

(Part 3 of 6 from)

## THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM IN THE APOCALYPSE

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### CHAPTER XXVI

From *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (1959)

#### 8. *The Place of Israel in the Period of Pre-Kingdom Judgments*

And the dragon was wroth with the woman. -- Rev. 12:17

In the Book of Revelation, the appearance of the last one of Daniel's seventy weeks of years, constituting the chronological frame of the period of pre-Kingdom judgments (chs. 6-19), is perfectly consistent with the purposes of God for the nation of Israel. For in the original prophecy, the angelic messenger said to Daniel that the entire "seventy weeks" were determined "upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (9:24). To this people belonged in a peculiar covenantal sense the future Messianic Kingdom. And although during the present age, because of her sinful rejection of the Messianic King, the nation of Israel has been set aside temporarily (Rom. 11:11-15), we should expect that this nation would once more appear as the object of God's special concern when He prepares judicially to establish on earth the long-expected Kingdom. In full accord with this assumption, Israel does appear once more in her place of national distinction during the period of judgments preparatory for the Kingdom.

The evidence for this restored distinction is very clear in the inspired record. Before the storm of supernatural judgments is loosed upon the world, a company of 144,000 Israelites are protectively sealed as "the servants of our God" (Rev. 7:2-4; cf. 14:1-5), definitely distinguished from the uncounted multitude from "all nations" appearing in 7:9. Chapter 11 opens with a clear distinction between the people who worship in the "temple" and the "Gentiles" who tread underfoot "the holy city" (vss. 1-2). In the same verses, John is told to "measure" the temple, the altar, and the people who worship there--a symbolic action suggesting the resumption of divine possession. The testimony of God during this period is directly primarily toward the nation of Israel; and the "two witnesses" (vs. 3) are certainly Jewish in origin (Mal. 4:5-6). Even the plagues to be visited upon their enemies are reminiscent of former judgments associated with Elijah and Moses in the history of Israel (Rev. 11:6). The whole of chapter 12 is concerned with a "woman" who is unmistakably identified with the Israel of history (cf. vs. 5). She is the special object of persecution by

the beast, but is divinely preserved throughout the terrible period of his reign (vss. 6, 14); although those of her seed who hold the "testimony of Jesus" continue to be exposed to his wrath (vs. 17). All this persecution of Israel, both past and future, is traced back to Satan himself (vs. 9). And in the final scene this conflict reaches even into the heavens where Satan meets defeat at the hand of Michael (vss. 7-9), the great angel to whom has been divinely assigned the protection of the interests of Israel (Dan. 12:1).

Also certain features which appear in the *imagery* of this judgment period are historically associated with the nation of Israel. Almost immediately following the measuring of Israel's temple on earth (Rev. 11:1), the temple of God in heaven is opened and there reappears "the ark of his covenant" (11:19, ASV). The seven angels with the last seven pre-Kingdom judgments come out of "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" (15:5, ASV). And when the last vial is emptied, the announcement of finished judgment issues from this same heavenly temple (16:17).

The Israel which appears within the frame of end-time events, as the object of God's special concern, is the Israel of Old Testament history. The symbolic description in chapter 12 is unmistakable; and in chapter 7 even the tribes are named. The attempts of spiritualizing interpreters to identify this Israel with the Church, and to find the fulfilment of the predictions of Revelation 12 and 13 in history, have not succeeded. The dictum of Dean Alford still remains unshaken: "I am . . . quite unable . . . to point out definitely any period in the history of this world's civil power which shall satisfy the 42 months of chapter 13:5. As far as I have seen, every such attempt hitherto has been characterized by signal failure."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the premillennial view of the permanence of God's covenantal relation to the historic nation of Israel is today receiving strong support from unexpected sources. Dr. T. F. Torrance, professor of dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh, has recently written: "The historical particularity of Israel covenanted with God persists through the Christian era. God has not cast off His ancient people (Rom. 11:1ff.); for the covenant with Israel as God's people remains in force, and cannot be 'spiritualized' and turned into some form alien to the stubborn historicity of its nature without calling in question the whole historical foundation of God's revelation in Old Testament and New Testament."<sup>2</sup> We welcome this unequivocal testimony as to the factual and permanent nature of Israel's historic relation to God, even though we may not concur in all the conclusions drawn by Dr. Torrance from the fact.

## 9. *The Church during the Period of Pre-Kingdom Judgments*

For God hath not appointed us to wrath. -- *I Thess. 5:9*

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1 Henry Alford, *Commentary on Revelation*, Intro., Sec. V., Par. 50.

2 T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God," *Interpretation*, July, 1956, p. 317.

a. As stated above (point 2, p. 446) [see Part 1 of 5, pg. 4 of this reprint], the term *ekklēsia* occurs frequently in the first three chapters of Revelation but not at all thereafter, except once in the epilogue, where the divine Author turns from the area of prediction to speak a final word of comfort and admonition to the "churches" to which the entire prophecy was addressed. From this usage it appears that in the Book of Revelation *ekklēsia* is reserved always to designate churches existing on *earth*. And it therefore becomes significant that during the judgments of chapters 4-19 the term is never once applied to any body of saved persons on earth, although several such bodies appear (cf. 7:1-18; 7:14, ASV; 12:11, 17; 13:7; 14:1-5; 18:4). This omission would be strange if, during the period described, there were any *ekklēsia* remaining on the earth.

b. The lofty position of the Church in relation to the coming Kingdom would be seriously inconsistent with subjection to the terrible judgments which will prepare for its establishment. For the Church is the very "body" of the Messianic King (Eph. 1:23), a term of intimacy never applied to any other redeemed group of people. To the members of the Church is promised that they shall have a part in *judging* the world (I Cor. 6:2) and that they are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), destined to "reign" with Him (Luke 22:29-30; II Tim. 2:12). Also to the Church our Lord has assigned the high authority represented by the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19); and against her "the gates of hell shall not prevail" (vs. 18). Now in sharp contrast to these assurances given to the Church, the Book of Revelation declares that "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit (11:7) will make war against "the saints" on earth during his awful reign, and "overcome them" (13:7). Furthermore, this power of the beast will extend over "all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." We must not overlook, either, that this power of the beast to overcome the saints of that future time will be "given" by God Himself, thus setting it within the category of divine judgment. The verb "given" is used frequently throughout the book with this connotation. Now great as her sufferings have been at times in the past, nothing comparable to this can be found in the long history of the Church on earth. Such an idea would be excluded in advance by the fact that the present age of the Church is not in any eschatological sense the "great day" of divine wrath, as that future time will be (Rev. 6:16-17).

c. Opposed to the idea of the Church's exposure to this period of future judgment, there is also the specific promise of Revelation 3:10--"Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world [lit., "inhabited earth"], to try them that dwell upon the earth" (ASV). While this promise was addressed initially to the *ekklēsia* at Philadelphia (vs. 7), it is also intended for the whole Church as symbolized by "the seven churches" (1:20), for the letter closes with a general call to "hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (3:13).

As to the precise meaning of Rev. 3:10, the first thing to be noticed is *what* the Church is to be kept from: not from the ordinary trials of human life, but from a special hour (lit., "the" hour) of trial which is yet future and will fall upon the entire inhabited earth. Since "hour"

in Scripture may refer to any specific expanse of time (cf. John 4:23), the particular "hour of trial," in its Biblical context, points definitely to the "hour of his [God's] judgment," as the period of Revelation 6-19 is designated in 14:7. The verb *tēreō* with the preposition *ek* in 3:10 seems to indicate the action of being *kept* out of rather than being *delivered* out of. And this idea is supported by the inspired record of what will happen during that awful "hour." Of all the temporal judgments of the period, the worst will be the suffering involved in the test of decision between Christ and the antichrist; and this will fall exclusively upon the saved, not upon the unsaved (13:15).

The notion that those who become believers on earth during the period of pre-Kingdom judgments will be divinely guarded *from* the afflictions entailed, in alleged fulfilment of the promise in Rev. 3:10, is simply false to the record. In that hour the physical judgments will generally fall upon the saved and unsaved alike. But, excepting the 144,000 sealed Israelites, in the supreme "trial" those who choose Christ will be killed, while those who reject Him will live! Even the two great prophets of the hour, having borne their faithful witness for 1260 days, will at last suffer martyrdom and the diabolical indignities which attend it (11:7-10).

The promise of Revelation 3:10 is supported by other promises to the Church: "We shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). "And to wait for his Son from heaven, . . . which delivered us from the wrath to come" (I Thess. 1:10). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath" (I Thess. 5:9). There is also the great promise of our Lord Himself, "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24, ASV); a passage which, according to Alford,<sup>3</sup> expressly negatives the notion that the Church can be made subject to the judgments associated with the Millennial Kingdom.

d. Although during the judgments described in chapters 4-19 there is no mention of any *ekklēsia* on earth, there are at least three references to *a body of saved people in heaven* during the period, and who are designated by terms which are applicable best to the Church of the present age. The references occur in chapters 19, 13, and 4-5, and will now be considered in this order.

(1) *The "wife" of the Lamb in Rev. 19:1-9*

The symbolical language here will not be strange to readers of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul has described the Church of the present age as the future wife of Christ. Thus he writes to the Church: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2). The same spiritual relationship and also the same future day of presentation is spoken of in Eph. 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it. .

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3 Henry Alford, *Commentary on New Testament*, on Rev. 20:5.

. . . That he might present it to himself a glorious church, . . . that it should be holy and without blemish."

To the Apostle John finally it was given in prophetic vision to behold the blessed consummation of this conjugal relationship between the Church and her Lord. He hears the voice of a great multitude saying, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Another voice adds, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (vs. 9). Nothing could be more certain than that John and Paul are speaking of the same body of the saved and of the same eschatological event. But the point of immediate interest is that the entire scene of the marriage and its glorious supper is by John "*in heaven*" (vs. 1), not upon the earth. In the order of events, therefore, John puts the Church in heaven before the glorious coming of Christ (19:11-16), and before the final and most terrible of the entire series of judgments preparatory to His establishment of the Kingdom on earth (19:17-21).

## (2) *The "tabernacle" of God in Rev. 13:16*

In the 13th chapter of Revelation the beast "out of the sea" (vs. 1) appears at the height and fullness of his brief span of world power. The entire world of nations, politically and religiously, is at his feet. And with the exception of those "written in the book of life of the Lamb," all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (vs. 8). At this point in his mad career, he opens his mouth in terrible "blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (vs. 6). Thus, according to the King James Version, the objects of the beast's blasphemy are *four*: God, His Name, His tabernacle, and certain ones who dwell in heaven. But the best Greek text reduces the number to *three* objects. The manuscript evidence overwhelmingly supports the omission of the conjunction *kai* ("and") in the final clause. The words "them that dwell in heaven," therefore, stand in apposition<sup>4</sup> to the preceding clause, and are exegetical in character, defining and identifying the "tabernacle" mentioned there. The "tabernacle" of Rev. 13:6, hence, cannot be heaven itself (as in Heb. 9:11), but is specifically defined as a body of personal beings who will be dwelling in heaven at this time during the career of the beast. The American Standard Version has well rendered the verse as follows: "And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, *even* them that dwell in the heaven."

Who are these dwellers in heaven referred to as God's "tabernacle"? The Greek term used here, I think, points to the correct answer. It is *skēnē*, which means a tent, dwelling, abode, or habitation. In Scripture it is used variously: to designate the tabernacle of Old Testament history (Heb. 8:5); the celestial tabernacle (Heb. 8:2); the holy of holies (Heb. 9:3); and the bodily tabernacle of the soul (II Pet. 1:13-14). Although this term itself is not applied directly in the New Testament to the Church, the idea it represents is often

<sup>4</sup> Alford's opinion, that "the apposition is strange" here, arises through his failure to recognize the true nature of this "tabernacle."

connected with the Church. According to Paul, the Church is a "temple" [*naos*] of God (I Cor. 3:16-17); a "habitation [*katoikētērion*] of God" (Eph. 2:22); and the "body" (*soma*) of Christ (Col. 1:24). Herein is one of the unique glories of the Church: to be the corporate dwelling-place of God through the Spirit, beginning with the day of Pentecost and extending out into future ages without end. In the visions of the Apocalypse, then, the Church of the present age appears in its corporate capacity as the habitation (*skēnē*) of God already *in heaven* at the very time the antichrist reaches the height of his power *on earth*. And this point in time, the reader should recall, will arrive at exactly the middle of the entire period of seven years covered by the judgments of chapters 6-19, i.e., at the beginning of the beast's total power extending forty-two months (13:5).

This body of the saved in heaven, referred to as the "tabernacle" of God, must not be confused with "the great multitude" of Rev. 7:9-17; for, according to the divine identification, the latter are those who are seen coming (Grk. present tense) up out of "the great tribulation" of those terrible days (vs. 14, ASV), whereas the Church is to be kept out of that "hour of trial" (Rev. 3:10, ASV). Moreover, though both groups are redeemed through grace by the same Lord, the descriptions of their respective destinies are clearly different, as may be seen by comparing the account in Rev. 7:14-17 with New Testament predictions of the Church's regal future.

The question now may be raised as to what form the beast's blasphemy of God and the Church will take. Since to blaspheme is to speak impiously and injuriously of divine things, in what way will he speak? To this the inspired record gives no specific answer in the passage. But from the general teaching of Scripture there are some legitimate inferences which may be drawn. First, among all the redeemed, none have attracted a greater measure of satanic hatred than the Church which is the body and bride of Christ. For its members are destined to reign with Him in the highest level of His Kingdom, a comparable place once held by Satan himself. Second, when the satanic beast of the end-time reaches the height of his absolute earthly power, the Church will have been removed to heaven wholly beyond his malignancy. Third, this mysterious disappearance of millions of people from the earth bodily in "the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15:51-52) will be a world-shaking event, something impossible to keep from public knowledge by any power or device of news control. Such an event, clearly miraculous in nature, will demand some plausible explanation on the part of the beast who will then be on the march toward political supremacy and seeking to attract to himself as world leader the admiration and confidence of all men. In this dangerous emergency, with his leadership at stake, what could be more reasonable than to find the beast resorting to the well-known technique of "the great lie," explaining perhaps to his followers that the vanished people were opposers of social progress, "apostles of discord" standing in the path of religious unity; and therefore they have been taken away by *divine judgment*? Perhaps this will be part of the "strong delusion" welcomed by the ungodly of that coming day (II Thess. 2:11). At any rate, a lying explanation of this kind would certainly satisfy the meaning of the "blasphemy" of Rev. 13:6, for it would malign both the character of God and also that of the true Church which

today is the only light of the world and salt of the earth.

(3) *The "four and twenty elders" in Rev. 4 and 5*

The careful reader of these two chapters will already have noted that the atmosphere of the scene pictured here is *judicial* in character. The "throne" of 4:2, like the throne of 20:11, speaks of judgment; God as judge sits upon the throne. In His hand there is a seven-sealed book which no one can open except "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David," who appears here as "a Lamb" bearing the marks of having been sacrificed (5:1-6). After an outburst of universal adoration and expectant joy the Lamb begins to break the seals of the book; and the judgments of God begin to fall successively upon the world (5:8-6:1). A very striking feature of this judgment scene is the presence of "four and twenty elders," sitting in a circle immediately surrounding the central throne, and who display at least four marks of identification.

First, they sit upon "*thrones*" (4:4, ASV). The term here (unfortunately rendered "seats" in the KJV) is the same as used of the judgment-seat of God. Thus the elders sit with God as assessors or associate judges in the judicial acts about to be inflicted upon the world. This means that they cannot represent angels, for the latter appear in Scripture always as servants, and never as *judges*.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the "four and twenty elders" are clothed in "*white raiment*" (vs. 4). Such raiment doubtless speaks of both regal splendor and moral character, a fitting symbol of the unimaginable glory for which the redeemed are even now being prepared.

Third, these elders wear on their heads "*crowns of gold*" (vs. 4). Both the crown and its costly substance represent the regal or reigning function at its highest level. While the ideas suggested by "thrones" and "crowns" respectively are not ordinarily wholly separable, yet in Scripture the "crown" seems to have the meaning of *executive* function, whereas the "throne" is reserved as a symbol of that aspect of rulership which appears in its *judicial* activity. Of the latter there is an excellent example in the promise of our Lord that His disciples are to "*sit on thrones judging*" (Luke 22:30, italics added).

Fourth, the twenty-four elders sing a "*new song*" (5:9-10). Although the four "living creatures" (ASV) join the elders in falling down before the Lamb in worship (vs. 8), it is significant that the song, the harps, and also the prayers of the saints, seem limited to the elders. Hengstenberg says dogmatically that the words of verse 8, "having every one," etc., refer to the elders only, not to the living creatures, rightly identifying the latter as cherubim (cf. Ezek. 10:20).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Greek *hekastos*, rendered "every one" here, is masculine and therefore points back to "elders" with which it agrees in gender; whereas

5 E. W. Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, tr. by Patrick Fairbairn (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1851), Vol. I, p. 206.

6 E. W. Hengstenberg, *ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

*zōa* (KJV "beasts") is neuter. By the very redemptive nature of the song which follows, the cherubim would be excluded, for angelic beings are not subjects of redemption. There is a textual problem, however, in connection with the pronouns of verses 9 and 10. On the basis of weighty manuscript evidence, the textual editors have properly changed the "us" and "we" in verse 10 (cf. KJV) to the third person "them" and "they" (cf. ASV). Then feeling it desirable to bring verse 9 into forced conformity with these changes, but finding no evidence of any alternative pronoun to the "us" there, a few editors<sup>7</sup> simply dropped the pronoun altogether, leaving the verb "redeemed" without any proper object. Not understanding the relation of these elders to the redeemed, they failed to see that there was no necessary conflict between a first personal pronoun in verse 9 and the third personal pronoun in verse 10. As Hengstenberg pointed out long ago,<sup>8</sup> the elders speak of *themselves with* the redeemed in verse 9, whereas in verse 10 they speak objectively of the Church *as its representatives*, which they are in chapters 4 and 5.

In summarizing the four marks of identification outlined above--the thrones, the white raiment, the golden crowns, and the redemption song--it may be said that among all the saved there is only one body in the universe of which *all* these things are true. Others may be redeemed, walk in white, even reign with Christ, but only the Church which is the body and bride of Christ will enjoy these special privileges and also sit with Him in judgment of the world (I Cor. 6:1-3; Rev. 3:21).

To this may be added the argument from the term itself. The elders are *presbuteroi*. It would be hard to imagine any symbol which could better represent the Church than a company of these *presbuteroi*, so familiar to the early Christians. They were in every congregation (Tit. 1:5). In was their proper business while on earth to represent the *ekklēsia* in various ways. If one of its members fell sick, he was instructed to send for the "elders" who would represent the Church in the solemn service prescribed by the Epistle of James (5:14-15). When Paul wished to discuss certain matters with the Ephesian Church, he sent for its "elders" as representatives of the congregation (Acts 20:17). Why should not a group of these well-known officers, therefore, serve appropriately in heaven as a symbol of the entire body of Christ? Furthermore, the fact that the elders were properly a *ruling* body on earth would add to their appropriateness as a symbol of the Church enthroned in heaven. The number chosen here, while of interest, is not of great consequence. It may be noted, however, that the number 24 is never used as a symbol in the Apocalypse apart from these "elders," suggesting the absolute uniqueness of the Church for which they stand.

It is an impressive fact that, in the long and bewildering history of attempts to interpret the symbols of the Apocalypse, there is hardly any instance of greater unanimity than with reference to that of the twenty-four elders. Among the well-known commentators who regard these elders as representative of the *Church* are Alford, Barnes, Benson, Binney, Carpenter, Clarke, Clemance, Book, Crafer, Crosby, Dusterdieck, Fausset, Girdlestone,

<sup>7</sup> Tischendorf, Alford, Wordsworth, Lachmann.

<sup>8</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *ibid.*, pp. 239-242.

Godet, Gray, Henry, Holden, Kuyper, Milligan, Plummer, Robertson, Scott, Sheppard, Simcox, Slight, Smith, Swete, Weidner. Vincent says, "The twenty four elders are usually taken to represent the one Church of Christ." And Hengstenberg declares, "That the elders are representatives of the church, there can be no question."<sup>9</sup>

The commentators named represent many eschatological viewpoints. They were not writing in support of any pretribulationist school of thought. As a matter of fact, they were in sharp disagreement with one another about much in the Book of Revelation. The reader grows weary trying to follow the ramifications of their different systems of interpretation. Some of them almost despair of reaching any safe conclusions about many things in the book. Furthermore, they do not all agree as to the precise nature and extent of the Church, nor as to its place in the divine plan of the ages. Yet in spite of these disagreements, they are united in the opinion that the twenty-four elders of chapters 4 and 5, enthroned in heaven, do represent the true Church of God! This interpretation, if adopted by premillennialists who believe the Book of Revelation presents an *intelligible* program, shuts out of court any eschatological scheme which would leave the Church on earth during any part of the terrible judgments of the end-time described in chapters 6-19.

Regardless of the chronological arrangements which may be made of these judgments, whether some recapitulation or overlapping scheme be adopted, the opening action of chapters 4 and 5 simply cannot be pushed into the picture which follows in 6 to 19. There is a definite sequence here: No judgment falls until the first seal is broken; the first seal is not broken until the Lamb receives the sealed book; the Lamb does not take the book until the twenty-four elders are in heaven, enthroned and crowned. If the action in heaven described in chapters 4 and 5 does not precede the judgments of chapters 6 to 19, then no one can make any sense whatever out of the order of the events set forth in the last book of the Bible; and we may as well complain with Luther, "Even if it were a blessed thing to believe what is in it, no man knows what that is." But the very intensity of the labors of Christian scholars down through the centuries is the strongest witness to their rejection of such a verdict.<sup>10</sup>

## 10. *Harbingers of the Coming Kingdom*

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<sup>9</sup> For the quotations, documentation, and extended argument, see my address on "The Pretribulation Rapture and the Commentators," published in a symposium under the title, *Understanding the Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 198-207.

<sup>10</sup> **Note:** This website, as most readers know, holds the premillennial position *and* the posttribulation rapture, and here Dr. McClain is basing his approach on the pretribulation rapture. For more on these two views, check the Site Index for a number of classic reprints, such as *The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test* by Scruby; *Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?* by Shackleton; *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming* by Tregelles; *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation* by Frost, as well as *A Short Study on the Book of Revelation*, a compilation by us of excerpts from a great many commentators. It behooves us to be thoroughly knowledgeable with both positions in order to give an adequate defense of our own.

For reasons which will become apparent, I have reserved until now the discussion of certain matters recorded in chapters 5, 10, 11, and 12 of Revelation, which appear as the great pointers toward the coming Kingdom and its constitutive events as presented in 19:11-20:15.

a. *The Sealed Book of Revelation 5.* In the magnificent scene of chapters 4 and 5 there is seen in the hand of God a "book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (5:1). The Lamb receives this book from the hand of God, and as He breaks its seals there fall upon the world with increasing severity the judgments of heaven. As to the nature of the book (lit. "roll"), Deismann showed some years ago, on the basis of archaeological evidence,<sup>11</sup> that it must be understood in the light of a similar document which appears in Jer. 32:6-15. This was not a book at all in the ordinary sense, but rather a *title-deed* written on both sides of a sheet of material, which was then rolled up and sealed, leaving the roll so that one copy would be outside and visible but the other copy hidden inside. In case of tampering or dispute, the breaking of the seals would reveal the original copy and establish the lawful owner in his rights. Thus Biblically interpreted, the sealed document of Revelation 5 becomes a symbol of high importance; and the breaking of its seals by our Lord marks the first judicial assertion (in Revelation) of His regal rights, for the purpose of punishing and dispossessing the usurpers of His realm. In this sense, the breaking of the first seal becomes a strong harbinger of the impending Kingdom.

b. *The Angelic Action of Revelation 10.* Here a "mighty angel" comes down from heaven and sets his feet on land and sea (vss. 1-2), thus serving public notice of divine ownership. This meaning is confirmed by the angel's words: "there shall be delay no longer" (vs. 6, ASV); for in "the days of the voice of the seventh angel, . . . the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (vs. 7). The "mystery" here mentioned is closely connected with the "delay." If in the Old Testament there was one thing which to the prophets was mysterious about the eagerly expected Messianic Kingdom, it was the seeming long delay in its establishment. As an example of the acute distress felt in the presence of this mystery, let the student read the cry, "How long, LORD?" (Ps. 89:46), in the context of the entire psalm. So also the redeemed have felt down through the centuries as they have prayed, "Thy kingdom come." As the pledge that these prayers shall be answered we have the great angelic shout of chapter 10: "There is to be no more long delay, for very shortly the mystery of a long-deferred kingdom will be finished. In fact, from this point in the chronology of the book, within the brief span of "forty and two months" (13:5), the satanic usurper will be fully dispossessed and the rightful King will arrive in power and glory.

c. *The Great Voices of Revelation 11.* As the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, these voices are heard saying, "The kingdom<sup>12</sup> of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of

11 Adolph Deismann, "Treasures in Earthen Vessels," *the Biblical Review*, October, 1922.

12 The singular number here (supported by weighty Ms. evidence) points to the satanic unity of

his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15, ASV). This is the *de jure* announcement of what in a short time will be made *de facto*. It is only a sovereign God who can speak like this: for He "calleth those things which be not as thought they were" (Rom. 4:17). And it is an impressive exhibition of divine grace and sovereignty that the announcement is made at the precise moment when the beast reaches the height of his power on earth, with all opposition crushed (Rev. 12:7; 13:4-8). What an encouragement for the redeemed to know that there are no dark hours to God. Even when all seems to be lost, for those who have eyes to see, the Lord still sits upon His throne high and lifted up in the heavens; and the unfailing character of His Universal Kingdom guarantees that the Mediatorial Kingdom of His Son shall be established on earth, in spite of all satanic opposition.

The grand theme of these "voices in heaven" is now picked up by the twenty-four elders and expounded in larger detail: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (11:16-18).

First, we note that in this passage the high point is that God has now at last "*taken*" to Himself the great power which is His by right. This harmonizes with the angelic declaration in chapter 10 to the effect that there is to be "delay no longer" (10:6, ASV). The mystery of a silent heaven is now at last to be cleared away. The verb rendered "*taken*" is perfect in tense, indicating that this judicial act will have continuing results; which will appear in the exercise of God's "great power" through supernatural judgments and works, never again to be interrupted until the entire eschatological program is complete. This thought has an interesting confirmation in the omission of the clause "and art to come" from verse 17 by the large majority of Greek manuscripts. It occurs without question, and properly, in Revelation 1:4, 8, and 4:8. But it becomes inappropriate from 11:15 onward in the chain of events; for at this point in prophecy, God *has come judicially* in the sense of the special and immediate exercise of His regal power of judgment, which will not cease until the Mediatorial Kingdom of His Son is fully established over all the earth. It is significant in this connection that the similar futuristic clause of 16:5, "and shalt be," is also lacking in manuscript support (cf. ASV).

Second, the words "and hast reigned"<sup>13</sup> must not be interpreted to mean that the Mediatorial Kingdom has now been *fully* established on earth, for this would contradict practically everything in the book from chapter 11 through 20. We have already seen that one of the important functions of the divine reign is that of *judging*. In this sense *only*, the reign of God has begun here, i.e., in the judicial acts which precede the events of chapter

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the world system of nations at the end-time.

13 The tense is an *aojist*.

20. And in accordance with this idea, we note that the entire passage of 11:15-19 is permeated with marks of such *judicial actions*: God's "wrath" has come; the dead are to be "judged"; "rewards" are to be bestowed; the destroyers are to be destroyed; and the phenomena of verse 19 are all signs of divine judgment.

d. *The Great Voice of Revelation 12*. In this chapter there is war in heaven: Michael and his angels fighting against Satan and his angels; and the outcome is the casting of Satan out of heaven down to the earth. This action must lie in the future, because during the present age of the Church, its members must do battle spiritually against Satan and the hosts of his wicked spirits who are now "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:10-12, ASV). But in the action described in Revelation 12 Satan's liberty is reduced to the area of the earth; and when this takes place in harmony with divine prophecy, exactly forty-two months before the end (13:4-5), Satan will begin this restricted career on earth with "great wrath," knowing that he has but "a short time" (12:12) before his imprisonment in the "abyss" of Revelation 20:1 (ASV). This casting down of Satan is hailed with joy in heaven, and a great voice says, "Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down . . ." (12:10, ASV). This repeats substantially the announcement of 11:15-17 but adds an important idea: Just as God, who always has all power, took this power at a certain time (11:17) and began to use it in judicial preparation for the Kingdom, even so our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given all "authority" at His ascension (Matt. 28:18), now at this juncture in the divine record begins to exercise this authority in preparing judicially for His Kingdom soon to be established on the earth.