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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 14

REVELATION 11:15-19

The Mystery of God Complete

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART FOURTEEN

THE MYSTERY of GOD COMPLETE

Revelation 11:15-19

The Last Trumpet sounds, and the general description which follows can only refer to the end of the world, if we are to adhere to the view that the Seven Trumpets cover the entire period of time from Patmos to the conclusion of the divine purposes on the earth. Verse 18 ensures this – “Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged....”

Yet in view of subsequent chapters, we can only conclude that the end of the world, though sudden in its climax, is prolonged in its introduction. There are events which lead up to the GREAT EVENT. This appears from the fact, long recognised by most of the commentators, that the Last Trumpet contains within itself all the events of the Seven Vials (chapters 15 and 16), just as the Seven Trumpets themselves were contained in the opening of the Seventh Seal (chapter 8: 1-2). It could be (though we have neither the authority nor the inclination to assert this as a fact) that even now we are in such a preliminary period leading to the Second Advent, under the symbolism of the seven last plagues (15:1), but a more detailed examination must be reserved until we reach the relevant chapters.

Meanwhile it is beyond dispute that the Last Judgment is foreshadowed in many of the preliminary judgments of divine history for example, the FLOOD and SODOM, and the fall of Jerusalem. The confusion which often exists in the interpretation of the Lord’s Olivet discourse (Matthew 24), as to whether the Lord is speaking of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem or of the end of the world, could be resolved if students of that chapter would observe that the Lord is deliberately speaking of both events, the one being the foreshadowing of the other - and that He did so with the intention neither to encourage laxity on the one hand, nor on the other to raise hopes of deliverance amongst His people, beyond what is proper to the region of faith. It was never the Lord’s intention to give such information as could lead to accurate forecasts of the date of any event of prophecy, least of all that relating to His Second Coming and the end of the world. Even that most precise of prophecies, Daniel’s Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9) was couched in such language as would preclude any final reckoning of the time of His

first coming, until the actual event verified it.

Even today, there is not unanimity amongst commentators on the actual starting date of the Seventy Weeks, nor yet on the ending of that great period. There is even a theory (no doubt to meet the convenience of an ingenious prophetic scheme with a vested interest in novelties) that those Seventy Weeks have not yet run their course, because (say they) the last week has been severed from the main body as the head from its shoulders.

So in these chapters in Revelation the same caution must be observed, for the Lord is speaking through John the same language as in His Olivet discourse, combining all significant events in one general description, so as to stimulate watchfulness without raising false expectation. The object throughout the Apocalypse is to minister comfort to the people of God in their afflictions, without provoking them to idle speculation as to the future. It is noteworthy how prophecy becomes an obsession with those who persist in associating all the events of their own day with the end of the world. In our century the Great War of 1914-18 became synonymous with ARMAGEDDON, but we have had another of the same vintage since and every prospect of yet a third before the century closes.

The sale of books which purvey these sensations is certainly lucrative but the writers only succeed in diverting attention from the true purpose of prophecy. At one time prophetic writers were preoccupied with the Unspeakable Turk, the invention of gunpowder, the Fall of Constantinople, and the Islamic invasion of Europe. Historicism still weaves these sensations into its scheme, though it leaves its authors very little room for any association of the Trumpet Judgments with events threatening at the end of the 20th century. Not embarrassed by these chronological handicaps, Futurism enjoys the liberty of revising its phenomena from year to year to suit the changing pattern of events. The Russian now has the virtual monopoly of the prophetic field - though with the Chinaman looking over his shoulder as much as to say, "Don't you dare!"

The Russian tale is being well told no doubt, and Muscovy is adorned with a plentiful supply of texts snatched almost at random from the prophetic Books with the same indifference to interpretative principle as has marked all the other prophetic novelties in times gone by.

The deep spiritual inwardness of prophecy is seldom perceived, and there goes unheeded the caution of the Lord, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has placed in his own power". (Acts 1:7) How

disappointing it seems to most people to be told that the Bible is a spiritual book and can be understood only in spiritual terms.

GREAT VOICES IN HEAVEN

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Verse 15

We now turn to consider more particularly the events of the Last Trumpet. The Mighty Angel of chapter 10 has already announced that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished (chapter 10:7). The peculiar words of warning, “In the days of ...” should caution us to expect that there is delay in the onset of the cataclysmic event of the end of creation. There appears to be a preparatory period. The purpose of prophecy is to put all believers on their guard and to “Watch” lest the Day of God should overtake them as a thief in the night (Matthew 24). We do well, in all our generations, to be READY - for at such a time as we think not, the Son of Man cometh.

“There were great voices in heaven.” The expression is common in the Book of Revelation. In the first chapter Christ announces Himself with ‘a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last’ (chapter 1:10-11). In chapter 4, verse 1, John is summoned up to heaven, in the spirit, by a voice ‘as of a trumpet talking with me.’ In chapter 5:2, a ‘strong angel proclaims with a loud voice.’ At the opening of the First Seal in chapter 6, one of the Four Cherubim speaks with ‘the noise of thunder’. The sealing of the elect in chapter 7 is introduced by an angel who cries ‘with a loud voice’ (v.2). In the same chapter, v.10, the multitude of the redeemed cry with a loud voice ascribing salvation to Him who sits on the throne.

The trumpet judgments are introduced (chapter 8, v.5) with ‘voices, thunderings and lightnings, and an earthquake.’ In the same chapter (v.13) the three Woe Trumpets are introduced with a loud voice.

The ‘Mighty Angel’ of chapter 10 cries with a loud voice ‘as when a lion roars’ and at his cry seven thunders roll. See also 12:13; 14:2; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1; 16:18; 18:2; 19:1, 6, 17; 21:3.

Returning to our verse in chapter 11 we conclude that the great voices in heaven

represent heaven's universal acclamation at the victorious conclusion of the holy purposes of God. They represent the unanimity of the angelic powers who from the beginning have been awaiting this glorious moment, when the dominion of the Lord over all is finally conceded by the rebellious forces which throughout the ages have sought to challenge that dominion. Perhaps the reading hinted at in the italicised words in our version, helps to clearer understanding. Without the italicised words the reading would be, "The kingdoms of this world are become our Lord's and of his Christ." The plural word 'kingdoms' is challenged by many who prefer the singular 'kingdom'. There is not much at stake either way. What the verse is saying is that the total power or dominion of this world has passed into the hands of Christ in accordance with the decree of the Father in the fundamental prophecy of Psalm 110, "Sit thou at my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." The Second Psalm is also fundamental to this verse in Revelation.

The history of the world has been the history of the divine working to reduce this revolted province of creation to the holy will of God. In that warfare the mystery of God is fully developed and in the Person of the Son, God is revealed in that suffering meekness and obedience which is the only possible destruction of hell's empire (which is a kingdom of pride and boasting). The glory of God is achieved in a manner which raises creation to the highest glory through the mystery of the incarnation (God becoming Man) and the agony of the atonement, where the curse was borne and the judgment executed upon creation's Glorious Victim. Hence the prayer of Christ in the Upper Room, "Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee". (John 17:1)

At last the drama of creation is worked out to its magnificent conclusion and all heaven bursts into praise and admiration at the victorious result of all the travail entered into by the Godhead.

There will never be another challenge to the divine will for the voices in heaven declare, "And He shall reign for ever and ever." Evil will never rise up a second time to ruin creation.

Hengstenberg: "The kingdom of the world is the Lord's and His Anointed's: the Son's into whose hands all things have been committed by the Father (John 3:35) and in particular all judgment (John 5:22). There is the same connection here between the Lord and His Anointed as in Acts 4:26 - in both places from Psalm 2.2: 'The kings rise up, and the princes sit in counsel against the Lord and his Anointed'. The conflict depicted there, finds here at last an end."

THE CHURCH ENTERS THE SCENE

“And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,” Verse 16

The Church is now brought into the scene, in the figure of the four and twenty Elders whom we first met in chapter 4, v.4. They have only a representative value as symbolising the redeemed church. We have here the total number of the elect from all ages, the united church of Old and New Testaments under the mystic double-twelve. This is the kingdom of Christ, wrested by His atoning work from the grasp of the Usurper in accord with the original decree that the Seed of the Woman must destroy the dominion of the Evil One, “It (the Seed) shall bruise thy head ...” (Genesis 3:15)

The prostration of the Elders before God in an act of worship symbolic of the prostration of mind, heart and affections before Him in acknowledgement that the Lord is Almighty, to whom belongs the right to judge the world. “We give thee thanks ...” To the people of God is given the privilege of approving the judgments of God. They rejoice in the consummation of the divine purpose, and they assess the works of God at their true worth. When all God’s works are completed, they will be found to be thankworthy. The prostration of these worshippers indicates also that the nearer the soul approaches the glory of God, the more it will be filled with adoration and praise and love for Him. The reason for present difficulty in perceiving the righteousness of God in all His acts, is because we are insufficiently informed of His wisdom and grace.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD ACCLAIMED

“Saying, 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.” Verse 17

The ascription by the Elders, “Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come” praises the divine attributes now brought into full recognition and understanding. The almightiness of God is an aspect of deity rather lost in the view of many in these latter days. The church is in need of refreshing her faith at that fountain. That God is sovereign in all His ways and works is a burdensome thought to many ill-instructed Christians, but they ought to consider that if God is not sovereign He cannot be God and there must be another who IS God Almighty. A God who is not in absolute control is unthinkable, though that is far from requiring

us to accept the theology of many sincere persons who have attributed to God a form of universal sovereignty which is in conflict with His other attributes. We know in part only, and must never stray beyond the confines of that humble faith which does not need to know the unknowable, but which can hold the paradox without wavering, of a sovereign Lord who weeps over the judgment about to be executed and declares ‘How often would I -- and ye would not?’ (See Luke 19:41; 13:34-35; Matthew 23:37-39).

The eternal nature of God is expressed in the words, “Who is, who was, and who is to come.” We are not to understand this in terms of past, present and future, for God has no ‘history’ as we understand it. God lives in the eternal, ever-present moment, and the phrase quoted tells us that what He is He ever was and always shall be, but not in our terms of time. He is what He is, and what He has determined Himself to be. He wills His own Being and determines His own perfect will. He has neither priority nor consequence. Nothing can be added to Him or taken from Him. He is not in time, but time is in Him. He is not in heaven, but heaven is in Him. He is complete in Himself, in the ineffable mystery of Three Persons. He is ever Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in an order of Godhead, though not an order of time. The Son is Eternally Son without beginning, yet of the Father in filial order. The Holy Spirit is eternally the Spirit of the Father and the Son, ever proceeding, but never beginning. The Godhead is an eternal, never beginning, never ending, communion of holy and perfect LOVE.

This is the subject of the acclamation of the elders, who are figured here in that last great act of creation when the Godhead stands fully revealed at last. Creation as a consequence is filled with light, and rejoices in pure worship. Even the dark hosts of hell are muted eternally bowed at the Name of Jesus (Phil. 2:10-11), and the defeated armies of earth who in life refused to bow the knee to the Son, must remain eternally remote from that light which they hated. The Glory around which the angelic creation disports in bands and circles of everlasting light, is borne and shared in its totality by those whose image the Son took upon Himself, so that, higher than angels, they now enter upon their destiny as those who were created (and now redeemed) as the very image of God, to exercise dominion over the works of His hands. This high destiny the angels do not envy, because pure love has no place in itself for envy. But Satan and his ruined host, and the armies of the impenitent, dumbly acknowledge the Name of the Son though they can have no part or share in the felicity from which they are eternally estranged. Further into that mystery of eternal being we cannot now penetrate, but we shall understand it all by-and-by.

THE WRATH OF GOD

“And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged....” Verse 18

We should note the changes of tense. The nations WERE angry. The church in her eternal state looks back on a chapter which has ended. The anger of the wicked, and their envy against the church, is over. The blinding light of truth, silences every lie, and the soul is mute as to evil, while it bears the bitterness of its fate. At the judgment seat, every mouth is stopped and every tongue is silenced, as the sense of guilt presses with its enormous weight upon the soul. This is the wrath of God, the only present reality to the wicked at the judgment. They do not aspire after the light but seek the darkness, to be hidden from the face of Him who sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

Throughout all history the anger of the nations has been stirred up against the Lord's people whose very presence is a testimony against their impiety. Cain slew Abel because his deeds were evil and those of his brother were righteous. So the world of the wicked hates the church of God whose presence is a standing rebuke to the world's sin and unbelief. At last the anger of the world meets the fate it has long deserved. The next sentence in the holy adjudication made by the Elders, is in the words addressed to the Throne, “Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged.” The futility of the world's anger is exposed as the wrath of God is revealed. We are reminded again of Psalm 110:5:

“The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.”

Again, Psalm 2, a psalm which has a good deal to do with our chapter: “Kiss the Son lest he be angry and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” (Verse 12)

The wicked in Revelation 6:16-17 cry to the rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the face of Him who sits upon the throne, “and from the wrath of the Lamb.”

Hengstenberg observes, “The wrath of the heathen was called forth by the advancement of the hated kingdom of God and Christ, as it began to take place after the Word was made flesh.”

THE SUBLIMITY OF GOD'S ANGER

But that is a mysterious word, “Thy wrath is come.” God’s anger is not an emotion. There never is nor can be any disturbance of the divine peace. The divine nature is not subject to change or the play of emotions. God is one simple thing - a Unity of Eternal, Unchanging LOVE. How then can it be said of Him, “Thy wrath is come”? God’s wrath is His righteous judgment in the upholding of those inevitable and holy principles of His own glorious Being, without which creation would become amoral waste in which nothing could live. Joy and peace and love would cease to be.

This then is the wrath of God. Here is no storm of disturbed emotion. No gales of passion ever trouble the surface of that measureless sea. No angry waves toss and rage. Unutterable peace reigns in that great heart which beats only in the measures of eternal love: that love which unites in the eternal blessedness of the Three Persons, without whose tender relationship deity had become nonentity. Anger is impossible there - anger as we know it. In accommodation to our feeble understanding we are permitted to speak of the divine wrath. The Lord Himself uses the expression in His Word, but always with the caution that we must not regard our God as being such an one as ourselves. His anger is not our anger. We may say it is the streaming forth of His righteousness impinging upon the selfish resistance of a carnal, unsubmitive heart, to which peace and truth would be hell itself.

God cannot be angry as we are angry, because He who determines His own existence and all the conditions thereof cannot be taken by surprise with unknown, unanticipated events arising to vary His procedures and lead Him into paths not foreseen. All things are present to Him with whom there is neither past nor future. In the light of His perfect knowing, He has determined the outcome of all things. Events always foreseen and ever present with Him, can create no surprise or disturbance in those unfathomable depths of God. Our anger and wrath may rise because of opposition, self-will, or an outraged sense of justice or grievance. He who bore all injustice, and all the consequences of the sin of man - the hatred, the mocking scorn, and mockery of those whom He came to save, and cried “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” - knows the end from the beginning, and has perfectly planned all that shall be, yet without taint of evil or of constraint. The purity of His Being and the singleness of His glorious wisdom, cannot be soiled with any taint of our emotions of anger and arbitrariness.

God is not a man that He should repent, yet we hear Him saying “It repenteth me

that I have made man upon the earth.” The divine repentance is not the regret which we poor mortals feel when our best plans go awry. God’s plans can never be subject to failure or revision; else He is no God but only a phantom. His ‘repentance’ is the revulsion of His holy love to that which is not of Himself, and marks the limits of His tolerance of evil.

Even in the experience of those who by grace have entered the redeemed family, there are those periods of chastisement which may mark the divine displeasure at their sins, yet are these chastisements only evidences of His love, and not of wrath, as Paul observes, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”. The object of the holy discipline which God exercises upon His children, is “that we might be partakers of his holiness”. (See Hebrews 12:5-11)

Likewise Paul warns the wicked who despise the patience and forbearance of God, ‘not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth them to repentance’. They go on in their wickedness, with hard and impenitent heart, ‘treasuring up to themselves wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God’. (Romans 2:1-6)

A ‘wrath’ which can patiently labour to bring the wicked to repentance and only expend itself and pour itself out when all means have failed to move the stubborn heart to return to the Lord, cannot be considered as an emotion for it is beyond all question under perfect control, and is but a manifestation of righteousness.

The glorious orb whose rays fall upon the good ground and fructify and enrobe it with the splendours of spring, the glories of summer and the generous harvests of the autumn, is the same sun which turns the dry hard ground into barrenness as its fiery beams fall upon the unyielding wilderness. Divine Love becomes the fierce flame which is absorbed by the obdurate and proud heart until all is withered and consumed. “I am tormented in this flame”, cried the Rich Man in hell.

David writes, “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of those who dwell therein”. (Psalm 107:33-34)

THE DIVINE NATURE - LOVE

The natural becomes a parable of the supernatural. The powers by which the visible creation is sustained are founded on the one great principle of the divine

nature - LOVE. As this is the principle on which the moral creation is constructed, so the natural principle of attraction is that upon which the cosmic creation is built - as all science has known since the days of Newton. William Law carefully points out that God is only known by His works. Without creation, the deity is 'an entire hidden, shut up, unknown, and unknowable abyss' (Wm. Law, "The Spirit of Love", 1752). The one fundamental principle of creation is (as we might expect inevitably), a visible pattern of the one simple principle of the Divine Nature, Love - for Love is Desire, or Attraction.

Further to quote Wm. Law, "Take away Attraction from this material system, and then it has all the annihilation it can ever possibly have." That is, once nature betrays itself it must destroy itself, yet not absolutely, but as to its only function and only reason for being. The soul of man, when not transformed into the divine likeness by the grace of repentance and faith, in the power of the Eternal Spirit through the atoning work of the Redeemer, destroys itself in a void where desire turns in upon itself. Destruction is not annihilation, for God does not create life in order to extinguish it. His wrath is that judgment in which the soul determines in itself by selfish choice to live within itself to the exclusion of that life, light and love which stream eternally from the divine Being. If this be Gehenna, then is this Gehenna indeed. "All wrath is disorder, and can be nowhere but in Nature and Creature, because nothing else is capable of turning from right to wrong. Wrath can have no existence even in nature and creature, till they have lost their first perfection which they had from God, and are become that which they should not have been" (Wm. Law).

THE TONGUE AND THE WATER

The rich man in hell (Luke 16:19-31), whose riches were his own self-sufficiency without God, longed for a drop of cooling water on his tongue, from the hand of Lazarus, the destitute whom in life he had despised. The account enshrines the real principle which creates hell out of itself. The tongue is that little member of which James speaks, that it is in itself 'a world of iniquity'. It sets on fire the whole course (margin, wheel) of nature, and its fire is the fire of hell (see James 3:1-6). The fire of which this man complained ("I am tormented in this flame") was therefore a fire kindled by the tongue which he had only used for pride, boasting and insolence, and never for blessing and worship. That fire is a conflagration which finds its never-ending fuel in the conscience- a flame beyond all comparison to be dreaded, which parches the soul which has set itself up to be the centre of its own world, to draw all things to itself.

There is another cry which floats down to us from Gethsemane –
“Not my will but thine be done”.

It is that same voice which elsewhere warned, that of every idle word that men shall speak, they must give account in the day of judgment – “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”
Matthew 12:34-37

The last clause of our 18th verse – “and shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth” - shows the inevitability of the holy judgment of God and the righteousness thereof. The active word is ‘corrupt’ which bears the parallel meaning of ‘destroy’. The world of intelligent beings has been corrupted by its inhabitants, and they are left in possession of that which they have corrupted, and thus are destroyed. The righteousness of the divine judgment will be fully disclosed and there will be no dissentient voice. Every mouth will be stopped and the whole world become guilty before God. Then also will be fully revealed the infinite value of the atonement wherein RIGHTEOUSNESS descended from the Throne to be impaled upon the cross. Only so could a recompense be made of such a nature that the universe remains unimpaired, and those who are saved through the great redemption are raised up to reign with Him whose righteousness is the rectitude of ETERNAL LOVE.

HOW THE CHURCH IS KNOWN

Who these blessed ones are is fully described in our verse:

“Thy servants the prophets, and the saints, and those that fear thy name,
small and great.”

This comprehensive description is an inclusive identification of the one universal church in Old and New Testaments. How is the church to be known? Not as that institution which arrogates to itself the sole right and title to the honoured designation, but to those, and all those, and none but those, who come within the meaning of this threefold description. First, they are built upon the word of the prophets - the prophets of Old and New Testament through whom God has spoken with sublime and final authority, and whose word alone we are obliged to receive. The last of the prophets speaks to us in the Book of Revelation. There have been no prophets since the prophets, and those who now delude themselves and others, that they have the gift of prophecy, had better be careful what they are about. “Many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many”. (Matthew 24:11). The

age in which we now live is peculiarly prolific in prophets of that vintage.

The true church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). Let us look for those who believe and worship on that foundation, for there is the church. Luther is said to have observed, “Where the Word of God is preached, there is the church”.

WHO ARE THE SAINTS?

“Saints”, is the common designation for the true people of God, throughout the Bible, for this is what they are - sanctified ones, rescued from sin and condemnation, born again of the Spirit, washed from their sins in the all-atoning blood of the Lamb of God. Not sinless in themselves, but accepted in the perfect righteousness of the only Sinless One, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. A certain ecclesiastical corporation takes upon itself to create saints, invariably from the dust of those long since dead who have distinguished themselves after death by magical works among the living, mainly through the manipulation of their relics.

The Bible designates as saints all who are in covenant relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord – “Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice”. (Psalm 50:5)

The third mark of identity of the true church lies in the words, “Them that fear thy name, small and great.” Let it suffice for every tender conscience, that the only greatness in the sight of God is faith. In this world there are other distinctions, but the Lord gives to His servant John this designation, ‘small and great’ as a leveling term, making all one without distinction who worship with reverential fear that One whose name is above every name. There is no precedence at the mercy seat. Access is free for all, and where this is truly apprehended, there is the church of God, ecclesiastical superstition or tyranny notwithstanding.

“The three terms together”, says Alford, “include the whole church.”

THE TEMPLE AND THE ARK

“And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.” Verse 19

We must compare this verse with that of chapter 8 (verse 5) where the Seven Trumpet judgments were introduced under the figure of an angel filling his censer with altar fire, and casting it into the earth, whereupon there were ‘voices and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake’. The subsequent trumpet blasts have signaled the holy war waged against the power of this world and its usurping prince of hell, Satan. Now at the blast of the last trumpet we arrive at the consummation of all temporal judgments in the last great judgment which brings to a successful end the Lord’s holy and glorious purposes in creation.

The correspondence of the verse in chapter 8 with the one now before us is a valuable aid in understanding the relevance of the remaining chapters of Revelation. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the end of chapter 11 marks the end of the world, and subsequent sections of our Book must therefore be developments or enlargements of what has been summarised in chapters 8 to 11.

Hengstenberg attaches significance to the slight alteration in the order of the phenomena of judgment in the two verses. That of chapter 8 begins with ‘voices’; that of chapter 11 with ‘lightnings’. There is added at the end of our verse in chapter 11, a ‘great hail’. Hengstenberg writes, “The lightnings which (in chapter 8) occupy the third place, are here placed at the head; and quite naturally. For in the former the voices have only a threatening character, merely foreshadow the future judgments. Here, on the contrary, all concerns the judgment itself. Hand in hand goes the addition of the hail, which never possesses a merely threatening character, but always appears where judgment has actually begun. The earthquake marks the shattering of the ungodly world power.”

Hengstenberg also points out the frequency with which hail is used in the OT as an image of the divine judgment: “And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard with the flame of devouring fire, with scattering and tempest, and hailstones”. (Isaiah 30:30) See also Psalm 18:12-13: “At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice: hailstones and coals of fire.” “Clear proof”, adds Hengstenberg, “that we have here to do with the final judgment.”

NO MILLENNIAL TEMPLE

We must now come to a more detailed view of our verse. “The temple of God is opened in heaven.” Who now speaks of a MILLENNIAL TEMPLE to be reconstructed on the old temple site at Jerusalem? This is one of Futurism’s most

cherished ideas. But here we have the temple of God in heaven- not on earth. Our friends surely will not require two temples of God, one on earth and another in heaven. We have already seen from the beginning of our chapter that there IS a temple of God which is the living church of redeemed men and women who worship God in the Spirit. It is not confined to that fragment of the whole church which at any one time represents the church on earth, for the true believer has come to a spiritual Mount Zion, a Heavenly Jerusalem, and been united to the society of the angels and to the spirits of just men already made perfect (Hebrews 12:22-23), awaiting in heaven the grand moment when all Christ's work will be ended, the last of His elect gathered in, the temple finally completed, and the headstone brought forth with rejoicing, and cries of Grace, Grace, unto it (Zech. 4:7). Of this temple Paul speaks, "Ye are the temple of God". (1 Cor. 3:16)

The temple on the earthly Mount Zion was never intended to be other than a temporary expedient to shadow forth the true temple of Christ's body, the church. It had no meaning except as a centre of visible worship where the sacrifices and ordinances of the Law were conducted, 'until the time of reformation' (Hebrews 9 v.10). The 'time of reformation' was the first coming of Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice for sin, which abolished the old temple (as abolished it was by the decree of God when it was overthrown by the Roman legions, never to be built again).

Before another temple can be built on earth with the divine approval, the church must be abolished - which is precisely what Futurism teaches will be the case. But Futurism must abolish more than the church; it must abolish Paul and the epistle to the Hebrews, in which the great apostle makes it clear that the one and only true High Priest is the Heavenly Melchizedek, who takes precedence even over Abraham and all his posterity, and whose coming into the world and His crucifixion and triumph over sin and death took away the first (that is the Old Covenant with all its ritual apparatus) and established the second (that is the New Testament with its spiritual temple, spiritual nation, spiritual worship, heavenly nature, and world-wide testimony).

"Now of the things we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens". (Hebrews 8:1, etc.)

But our Futurists are very subtle and they tell us that though it is essential to their scheme to have all the ritual code of Moses re-established in their millennial temple, complete with sacrificing priests, Levites, animal sacrifices, and feasts, yet these are intended to be 'memorial' sacrifices to bring to remembrance the one true

sacrifice which Christ offered on the Tree. The Pope of Rome could not ask for more: But we would remind our readers, that Christ did in fact ordain a feast of memory to be observed by His disciples to the end of time, till He should return in glory and power - He did so when at the Last Supper He took the bread and break it and gave it to His disciples ... likewise the cup, saying, THIS IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD - do this, in remembrance of me.”

We are content with this simple feast of memorial. The Lord has not been pleased to ordain any other, than just this one, to “show forth the Lord’s death till He come.”

The temple in Revelation 11 is the church, in her testimony on the earth, with her courtyard usurped by the trampling feet of false religion, but perfect and secure in the inner core of her life which is hid with Christ in God (verses 1 and 2).

The ‘opening’ of the temple of God in heaven, signifies the end of the period of building. All things are accomplished. The ‘opening’ is the complete revealing of God in Christ, in the midst of His redeemed people from every age and clime and tongue and nation.

THE ARK IS SEEN

“And there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament (covenant).” The ark of God in the Old Testament was a box overlaid with gold, on its covering a representation of the cherubim of glory, in gold, overshadowing the mercy seat (the covering lid). Inside the ark, as constructed by Moses and his helpers, were first of all the tables of stone with the Ten Commandments inscribed by the finger of God. There was also placed therein a golden pot containing a sample of manna gathered in the wilderness by the tribes for their sustenance during the weary desert wanderings. Finally there was added Aaron’s rod which budded, as the token of the validity of the priesthood in the line of Aaron. The years passed by, and the ancient tabernacle constructed by Moses was replaced by the magnificent temple constructed by Solomon according to the pattern bequeathed to him by his father David. They opened the ark ere it was carried into its last resting place, and found in it only the tables of stone. (1 Kings 8:9)

The ark had passed through many a crisis. Once it had been in the hands of the heathen Philistines, its capture causing the death of the old High Priest, Eli. Somewhere along the line two of the precious memorials had been lost - a prophecy, this, that the Old Covenant was unstable and temporary. Aaron’s

priesthood was to be abolished when the time of Melchizedek came (that is, when Messiah should be set up as High Priest for ever (Psalm 110:4). He who was Himself the heavenly manna, the bread of life sent down from heaven, would fulfill the wilderness type: “The bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world Moses gave you not that bread from heaven my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead.... This is the bread that cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die”.

(See John 6:32-58)

How long the tables of the Law survived we do not know -certainly not beyond the final destruction of the temple by Titus in AD 70. Their preservation no longer had meaning or purpose. He who kept the Law and fulfilled its last demand, on the Cross, became thereby THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

(See Romans 3:20-22)

Let no unhallowed hand set up that temple again, or construct an ark to be housed therein to the insulting of Him who is our ark of the covenant, who by His own obedience unto death fulfilled all things for us sinful men, making a complete atonement and who for ever will be our temple, our High Priest, our Emmanuel, our heavenly Melchizedek, our Prince and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We reject the threadbare prophetic methods which would set up again that which God has for ever cast down.

THE ARK IS “SEEN”

But what means this - that the heavenly temple is opened and the ark of God is seen? Hengstenberg expresses the meaning of this figure thus, “When the Ark of the Covenant is made visible the meaning can only be that the covenant receives its most signal accomplishment.” In other words, all the promises and undertakings of Christ on behalf of His covenant people, given to Him by the Father as His inheritance before the world began, have at last been realised. All His work is ended. Nothing remains to be done.

THE TRUE COVENANT THEOLOGY

This is the true ‘Covenant Theology’ - a much misused term nowadays. Covenant theology sees two covenants by which man’s relation to God is regulated. There was the original Covenant of Works, implicit in man’s creation, wherein man was

required to render to God true obedience under promise of endless life. Then there is the New Covenant, or the Covenant of Grace, under which sinful man, fallen under the first covenant finds deliverance from death and condemnation through the righteousness and obedience of Another who by divine decree has taken up man's breach of the first covenant and by fulfilling it under trial, total and absolute, obtained everlasting salvation on behalf of all whom the Father had given Him (John 17:2). The Mosaic covenant was designed to give a picture of this great redeeming work of Christ. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin: that was ordained for the time then present, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made, even Christ. This then is the everlasting covenant of redemption by which the Father bound Himself from all eternity to fulfill the promise of life made in Christ Jesus on our behalf. What is to us a covenant of grace, was to our glorious Mediator, a covenant of works and death and condemnation. On the one hand He fulfilled the obligations of obedience which man had never rendered, and on the other He expiated on the tree, by awful death, the offence which had brought down the curse. Only One who was God could make the sacrifice or undertake man's obligations, and only by God becoming Man could deity place itself under obligation to death and so by dying overcome death and destroy him who had the power of death, man's great adversary, the devil and Satan.

Perceiving this more clearly than most men, even in the great days of Puritan Theology, Oliver Cromwell exclaimed on his death bed "THE TWO COVENANTS ARE ONE". What was death to Christ became life to us. What was Law and Justice to Him, became grace and life and immortality to us.

The exhibiting of the ark of the covenant in heaven, therefore, can only mean that at last, when all Christ's work has been completed there will be revealed, fully and finally in all its majesty and wonder, that love of God which in covenant mercy bound itself to death, agony, mortal conflict, suffering, and shame. Immortal Love triumphs at the last over sin, death and hell, and is rewarded with the priceless destiny of a Bride who from the very beginning has been pledged and given. This will be the theme of eternity. "Come" said one of the last angels to John, "Come, and I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Revelation 21:9)

That will be the consummation of all that God has ever strived for. It will be more than that. It will be the final unfolding of who and what God is, His wisdom, perfection, and beauty - all proceeding from the one great source which God IS, namely, pure and perfect LOVE. Thus the temple is opened in heaven, and in its holiest place will be laid bare, and revealed, THE COVENANT which enshrines

what all creation has waited for with bated breath.

The seraphic David, beloved king of Israel, saw it afar off, and wrote of what he saw, in these mysterious and imperishable words,

“IN THE BEAUTIES OF HOLINESS, FROM THE WOMB OF THE MORNING, THOU HAST THE DEW OF THY YOUTH” (Psalm 110:3);

And yet again, in completeness of the scene:

“UPON THY RIGHT HAND DOTTH STAND THE QUEEN,
IN GOLD OF OPHIR.” (Psalm 45:9)

Let those lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquakes and hail, sweep away and drown every discordant opinion and voice at the great Bridal Day.