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REVELATION—CHAP. 4

“After these things I saw, and behold a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, as of a trumpet, speaking with me, saying: Come up hither and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter. Straightway I was in the Spirit.” [Revised Ver.]

When we listen to the description of a scene, as told by two or more observers, it is of much importance that we know both the time and the standpoint of the different witnesses. The chapter we are about to examine comes under this rule.

In the Book of Revelation we believe that John, personally, always symbolizes the beloved disciples—the faithful in the Church—who are alive at the time required by the events described. We think the Master referred to this in John 21:22: “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.” “This saying, therefore, went forth among the brethren that that disciple should not die; yet Jesus said not unto him that he should not die, but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is it to thee?” If we observe the standpoint from which John sees each vision we will know that of the class he represents.

Verse first tells us that the vision is of things “after” the events of the preceding chapter. The last period was while the Lord stood at the door knocking [being *present*, of course,] and when he is about to spue out of his mouth the present proud and worldly Church.

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That process has begun, so that it is now due that the class symbolized by John should, *in a symbolic sense*, be caught up and enabled to see things from a purely spiritual standpoint.

In John’s first vision, while he is given a glimpse of hidden things, he remains on the Isle of Patmos. Patmos means *mortal*. This symbolizes that the Church of John’s day could only see coming events from a mortal standpoint. *Now* he—rather we, whom he represents—are “caught up” in the spirit of our minds, and see spiritual things from an exalted position never attained to before.

John’s vision, then, as described in this chapter, shows events as seen by us, or rather so many of

us as have attained to this standpoint or spiritual position. This is in a sense the beginning of John's visions. At the first revelation made to him he saw only our Lord and the lamp-stands; the messages were delivered to him in words. From this time forward he is allowed to see events and conditions in a series of vivid pictures—the clearest way of representation.

He sees an open door in *heaven*. What heaven? When Paul was shown visions of things to come he was "caught up [better, *snatched away*] to the third heaven." (2 Cor. 12:2.) John also saw at last the third heavens and earth fully established. As most of our readers know, the progression of these so-called heavens is not upward, but onward. The first heavens and earth were before the flood; the second, this present evil world and its ruling powers (first and second are under Satan); the third, the new heavens and earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The third will be under the rule of Christ and his saints. It is during this latter that all the glorious promises of peace and prosperity will be fulfilled. "His rest shall be glorious." This dispensation of the kingdom of God is symbolically termed a new heavens (government) and new earth (subjects) in contradistinction from the heavens and earth which now are, "The present evil world," or order of things. It was to this Millennial kingdom that Paul was caught away in vision (2 Cor. 12:2).

As the *powers* of the third heaven take possession, the powers of the second are "shaken" until they are destroyed. (Matt. 24:29; Heb. 12:26.) The Lord tells us in Matt. 24:31, that after he has come he "will send forth his angels with a great trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds." (See also 1 Thess. 4:16,17.)

It is evident, then, that the open door which John saw was the entrance to the third heaven—the first step toward the place of power for those whom John represents. What brings them there? John says that the first voice which he heard was as of a trumpet, which said: "Come up hither."

During the sounding of the seventh trumpet, under which we now are, the announcement was made: "The kingdoms of this world are become those of our Lord and of his Christ." (Rev. 11:15.) The prophetic word has shown us that the Christ has come, that he has entered upon his reign. Believing this, and knowing what the result would be in the earth, business has been sacrificed and pleasure relinquished that we might know and spread the truth. Every new truth received and cherished has been a stepping-stone upward. The Lord has been our Guide, and we have been led into "green pastures."

The first object to meet the gaze of John is that of a glorious King seated on his throne. This is the Father, the "Ancient of Days." He is "to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone." The jasper is supposed to mean the diamond. It is described as "most precious" and "clear as crystal." Being the most brilliant of all the gems, it fittingly symbolizes the glory of God; the light (luminary, or

source of light) of the New Jerusalem. (Rev. 21:11-23.) The sardine is a stone of a red color. We think it here symbolizes love, which is the underlying element in all God's actions—tinging the glory through which it shines.

The throne is encircled by a rainbow "like unto an emerald." A rainbow is the "token" of a covenant. (Gen. 9:12-17.) The queen or emerald color probably symbolizes freshness and vigor; that God's plans are, like nature in the spring-time, filled with life, and continually developing and unfolding—blossoming into luscious fruit for the sustenance and pleasure of His creatures.

We are now introduced to

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Around the throne of God are seen twenty-four thrones, on which are seated twenty-four elders. Many opinions have been given in regard to who these symbolize. With present light we present the following: It is clear that, being symbolic, they cannot be individual saints. It cannot well be the Church of the first-born, as they appear under another symbol. It is unlikely that they represent angels.

There have been, as we count, twenty-four prophets that have prophesied of "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Their *testimonies* here seem to be personified, exalted and enthroned. The two witnesses of Rev. 11:3-12 are evidently the Old and New Testaments thus personified, as we think we can clearly show when we come to them. They, too, were exalted to (symbolic) heaven—the place of honor and authority in the Church.

These twenty-four witnesses for God, while now more or less despised and disbelieved, will yet be proved true and faithful, and will thus be similarly exalted in the sight of all men. (Comp. Luke 10:15.) As yet, *we only* are enabled thus to see them. They are clothed in white, denoting purity. The crowns of gold symbolize their divine authority.

At the present time the Church, in a great measure, ignores their witness—failing to understand it. In the future reign both the Church and the world must bow to their authority, as they will then have *lost the privileges* that were promised in the New Testament.

"Out of the throne [of God] proceed lightnings and thunderings and voices." These refer to the mutterings of the tempest which is already gathering over the Church and the world. Others beside ourselves see the approaching storm, but they fail to recognize from whence it comes.

Before the throne are seen seven lamps of fire burning, which are the seven spirits of God—the seven (perfect or *complete* number) channels through which God is about to manifest his power. If we compare carefully Rev. 1:4,12,20; 2:1; 3:1; 5:6, we find that they are the church of the first-born. These were called from the beginning “the light of the world,” but from henceforth they are to “shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43.) These, too, are to be the honored instruments by which he will smite the nations, pour out his plagues, and shed light and truth upon mankind. “This honor hath all his saints.” (Ps. 149.)

In full view of the throne is also seen “a sea of glass.” This sea is soon to be mingled with fire (Rev. 15:2). From our standpoint it is transparent. The sea represents the unfettered, irreligious masses of the people. We are enabled to see clearly the internal forces that control them, what they are about to do, and why they do it. We can see that the fire is “already kindled.” We see it smouldering in their breasts, ready to break out, a wild, *unquenchable* whirlwind of flame, when the due time comes. The whole matter is clear as crystal from the standpoint of those who are walking in the light.

Around and in the midst of the throne are seen the four cherubim or living ones, here translated “beasts.” Before we can understand what they represent here, we must take a glance at what is revealed in regard to them in earlier times.

THE CHERUBIM

These strange creatures are first brought to view in Gen. 3:24, where they appear with flaming swords as the guardians of the way leading to the tree of life. They are next seen at each end of the mercy-seat on the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 25:18). In the most holy of the temple two new representatives of immense size were placed, between which the ark was set. (1 Kings 6:23.) They were seen in vision by Isaiah (6:2-6) and by Ezekiel (1:5-16; 10:1-21). They are always connected with the immediate presence or with the throne of God. Evidently at the entrance to Eden they represented or accompanied the presence of God. (compare Gen. 4:3,16.) Isaiah and Ezekiel saw them as *supporting* or carrying the throne or chariot of Jehovah.

Looking at the mercy-seat as representing this chariot or throne, the same idea is expressed in the relation of the cherubim to the ark—both in the tabernacle and temple. (See also 1 Chron. 28:18. 2 Chron. 3.) Jehovah is *frequently* spoken of as dwelling between or above the cherubim. (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; Ps. 18:10; Isa. 37:16.)

Some who have failed to recognize them as *symbols*, have supposed that they were a high class of angels, a kind of body-guard of the Most High. He has no need of such. He dwells amid admiring

and adoring worshipers.

What, then, do the cherubim symbolize? We think they personify the attributes of God. Scholars have suggested a number of attributes. We think that there are just four which are fundamental, namely: Power, Wisdom, Justice and Love. These four include all others. For instance: independence, omniscience, holiness and benevolence are dependent on or similar to the above mentioned in their absolute perfection as God has them. On these his throne is represented as being supported.

When the way back to Eden was closed by “the cherubim,” it was not

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only the act of his power and justice; it was also done by wisdom and love. “Cursed is the ground *for thy sake*” was the utterance of love and wisdom. Idleness destroys; activity develops. The latter made the Greeks, even in a rugged country, a finely developed people; while idleness ruined Rome, with the treasures of the world at her feet.

In the tabernacle two small cherubim appear. They are a part of the mercy-seat and seem to grow out of it. Before we can appreciate this picture we must remember that the tabernacle represented things as they exist during the Gospel age: the temple, as they will

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be during the Millennial age. Again, the picture is not as seen from God’s standpoint, but from that of the church. The mercy-seat in a sense represents Christ. Many who cannot see the love and justice of God apart from Christ, believe that they are somehow bound up in him. These two attributes of God are very indistinct to them; they cannot see them; except that in some manner, too deep for their understanding, they are blended in Christ. Again, previous to the advent of Jesus, even the love is hidden; only the “stern” justice appears. The love was in Christ, but was not yet made manifest. Previous to the atoning sacrifice the picture appears like this. The mercy-seat is the place of justice—but man has been proved guilty. Until satisfaction has been made there is no hope. Power and wisdom—the two cherubim—stand at either end, their wings uplifted as if ready to fly to the rescue, but their feet are held by justice. They cannot move. They look expectant toward the mercy-seat, waiting, watching for the blood of atonement which shall set them free to do their willing work. But these cherubim are said to over-*shadow* the mercy-seat. This is also true, for if the blood of atonement is not forthcoming, they stand as the guardians of justice and the terror of the evil-doer.

In the temple, which represents the church in the Millennial age, two new and very large cherubim were made. [Probably nearly twenty-one feet high.] They are represented as standing on each side of the ark, their outer wings touching either wall, and their inner wings touching each other, thus filling the whole expanse. (2 Chron. 3:10.)

These two new cherubim would seem to represent the other two attributes that had been so obscure before, but are now made glorious by the additional light of the new dispensation. [There was one lampstand in the tabernacle and ten in the temple.] The chief work of the Millennial age will apparently be to show that these two glorious attributes—love and justice—are not lame or impotent; they stand upon their own feet; they are independent, yet in perfect harmony, and that they are “of one measure and of one size.” (1 Kings 6:25.)

We cannot in this follow minutely the description of the cherubim as seen by Isaiah and Ezekiel, neither have we sufficient light as yet, but we will notice a few points that are easily seen. These two prophets seem, like John, to represent the living saints. To them “the heavens were opened.” (Ez. 1:1; Rev. 4:1.) They see “visions of God,” and Jehovah sitting upon a throne.” (Isa. 6:1.) They see the cherubim around and under the throne. They hear them rest not from crying, “Holy, holy, holy,” etc. That is, we now see that all of God’s attributes are in perfect harmony, and that in ceaseless chorus they are sounding forth his praise, and revealing the fact that “the whole earth is full of his glory,”—to those who have their eyes opened. We are sent to preach, as the Lord’s new mouth-piece, a message that is offensive to “a rebellious house,” even to those who believe themselves to be the “Israel of God.” It is a message of “lamentations, mourning and woe.” (Ez. 2:10.) We are given the book to eat. [What a blessed feast it is!] It is “like honey” in our mouths; but having been digested, it leads to self-denial, to crucifixion, to death. (Ez. 3; Rev. 10.)

We realize our weakness, but when the hot coal from the altar touches our lips, we are ready to answer, “Here am I, send me.” The message is, “Go and tell this people: Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.” “Declare fat the heart of this people, and its ears declare heavy, and its eyes declare dazzled,” etc. [*Young’s trans.*] “Then, said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.” (Isa. 6:5-13.) At the voice of the cherubim the door posts of the temple move, and the house is filled with smoke (Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 10:4; Rev. 15:8.) [For an illustration of this see “Seven Last Plagues,” ZION’S WATCH TOWER, June, 1883. The four faces of the cherubim will be treated when examining chap. 6.]

In Rev. 4:9-11, John hears the cherubim “give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne,” and immediately the twenty-four elders fall down before him, saying, “Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst

create all things, and because of thy will they are and were created” [Rev. 4:11].

When we can hear the power, wisdom, justice, and love of God proclaiming *in perfect harmony* the glory and honor of our Father, then indeed his twenty-four witnesses ring out his praise as never before, and we realize that he created all things, both good and evil, and that they exist by his permission and shall ultimately work out his pleasure. W. I. M.

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— September, 1883 —



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