaches that the origin of mankind involved the creation of a real, individual Adam and Eve. It is quite impossible to combine any consistent scheme of evolution with the statements of Scripture. To start with a scientific theory which is accepted as unquestionable fact, and then bend the Bible to adjust it to this scientific theory, is certainly not consistent with regarding the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith. Scientific theories and human philosophies are constantly changing—the Bible lives on unchanged, the abiding Word of the living God. It is time for Christians to stand up for their beliefs and not be frightened by the sweeping (but often ill-founded) claims of scientists and philosophers. The servant of the prophet Elisha was badly frightened when he saw the city surrounded by armed men with horses and chariots (II Kings 6:15). But the prophet said to him, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (verse 16). “And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee. open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (verse 17). There are spiritual hosts and powers to help us, if we will but cast off carnal fear and witness in faith for the truth of God. The Christian people of America could put a stop to the teaching of evolution as “proved scientific fact” in our public schools and in denominational and tax-supported colleges and universities, if they really cared enough to bear a faithful, sustained and practical witness against this evil. This is no mere trifle, no petty prejudice. Anti-Christian philosophy which cuts to the very heart of the Christian view of man and the world is involved. We are shocked that the Supreme Court has ruled against the use of the Bible in the public schools. Are we equally shocked that public schools all over the nation are tak-

organic evolution for granted and teaching this to our youth as "scientific fact" which all intelligent people must of course accept? Are we afraid of being called "Fundamentalists," or said to be "behind the times?" Men said of our Lord that he had a devil, and was insane (John 10:20). "The servant is not greater than his Lord" (John 13:16). Who are we that we think we can be faithful Christians and still avoid enduring reproach for Christ's sake?

Dr. V. Raymond Edman, President of Wheaton College, wrote, "Evolution, organic or theistic, does not accord with the teaching of creation in the Scriptures and is therefore unscriptural. Evolution is essentially a philosophy of science, and a bad philosophy in my opinion, and is not science. The evolutionist and the creationist have, or should have, the same facts; but their explanations thereof differ decidedly" (*Christian Life* magazine, February, 1963). —J. G. Vos

Question:

Was there ever a rainbow before the great Flood of Noah's day; Genesis 2:5 states the "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" and rainfall is not mentioned until the history of the Flood in Genesis chapter 6.

Answer:

Genesis 2:5,6 is considered a difficult passage to interpret, and various opinions have been held as to its import. We should note that it does not state that there was no rain until the Flood, but only that there had been no rain prior to the time of Genesis 2:5,6. Verse 6 adds the information that "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the

ground." This "mist" evidently took the place of rainfall and provided sufficient moisture for vegetation to grow.

One view that has been held by some scholars is that there was no rainfall before the Flood, but during that period the earth was enveloped in a massive vapor canopy, with atmospheric humidity very high. It has also been suggested that this vapor canopy blunted the damaging cosmic rays which may be a cause of human aging. Then at the time of the Flood "the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11) and the waters in the vapor canopy were rapidly discharged onto the surface of the earth. It is suggested that from the Flood onwards the weather has been like what we know today (Genesis 8:22). This is a possible interpretation, but in the opinion of the writer it is not proven.

The other principal view is that there was rainfall, beginning at an unspecified time after Genesis 2:5, and that there were rainbows when the conditions for them were right, but that only after the Flood did the rainbow become a God-ordained token of the Covenant (Genesis 9:13-17). We may note that the rainbow was a token to remind God of His promise (Genesis 9:15, 16). There is an old Jewish rabbinic tradition to the effect that there were rainbows before the Flood, but only after the Flood did the rainbow become a covenant token. A parallel might be the ordinance of circumcision. This was widely practiced in the ancient Near East, but only in the time of Abraham was it specified as a covenant token (Genesis 17:10). Similarly our Lord designated bread and wine as the sacramental elements in the Lord's Supper, putting a meaning on these elements that they had not previously had. Yet in Genesis 14 Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine (14:18). —J. G. Vos

Religious Terms Defined

REGENERATION. That supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which a sinner is instantaneously changed from being dead in trespasses and sins to being a new creature in Christ Jesus. In regeneration the dominant bent or tendency of the soul is, by the almighty power of God, re-created holy and good. In Scripture this is also called being born again, the washing of regeneration, the new creation (II Cor. 5:17), being "begotten of God," etc. Logically considered, faith in Christ is the effect, not the cause, of regeneration, though in point of time the two may be almost simultaneous.

REPENTANCE. "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." (Shorter Catechism, 87). It should be noted that

this definition involves the human intellect and the will as well as the emotions.

REPROBATION. God's sovereign act of passing by those angels and men not elected to eternal life, and his additional act of ordaining them to dishonor and wrath to be inflicted for their sin. (See Westminster Confession of Faith, III.7).

RESTITUTION. That act of justice by which we restore to our neighbor whatever we have unjustly deprived him of. (Buck's Theological Dictionary). Our repentance will not be accepted by God unless we make proper restitution where it is possible to do so.

RESURRECTION. The supernatural event which will immediately follow the second coming of Christ, in which the bodies of all the dead shall be raised to life

and re-united with their souls forever. (Cf. Larger Catechism, 87).

RESURRECTION BODY. The body as raised from the dead at the Last Day, in some way identical with the body that died and was buried, yet different in its properties; in the case of the redeemed, a body spiritual, incorruptible, like Christ's glorious body.

RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. Christ's rising from the tomb on the third day following His death, according to the Scriptures, in the identical body in which He suffered, but glorified.

REVELATION. An activity of God by which He communicates truth to men.

REVELATION, NATURAL. God's communication of truth to men through the world of nature, including the human heart and conscience. Also called General Revelation.

REVELATION, SUPERNATURAL. God's communication of truth to men directly, apart from His natural revelation. Also called Special Revelation.

RIGHTEOUSNESS. Moral perfection, uprightness, or virtue.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. God's infinite moral perfection in His being and all His relations to His creatures. Also called the Justice of God.

RULE OF FAITH AND LIFE. "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him." (Shorter Catechism, 2).

RULING ELDERS. Those officers of the Church who have been set apart for the work of governing the Church, but not for preaching the Word nor for administering the sacraments.

Some Noteworthy Quotations

WHERE THERE IS MUCH DESIRE to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.

— John Milton

ALL THE PARTS of man's nature have suffered each their own peculiar injury by the catastrophe of the Fall, but it is those parts that have more immediately to do with God and His revealed will that have suffered most. And no part has suffered such a shock and hurt as the will. It is now by nature and in every unregenerate man turned away from God, and in bondage to sin and evil. It is not that man would do good, would return to God if he could; it is not that he cannot, he **WILL not**. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." There was no hand holding them back, no cord binding them but the bands of their evil will. This is what is meant when learned divines treat of the bondage and inability of the will.

— Alexander Whyte

GOD WILL NOT BE HONORED with exceptions, nor will He allow us to cut off from His law what is less pleasing to us. It is not said of a part of the law, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

— John Calvin

A MAN IS SPOTTED though he have only one stain; a cup is broken, if only the top be broken; one disease will make a man sick; and there are a hundred ways to wander in, but only one to life and immortality.

— Jeremy Taylor

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE LAW is such, that it does not admit of being broken in one point, and yet not in the whole.

— Henry Alford

STEPHEN NEVER PREACHED BUT ONE SERMON that we know of, and that was before the Sanhedrin; but how that sermon has been preached again and again all over the world! Out of his death probably came Paul, the greatest preacher that the world has seen since Christ left this earth. If a man is sent by Jehovah, there is no such thing as failure.

—D. L. Moody

REAL, TRUE FAITH is man's weakness leaning on God's strength. It is the Shepherd's business to keep the sheep. Who ever heard of the sheep keeping the shepherd? People have an idea that they have to keep themselves and Christ too. It is a false idea. It is the work of the Shepherd to look after them, and take care of those who trust Him. An Irishman said, on one occasion, that he often trembled, but his Rock never did.

—D. L. Moody

LIFE, ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, is founded upon truth; and the attempt to reverse the order results only in despair and spiritual death.

—J. Gresham Machen

THERE ARE, INDEED, EVANGELISTS who are not scholars, but scholarship is necessary to evangelism all the same. . . . It is out of a great underlying fund of Christian learning that true evangelism springs.

—J. Gresham Machen

THE SEPARATION of naturalistic liberalism from the evangelical churches would no doubt greatly diminish the size of the churches. But Gideon's three hundred were more powerful than the thirty-two thousand with which the march against the Midianites began.

— J. Gresham Machen

The impartial and prudent exercise of Church Discipline is useful for vindicating the honor of Jesus Christ, maintaining the dignity of His ordinances, preserving the purity of the Church, averting the judgments of God, and for the benefit of the offender himself, that by the administration of this ordinance of Christ, through grace, he may be humbled and recovered.

— R. P. Testimony

Toronto and the Reformed Faith

A Comparison of published statements of leading figures in the AACCS/ICS/Wedge movement with statements of recognized Reformed Confessional Standards

Compiled by J. G. Vos

“It is high time that we become struck with this undeniable message of the Scriptures, that, although they in numerous places speak to us of the Word of God, in no places do they mean themselves.”

“As such, as incriptionation, there is nothing unique about the Bible, for God's revelation is certainly not limited to that book. Nor is the inspiration of the Bible limited to it alone. For we certainly do not believe that after the Bible was complete God stopped inspiring authors. No, the uniqueness of the Bible is that it is an **authoritatively** inspired incriptionation of God's Word-revelation to His people.”

“In any case, we may certainly believe that in many instances the writings of 'saints' were 'inspired' writings and that they are revelational sources.”

(From Dr. Hendrik Hart, in *The Challenge of Our Age*, pages 118, 119, 130)

Reformed Standards versus Dr. Hart

“. . . which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.” (Westminster Confession of Faith, I.1.)

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced

from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (Westminster Confession of Faith, I.6.)

“The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.” (Westminster Larger Catechism, 3, in answer to the question, “What is the Word of God?”)

“All the books of the Old and New Testaments, and these only, are given by inspiration of God: they contain a complete system of faith, and a perfect rule for our direction in all the duties of life; unto these Scriptures nothing is at any time to be added by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (Reformed Presbyterian Declaration and Testimony, III.4.)

“Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; **for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself.** Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us, saying, **Prove the spirits whether they are of God.** Likewise: **If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house.**” (The Belgic Confession of Faith, VII).

(To be continued)

Reviews of Religious Books

The favorable reviewing of a book here does not imply approval of its entire contents. Purchase books from your book dealer or from the publishers. Do not send orders for books to Blue Banner Faith and Life.

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE AACS, by Peter De Jong. Reformed Fellowship, Inc., P.O. Box 7383, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49510. 1975, 19-page booklet. Price 40c per copy; 3 for \$1.00; 10 for \$2.00. 100 for \$15.00.

Approximately fifteen thousand copies of this new brochure have already been printed and sold. The author gives concise factual information about the "Reformational" movement, its origins and its activities. He gives many actual quotations from the published books and materials of the movement and shows how seriously these are contrary to the historic Reformed Faith with its infallible Bible as the only Word of God in the epistemological sense (i.e., the only rule of faith and life).

One section of the booklet deals with the activities of the AACS in the field of Christian education, emphasizing that the AACS bases all teaching not on the Bible as the unique Word of God but upon their own opinions and philosophical ideas which they call the "Word of God." (p. 16).

The booklet closes with an earnest warning and appeal to Christians to discern the truth versus the errors of the AACS, and to avoid associating with and supporting what may cause new and young Christians to stumble (p. 19).
—J. G. Vos

IF CHRIST IS THE ANSWER, WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS? Tom Skinner. Zondervan, 1974. 219 pp. \$2.95 (paper).

This is mainly a book about black-white relationships in family, state and church. There are chapters on Black power, Black theology, Black church, Blacks reaching Blacks, and etc. Herein lies the usefulness of the book; it is straightforward, honest comment on the current state of society, and the Christian witness in it, from a noted black evangelist. As such it is a book for whites as much as it is for blacks.

On more general doctrinal issues, Skinner is quite weak and inarticulate. For example, on the purpose of our lives, "God, like any normal father, wanted to have more children," verges on the crude and irreverent. Many such instances could be quoted. Admixed with the imprecision and error are flashes of good old sanctified common sense; e.g., talking of the modern preaching of "accept Jesus as your personal Savior," Skinner comments, "What we have today is a kind of cheap

Gospel which says Accept Jesus as your personal Savior so you won't burn in hell, and a number of people have invited Jesus Christ into their lives simply to collect fire insurance." (p. 26)

If you can sort out the theological confusion, you might get some useful insights from Skinner on the current state of black-white relations. —Gordon J. Keddie

A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY. William Barclay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975. 122 pp. \$5.95 (cloth).

On the eve of his retreat from the Divinity Faculty of Glasgow University, Scotland, William Barclay has written his "testament of faith." Barclay identifies himself as a "liberal evangelical" (p. 97), which, roughly translated, means that he "love(s) Jesus Christ. . . and (has) the utter assurance that (his) sins are forgiven" (p. 97) and yet does not believe "that Jesus is God" (p. 49), denies categorically the substitutionary nature of the atonement (pp. 51, 52) and does not accept that He actually rose from the dead. (p. 108) Barclay believes in "life after death" (p. 54) but is quite openly a believer in universal salvation (pp. 58-61). Furthermore, "God is not the omnipotent God, he is the struggling God" . . . indeed He is "an experimenting God who needs men to correct His mistakes." (p. 113) The Bible is quoted here and there, but never discussed.

As an autobiography the book, although a "couthy" personal statement of "a bit o' this an' that", is as threadbare as the author's theology. Professor Barclay needs our prayers.
—Gordon J. Keddie

A BIBLE EXAMINATION OF THE BOOK CALLED THE LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH. H. C. Heffren. P. O. Box 1448, Camrose, Alberta, Canada. 15 pp. n.p.

This brief tract seeks to show that Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* is "a false attempt to mislead God's people." Heffren does a good job in short compass. He shows some of the cardinal errors of Dispensationalism as represented by Lindsey. Of particular interest to the reviewer, who has just recently preached through Zechariah, was the critique of the latter's use of Zechariah 12-14, which Lindsey says describes the events of Jesus coming to reign among the remnant Jews in Jerusalem. Heffren rightly shows this to be absurd, since these chapters are clearly fulfilled in the Cross, the Resurrection, and the foundation

of the Church at Pentecost. A timely piece—we heartily recommend it. —Gordon J. Keddie

THE APPEAL OF CHRISTIANITY TO A SCIENTIST. John A. McIntyre. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1974. 17 pp. 25c.

The “scientist,” we are told, wants a “beautiful theory” that can be validated by thorough experimentation. In McIntyre’s experience the Christian faith, by analogy, is “the most beautiful theory he can imagine” and it has been “validated. . . completely in the laboratory of life.” (p. 17) Of course, unlike a scientific theory, it had to be “believed” first, but having “jumped in” he found that the water was fine!

As an argument for believing the Gospel this tract has no force, and the Gospel is done a disservice. The Gospel is to be proclaimed as fact—to be believed urgently. Why then is sin not mentioned? Why only the “beauty” of the “theory”? The IVF is to be censured for publishing this reduction of the Gospel call from a matter of life and death to one of aesthetic discrimination. —Gordon J. Keddie

SIDELIGHTS ON TWO NOTABLE MINISTRIES. Free Presbyterian Publications, 160 Pitt St., Glasgow, Scotland. 210 pp., LO.45. (paper)

A collection of Memoirs, letters and sermons of two brothers, Finlay and Archibald Cook, who exercised powerful ministries in the Free Church of Scotland during the nineteenth century. It is full of the Reformed piety so characteristic of the best Scottish Calvinism and makes sweet and edifying reading on a quiet evening. Their sermons evidence fervent attachment to the Person and Work of Christ—they are so full of the grace of the Gospel. This book is for the Christian who delights to savor over and over again the doctrines of free and sovereign grace. Richly devotional and experimental. —Gordon J. Keddie

DO YOU BELIEVE? William Brownson. Zondervan, 1975. 217 pp., \$1.95 (paper).

Thirty homilies from the Gospel of John first heard over **Temple Time**, the radio broadcast of the Reformed Church in America. The author is evidently a conservative evangelical, but there is nothing Reformed about his work. Subtitled, “Contemporary Insight on the Question of Faith,” this little volume contains little more than “Hoary old misunderstandings on the Question. . . etc!” For example, on John 3:1-3, the author affirms the sovereignty of God in the new birth and then in the next breath says that we can experience being “born again” by “looking to Jesus.” The net effect is to fail miserably to expound what the passage actually means. We are not told what the “new birth” really is—the author evidently confuses it with the experience of “conversion”—and we are forced to conclude that the author has not the slightest clue about the Biblical

ordo salutis. The whole book is non-exegetical and atheological—and therefore totally useless, at best. Pulp. —Gordon J. Keddie

THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH. Lawrence R. Eyres. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975. 69 pp., \$1.75 (paper). Preface by Prof. Jay Adams.

Eleven articles on Church government first published in the **Presbyterian Guardian** by the pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio. The discussion is full and is of excellent quality. It cannot but stimulate a healthy re-appraisal of the nature and functions of the elder as well as aid Christian men in assessing their own suitability as elders, potentially or actually. All Christians, especially the men, should read this book. The practical problems of eldership in the churches of the present day are not shirked, but are all dealt with simply, practically and Biblically. Highly recommended. —Gordon J. Keddie

THE RULING ELDER. Leonard T. Van Horn. Christian Bookstore, Centreville, Ala. 35042. 13 pp., 50c (paper).

Designed for those entering or exercising the office of elder, this manual by a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Synod) seeks to lead the reader to a sound view of the eldership. It is evidently intended as an outline for directed study. As such it is a useful guide, for it hits the appropriate nails on their heads. There is a great deal of emphasis on self-testing as to qualifications for the office and also on the “internal call” of God to be an elder, but the author puts weight upon the responsibility of the Session itself (and the people also) in the matter of the “external call” (election) of suitably qualified men. The Bibliography included is excellent. We are sure Mr. Van Horn would add Vol. 4 of J. H. Thornwell’s **Collected Writings** had it been available when he published his booklet. —Gordon J. Keddie

THE TRIUMPH OF PASTOR SON. Yong Choon Ahn, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1974. 96 pp. \$1.50 (paper).

The story of a Korean Presbyterian pastor who endured six years in Japanese prisons for refusing to bow to Shinto shrines, lost his two oldest sons in a Communist insurrection in 1948, and was himself martyred for his faith by Communists in the first year of the Korean War.

One wonders what one will do should similar circumstances come to prevail in this country. We cannot trust our own strength but must rest on that arm “that is not shortened, that it cannot save.” Light reading in popular style with a “heavy” subject. Read it.

—Gordon J. Keddie

HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR BIBLE. T. Norton Sterrett. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1974. 179 pp. \$2.50 (paper).

This is a delightful and eminently useful volume. Its publication is timely, for we are seeing at the present time a dearth of **true Biblical exposition** in the so-called "evangelical" or "conservative" churches. Texts are chosen by preachers; illustrations from life-experiences are hung on the texts willy-nilly; and the people identify with the experiential content of the illustrations and rationalize that they heard "the Word" preached. People learn individual Bible verses and understand

them in a way which is contradicted by the context they never took time to study.

Sterrett's book can go a long way to remedy this situation. In high school language, he covers, simply and in a very balanced way, the whole field of "hermeneutics" and "exegesis"—that is, "how to understand your Bible." People! . . . read this; pastors! . . . use it as a teaching tool. We believe this should be in every Christian home—the language is simple, technical terms are minimal, the examples are apt; the format is attractive, the print large and the price a bargain. The IVP has given us a "winner." —Gordon J. Keddie

Contributions Received

The following contributions have been received since our last issue went to press (June 30, 1975):

July, 1975. No. 2812. \$50.00.

August, 1975. No. 2813, \$25.00. No. 2814, \$15.00. No. 2815, \$500.00. No. 2816, \$6.00.

Later contributions will be acknowledged in our next issue. Without such generous contributions as these it would hardly be possible to continue publishing the

magazine, as subscriptions and sales of back issues and reprints provide only about half of the amount needed. We are trying to resist the tide of inflation by not raising our subscription rates. Many thanks to all who have helped. Your contributions are deductible from your Federal taxable income in you live in the United States.

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Reprints, Xerox Copies and Microfilm Copies

We are out of copies of the Syllabus on Old Testament History. If and when it is available again, we shall inform our readers. Much of the same content was published some years back in the magazine. We may be able to provide it in the form of back issues. Write for information if interested.

Back issues of recent years, and some of earlier years, are available at 50 cents per issue, postpaid. For some earlier years only used copies are available.

Xerox and microfilm copies of everything that has ever been published in this magazine are available. Write for circular telling how to order same.

Reprints of particular articles or series of lessons are available as follows. Most of these are issued at approximately the cost of production or less.

Available from **Crown and Covenant Publications, 800 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15221**

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Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East (free)
The Offense of the Cross (100/\$1.00. Single copy free)
Ashamed of the Tents of Shem? (5 cents each; single copy free)
Observations on the Theory of Evolution (100/\$1.00; single copy free)
The Visible Church: Its Nature, Unity and Witness (\$.50)

The following are available free as single copies; in quantities 10 cents each or \$1.00 per dozen, all postpaid:

The Work of the Holy Spirit and Receiving the Holy Spirit (combined)
 Arminianism and Sovereign Grace
 Bible Breaking, Bible Bending, and Bible Believing
 An Explanation and Appraisal of Dispensationalism
 God, Man and Religion

What is Christian Education?
 Surrender to Evolution: Inevitable or Inexcusable?
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