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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 15

REVELATION 12:1-9

The Drama of Redemption

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART FIFTEEN

THE DRAMA OF REDEMPTION

Revelation 12:1-9

In this chapter we have a complete view of the history of redemption from the beginning of the world to the end of time, with the past and present afflictions of the people of God, their certain triumph, and the secret of that triumph.

The central figure of this vision is the Mystic Woman, the church of Old and New Covenants. The Manchild to whom she gives birth is Christ, “the seed of the woman” (Genesis 3.15). The great Red Dragon is the old serpent, the devil and Satan. The warfare concerns the age-long effort of Satan to prevent the fulfilling of the prophecy concerning the Seed of the Woman, and having failed in this endeavour, to destroy the Church and her testimony.

We are still engaged in that warfare, and it is this unceasing conflict which lies behind the entire history of the New Testament Church, and only in these terms can that history be understood.

The purpose of this remarkable chapter is to supply the Church with the key to all her troubles, to explain all otherwise insoluble mysteries, to strengthen faith, and to promote patience and endurance.

The starting point in this drama is in the Garden of Eden. The expectation of the church from the beginning of the world has been the birth of the “Manchild” - the Redeemer, the Deliverer, and the Overcomer of Genesis 3.15 who must bruise the serpent’s head. The old Serpent is here once more in the form of the Dragon – perhaps the original form of the serpent family. The standing before the woman in readiness to devour the promised Child who must arise of her seed to destroy him, denotes the age-long expectancy of the feared conqueror. The trials and afflictions suffered by great representative men - Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David - all attest the malignant vigilance of the devil against the promised Seed.

The Manchild is born at Bethlehem, the Innocents are destroyed in the hope that the Seed might be amongst them. Cheated of his prey, the serpent is held at bay for

three and thirty years, till God's time arrives. "This is your hour and the power of darkness," declares the Victim as He voluntarily gives Himself up as a prey to the enemy's will. A moment of seeming triumph is granted by divine providence in the mystery of the redemptive will, and Satan seizes the prey. At last his hour of triumph has come. The cry of the mob is raised, a decree is signed, the Victim delivered to be crucified. Satan's triumph seems complete. The jaws of death are open and the Man-child is devoured by the grave. The serpent's triumph is short-lived. Death cannot hold the Victim. He dies only to conquer death and overcome the grave.

Robbed of his prey, and seeing in that victorious death the seal of his own doom and the end of his kingdom - he knoweth that he hath but a short time now - the Dragon turns his venom against the Woman who bore the Manchild - the church. Once it was the holy Seed. Now it is the Church which must bear the weight of Satanic malice. But the Church, like her Lord, is indestructible. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her because the Spirit of her risen Lord is in her. She flees, like Elijah of old, to a prepared place of refuge and is nourished in the wilderness till the days are fulfilled.

The drama now enters into new detail as the consequences of Christ's victory are further described in verses 7-12. The new act is named, **THE CASTING OUT OF SATAN AND HIS ANGELS**. This is not the Miltonic war in heaven (that has already been the subject of an earlier verse). It is certainly not any future war still awaited. There is only one place where Satan has been cast down and overthrown - at Calvary. There is only One who has ever been able in heaven or earth to overcome the Dragon - the mystic Michael, the one and only archangel, the Son of God, He whose name (Michael) signifies, **HE WHO BEARS THE LIKENESS AND IMAGE OF GOD**.

The sphere of the celestial conflict is said to be in heaven but this refers not to any location in heaven or on earth, but to a spiritual STATE. Satan's power to destroy and hold captive is broken for ever. "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" said Christ in anticipation of that "casting out" which had already begun through His all-powerful Word in the messengers sent to Israel (Luke 10:18). Again, "If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20). Again, "Now is the judgment of this world; now is the prince of this world cast out" (John 12:31).

Defeated and cast out, the Dragon goes forth to destroy the Woman which brought forth the Manchild. Again he is foiled - and by these three things:

1. Her faith and testimony;
2. The secret provision of God;
3. Christ's iron rule over the nations.

This is the epitome of the chapter. We now proceed to consider the DRAMA OF REDEMPTION in greater detail.

THE GLORIOUS WOMAN

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” v.1

No other figure in God's Word more perfectly describes the Church or more clearly shows that the people of God, whether in the Old or the New Testament, are one Church and one people, indivisible in history, and one in redemption and purpose, the Bride of Christ, the Wife of Jehovah, the Daughter of Zion.

“Clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet” can only be a representation of the one Church under the two dispensations of Law and Grace. We are reminded of the description Solomon gives of the Church in the Song of Songs: “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun....?” (Song 6:10) The moon has no light of its own. It reflects the rays of the sun, ever shining beyond the boundary of night and pouring forth its rays yet unseen on the dark side of the world. A fitting picture this of the Old Testament revelation which all accept to be the typical reflection of the New Testament light - the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ in the face of Jesus Christ.

ONE CHURCH - TWO DISPENSATIONS

The OT order with its temple and Priesthood, its sacrifices, feasts and daily ritual, all comprehended under the one general name of THE LAW, was a temporary administration to tide over the ages till in the fulness of God's time, the gospel should come. The old dispensation was to the new, as the cold light of the moon to the glorious, lifegiving, warming rays of the sun. Paul tells us in Colossians 2:16-17 that the Law of meats and drinks, holy festival days, new moons, and ritual Sabbaths were ‘the shadow of things to come’ and not the substance. So he also tells us in Hebrews 8:5 that the priests of Israel served only unto ‘the shadow of heavenly things’ and again in Heb. 10:1, “The law having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image (true substance) of the things” so represented,

could not make the worshippers perfect (that is, could not of themselves provide forgiveness, redemption, salvation, for sinful man). Those ancient ordinances were only the reflection of the approaching day, as the light of the moon is but the reflection of the glorious sun not yet risen over the horizon of redemptive time.

We find it incredible that any should think of challenging the fact of the temporary nature of the Law and its ordinances, or who with any hope of credence, can suggest that the shadows will one day return to resume their government over the people of God on earth, any more than they can maintain that some day the light of the moon will prevail over the light of the sun, and the night over the day?

Yet incredibly this is precisely what is asserted by good men today in their enthusiasm for literal interpretation of Israelitish restoration. The temple, which found its fulfillment in the church is, according to the dispensational theory, to be rebuilt at Jerusalem. The feast days are to be restored. The Levitical priesthood is to be re-introduced. Animal sacrifices are to be offered again at Jerusalem. The return of the night with its shadows is to be hailed as the fulfillment of prophecy. We may reasonably hope to be pardoned for rejecting so retrograde an error.

The appearance of the Glorious Woman of Revelation 12 should certainly give second thoughts to our Dispensationalists. The moon under her feet shows that the OT night is ended. Her glorious Illumination by the Sun of Righteousness who has arisen with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2) is proof that the New Testament has dawned. Her subsequent history as outlined in our chapter is the record of the agelong struggle by the dragon to overcome and destroy her. She is thus identified as the Church in her long history of trial and affliction, persecution and preservation.

HER UNIQUE CORONET

Her coronet of twelve stars is another identifying mark. The number twelve is always the number of the Church in Old and New Testaments. The Twelve Patriarchs (sons of Jacob) are matched by the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, in unbroken continuity.

The fact that both covenants meet in one glorious coronet proves the relationship of the two covenants, the old and the new and therefore presents the Church as one and indivisible under both covenants. The Woman is the same person who for so long dwelt expectantly in Old Testament night, but is now illuminated by the splendour of 'the dayspring from on high' (Luke 1:78 - margin "sun rising"). The

earthly Israel of the OT finds her fulfillment in the heavenly Israel of the NT. What was once an earthly administration becomes a spiritual, invisible order. The Church now dwells with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). She already reigns with Christ as partner of His throne.

The really terrifying teaching that the NT church is irrelevant to prophecy - that she has no place in OT prediction - that she is a mere temporary substitute for the OT Israel - that the kingdom envisaged by the prophets is an earthly institution, superior to the church of the NT, we can only view with dismay.

HER ORIGIN IN EDEN

The Woman being identified, the vision proceeds to unfold itself in the historical drama of her life history.

Verse 2 goes back to her origin in the Garden of Eden -

“And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”

We have before us as the **PROTOTYPE OF THE CHURCH**, our first mother Eve who in the day of her transgression was comforted by the promise of a Seed who should bruise the head of the great serpent Deceiver. We are aware that the words of the promise were uttered as a curse upon the Serpent, but the Woman (and the Man were the audience, and the doom of the serpent constituted their hope and their religion - that One should arise of the Woman's Seed who should reverse the verdict of Eden, overcome the serpent, and destroy his kingdom of darkness, sin and death.

God thus speaks:

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between her seed and thy seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:15.

The mystery of the bruising of the heel of the One who should be the Seed, is very profound. It was not understood by Adam and his wife, nor yet by those who came after, for 4,000 years - not until the Seed arrived, born of a virgin, despised and rejected, crucified - only then did it begin to appear what even now is so dimly perceived, that the fallen race can only be redeemed by death: the heel which

crushed the serpent's head must itself be bruised. That is, the One who so triumphed over death and hell could only do so by surrendering Himself in total weakness and subjection to the power of death, that through death He might destroy him who wielded the power and the fear of death - that is, the devil.

By his triumph over the Seed, Satan did not conquer, but destroyed himself, and by death was overcome.

THE ENIGMA OF HISTORY

It was this promise, wrapped up in the curse pronounced upon the Evil One, that is the seed-plot of all world history. Without the understanding of this promise history is an enigma. The historian who ignores this fact has no key to the meaning of the history which he studies. The archeologist digs in vain. The treasures of the past are revealed by the spade, but no meaning can be extracted from them. It is sure that Satan himself has a vested interest in deceiving the historian and the scientist, the philosopher and the poet, just as he deceived Eve. It is highly convenient for Satan to obscure or deny his own existence and the fate he has incurred, and to build in the minds of otherwise gifted men, the atheistic and materialistic concept of the universe: it came from nowhere and goes nowhere; man is an accident without credible past or future hope. The Prince of Darkness hates mankind for it was by envy of man and man's destiny that he fell from the light and now seeks to perpetuate his kingdom of darkness by veiling the mind of the creature whom he hates, so that man himself becomes as Satan, a serpent and a destroyer; a darkened, hopeless being.

MOTHER EVE, THE PROPHETESS

Mother Eve has passed on to her reward. There can be no doubt of her destiny in the glory. She was a prophetess. See how she named her sons - Cain (Acquired) , Abel (Vanity) , and Seth (Appointed). Observe her faith in the Promise: her premature expectation in the wonderful event of the first babe born into the world; her realisation by the time the second was born, that all was vanity and the time would be long; the birth of Seth 130 years after the creation of man when the City of the Wicked had already been founded by Cain, the human race divided, murder and death beginning to stalk the world. But mark her undying faith in the midst of calamity, perceiving the fresh start God was making in Seth. In this child was the hope of the race: "God has appointed me another seed in place of Abel who Cain slew." Eve, we say, passed on to the heavenly scene with an unconquerable faith that the Promise would be fulfilled. She was the true type of that Church already

being founded on the earth in the posterity of Seth, and she became the prototype of that MYSTIC WOMAN OF REVELATION TWELVE through whom the Deliverer would come.

The entire OT religion from the beginning is centred around this promise - and when rightly understood, the promise is the Gospel - the promise of life in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1). Likewise the entire NT religion - the Gospel - is centred around the fulfillment of the same promise. The OT saints looked forward to the promise; those of the NT look backward to the promise fulfilled in Christ. Outside this promise there is no religion, no faith, and no Church.

The trials and afflictions of the people of God (how piercing they must have been to our first lady, Eve!) down the ages of Old Testament time, are the travailing of the Mystic Woman of Revelation 12 who was always with child, awaiting the arrival of the promised Seed She 'pained to be delivered' - this is the description of the suffering Church as she awaited throughout those four thousand years of OT history, the coming of the promised Redeemer.

That Christ should be born of woman was no mystery, but that He who was so born should have preceded her of whom He was born and should be none other than the Great Creator, the Everlasting God - this was the mystery of all mysteries, and the wonder and glory of all creation. John calls it in Revelation chapter 10, THE MYSTERY OF GOD.

THE GREAT RED DRAGON

At this point of the drama John perceives in his vision the great foe of God and Man - the "great red dragon".

"And there appeared another great wonder in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads." v. 3

This is a symbolic vision of Satan, the enemy of God and man. The colour red stands for murder and hate, ferocity and destructive power. A dragon is a fabulous beast, belonging to no earthly species. But for his many heads we might suppose the dragon accurately to resemble the serpent before that creature was used by Satan to appear to our first parents. Thereafter the serpent has obeyed the decree - "upon thy belly shalt thou go...." as a memorial to the fall of man. The identity of the dragon in Revelation is made doubly sure by the words, "The dragon, that old

serpent, which is the devil and Satan”. (See v. 9, also Rev. 20:2)

His seven heads and ten horns show the universality of his dominion. The horn, in the Bible, always denotes power. The heads likewise denote empires and kingdoms. The numbers seven and ten indicate universality in time and in terrestrial extent. We have therefore a picture of Satan’s vast empire of darkness and death by which he deceives the nations of the world.

Yet though these figures denote the fearsome character of the Evil One and the enormous power permitted to him in history, we must not make the mistake of supposing that Satan has any INDEPENDENT power: his power is limited by divine decree and he is not permitted to go beyond the limits which have been set for him in the divine wisdom and sovereignty.

Luther in his blunt eloquence has phrased it well in his great hymn -

God’s Word for all their craft and force
One moment will not linger,
But spite of hell, shall have its course:
‘Tis written by His finger.
And though they take our life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small;
These things shall vanish all.
The City of God remaineth.

(Thomas Carlyle’s translation)

That the dragon appears as a wonder in heaven does not mean he is to be found in the region of blessedness. Heaven is frequently used to denote a region of power, whether for good or ill. Paul locates Satan and his host in “heavenly places”. (Ephesians 6:12 - margin)

THE FALL OF SATAN

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.” v. 4

We cannot find any satisfactory interpretation here, than to go back to Satan’s origin at the commencement of his career as fallen spirit. We are taken back to the

origin of all evil, antecedent to the fall of man. Satan's apostasy came about when he turned his eyes away from the divine glory to behold his own beauty and power which perfect love required him to place at the service of the creature Man to assist him to a destiny higher than any to which Satan himself, or any other angelic being, could ever attain. This was the moral test of the angelic world and when Satan rebelled against the divine decree he took with him into his degradation, one third of the angelic establishment. The tail of the dragon by which he swept the heavens and brought down so great a multitude of his fellow stars, must signify the repulsive nature of his policy and craft.

That Satan was originally a glorious spirit of high dignity and authority, and that he used that authority to suborn so great a proportion of the angelic creation and bring it down in ruins, there is every reason to believe. Fallen angels appear in the Word of God, especially in the New Testament, where their activity at the time of the birth of Christ and during His earthly ministry was most significant. Of the nature of that revolt (without recognition of which the history of man and of creation can never be understood) we have dealt more extensively in our pamphlets on "The Origin of Evil". [See The Problem of Evil, serial numbers 028-1, 028-2, 028-3]

Ignoring these facts we have no key to the mystery of evil in creation and no adequate doctrine of the Atonement.

Why must God become incarnate in order to die? Why must His death be required - and that a cursed death - to lift the curse which lay so heavily in our sinful race? And why is there no redemption for angels though there is mercy for fallen man? These questions are raised by our chapter, but we refer interested readers to what we have already attempted more extensively in the series mentioned.

That the 'stars' were cast down to earth indicates that the earth is the only sphere of Satan's warfare. The battleground of the ages is the soul of man. Astronomy will search in vain to find other inhabited world.

AWAITING THE BIRTH

"And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born." v. 4 (continued)

We return to the scene in Eden and the pronouncement of Satan's doom - "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed."

That Satan believes only too well the truth of man's creation and shameful fall, is clear from the tireless efforts he makes to persuade man - especially modern man - that the story is a myth; that man was never a special creation but just another animal which broke away in the course of evolution from his ancient and brutal stem, and developed an intellect, learned to walk on two feet, and became the master of his own fate, there being neither God nor evil, conscience, morality, purpose in living - and of course, no immortality, no life beyond the grave, no rational purpose to serve, and no dignity worth upholding.

To assert against the closed ranks of this pitiful human 'science' that immense forces of good and evil are massed in the invisibility, and that our visible and material world is only the glorious vestibule of an eternal world where redeemed man will live eternally in unity with the great Creator who eternally reveals Himself in a Trinity of Being - this may well excite the scorn of worldly wisdom. But it is high time that human wisdom learned this one great principle, **THAT THEOLOGY IS THE QUEEN OF THE SCIENCES WITHOUT WHICH SCIENCE LEADS NOWHERE EXCEPT TO THE ABYSS.**

The immoral state of Western civilisation today is one of the greatest of all proofs that the Bible is the true and only Word of God, because only the Bible can account for it. A Book of such power and penetration as the Bible must be expected to deal with supernatural things in a supernatural way, and this the Bible does. It is a Book which is alive with supernatural events, divine interventions and, crowning wonder of all, divine incarnation wherein the Creator becomes Man to suffer man's curse and open the way to blessed immortality where all the latent powers of creation in man will find their true field and everlasting expansion.

If this is not true, we say with all reverence, it ought to be true; man has no other hope but in LIFE beyond the tomb.

The Christian believer ought to reflect that Satan is bound in the end to fail in his attempt to obscure his own existence and delude man that there is no future and no immortality. Satan has neither all power nor all knowledge and it will be his hell to know that all he ever did to thwart the divine decree will only succeed in the end in promoting it. The triumph of Christ over evil must be full and absolute, complete and final.

HISTORY OF THE PROMISE

The agelong vigil of the dragon began with the expulsion of our first parents from

the Garden. Hell watched with trepidation the development of Eve's posterity. Cain they did not fear: had he not become as one of themselves, fallen into apostasy? Abel they feared for he was early marked as the priest and minister of the human race. But Satan could not know how soon or how long it would be before the curse of Eden fell upon him in full force. His policy therefore was to destroy the race as a whole, not only by murder and violence but by subversion of its moral integrity. Abel was destroyed about the year of Man 130; mankind lost its first priest by murder. The first man into the grave was the first man into heaven, for Abel was a saint. Satan's triumph was short-lived, for that year Seth was born and the promise began anew in him. By that time, under the laws of compound interest, the human race in great fecundity had multiplied into hundreds and thousands if not millions. Cain and his tribe were banished from the heart of the race, and they built the first city -the city of this world (Gen. 4:17) which, with its mystic successors, ever afterwards represented Satan's empire in perpetual opposition to the City of God - the Church. We see the same two cities today - the mystic Babylon, the kingdom of this world - and the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Zion, the Church.

By unbroken succession the original light of the Promise was transmitted to Noah, whose grandfather Methuselah died in the year of the Flood, aged 969 years, and Methuselah had known Adam for 243 years. Methuselah's name, meaning "At his death it shall come", was given by his father Enoch as a prophetic warning of the Flood. Noah carried with him into the Ark the precious records of the human race and as there stood only one man between him and Adam, the knowledge of the Promise was communicated to him without corruption. After the Flood, the Promise was cherished in the family of Shem, who also had known Methuselah for 100 years - and Shem was still alive when Jacob fled to Padan Aram.

By the great ages of the earth's earliest inhabitants not only the arts and crafts of civilised life were rapidly developed but before written records were compiled God preserved the original promise intact. From Adam to Abraham, a period of 1948 years, the record passed through only two hands, Methuselah's and Shem's. Thence the record passed through Jacob to Joseph, and finally to Moses who compiled the entire record in the Five Books known as the Pentateuch.

Through Jacob, Judah and David the line of descent of the Promised Seed traveled to the Babe of Bethlehem, when God became incarnate in human flesh and nature, and being crucified, was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven in glory and triumph. Satan was finally cheated of his prey: the Dragon had waited in vain for 4,000 years to devour the Woman's Child as soon as it was born.

The preservation of the promise was the secret which lay behind the great debate of the sages in the Book of Job. Job certainly was contemporary with Abraham if indeed he did not live before him, and Job was conversant with the Promise which sustained him during his incredible sufferings: "I know that my Redeemer is the Living One, and He shall rise and stand upon the dust of death, who is the Last, and therefore must also be the First" (For so a free translation of the Hebrew of Job 19:25 would read). Job, being a prophet, was given an exalted vision of the Coming One, the Promised Seed, and clearly discerned that He was none other than the First and the Last, who would overcome death and trample it under His feet. Job's words are among the greatest of all the prophetic utterances in which the Bible abounds.

THE VIRGIN MARY

The woman in travail is the Church, not the Virgin Mary. Yet that gracious lady certainly symbolised at the birth of her Son what the Church would endure as a consequence of that birth. For the dragon was waiting to devour her Child. The power of Herod was poised to strike down the holy Infant. The blow indeed fell, not on Mary's Child but on the Innocents of Bethlehem. The Saviour's Incarnation was bathed in the tears of murdered children and their desolate mothers. The Holy Innocents, they call them, and those who doubt Infant Salvation might pause here to consider whether they can believe that the divine decree which permitted their blood to be shed also determined to cast them away for ever from His own sight. Their death was prophetic. "In Ramah was a voice heard - Rachel weeping for her children, because they were not." Yes indeed. Poor Rachel was always weeping for her children. But hearken to this: "Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears they shall come again from the land of the enemy". (See Jeremiah 31:15-17 and compare Matthew 2:17-18).

We recognise the high prophetic significance concealed in the events at Bethlehem, but our conscience revolts against the thought that the Lord should use doomed infants as a type of evangelical salvation and then cast away the unconscious little actors into a hopeless grave.

The Woman in Travail therefore is the Church, and this requires that we understand the Church to be a perpetual institution from the beginning of history to the end. The Church of the OT brought forth the Saviour of mankind, for it is true He was born in David's city of Bethlehem, of David's kingly line, according to prophecy. It is equally sure that this same Saviour, referring to Peter's declaration that (the Lord Jesus) was "the Christ, the Son of the living God", made the

fundamental declaration, “On this rock I will build my church - and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”. The Church was not newly created then, but it passed, with Christ, into her new and more glorious state. The full power of the Spirit of God was manifest in her. Hell would not prevail against her. She would survive and overcome in the age-long testimony which she was to bear to Christ. From the shadows and restrictions of her legal state under the Old Covenant she issues forth anew with Christ from His tomb; the same church which long travailed in expectation of Him, is now exalted, rejoicing in the full revelation of eternal redemption and her own glorious state as THE BRIDE THE LAMB’S WIFE.

“O WISEST LOVE”

Thus was the declaration of Genesis 3:15 at last verified. The Seed of the Woman came forth from the womb of the church, and, bruising Satan’s head, crushing it beneath His heel, slew death by enduring death.

O wisest love, that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail;
Should strive afresh against the foe –
Should strive and should prevail.

In vain the dragon rose in all his fury and hate to subvert the divine decree. The blood of the slain Innocents of Bethlehem was the memorial of his terror and cruelty. In vain. The Child was in Egypt, carried by the divine decree to the very land where the family of Jacob, the progenitor of the Seed, a thousand years before, had been persecuted by that same dragon who sought to drown in the waters of the Nile the firstborn of Israel. The Christ-child returned from Egypt, not to the City of David, but to a village called Nazareth, and more prophecy was then elucidated – “I have called my Son out of Egypt” and “He shall be called a Nazarene”. (Matthew 2:23)

THE NAZARENE

There is a grand note in the Speaker’s Bible (1878) contributed by Dean Mansel, of St Paul’s Cathedral, shortly before his untimely death in 1871. It is as follows:

“The words, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’ are not found literally in any prophecy of the OT, but it should be observed that Matthew does not say, as in other cases, by the prophet, but by the prophets, thus intimating that he is not giving the actual words of any one prediction, but the general sense of

many. Yet it is probable that the Evangelist had especially in his mind one prophecy, which in reality approaches far nearer to the citation than at first sight it appears to do. The city of Nazareth is nowhere mentioned in the OT nor in the Talmud so we are left to conjecture as to the Hebrew form of the name; but Hengstenberg has shown with considerable probability that the original name was NETSER and this view is accepted as proved by Winer. The name of the city is thus identical with that given to the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1, as the BRANCH or SHOOT of the root of Jesse. The name has probably the same meaning in both cases, being given to the town on account of its smallness and insignificance, as a weak shoot in contrast to a stately tree (a meaning which perhaps gives the point of the saying of Nathanael, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"), while it was applied to the Messiah with reference to the lowliness of His first appearance. Our Lord by His residence at Nazareth, thus verbally as well as really, fulfilled the prediction of the prophet; not only growing up in obscurity from the family of Jesse reduced to low estate, but bearing a name derived from the place in which He grew up."

BORN TO RULE

"And she brought forth a manchild who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and his throne." Verse 5

The vision here oversteps the history of the Child on earth, the ministry and the crucifixion, and proceeds at once to the Ascension, for the entire episode is now focused upon the subsequent conflict between the Woman and the Dragon.

The destiny of the Man Child is prescribed: "He shall rule all nations with a rod of iron". He, who was born of the Mystic Woman, was born to rule over all things, and in particular to reduce all opposing forces to His will. The description of His rule "with a rod of iron" as His sceptre, is clearly taken from the same Second Psalm which so frequently enters into John's prophecy. "Thou shalt break them (i.e., the heathen nations who oppose the kingdom of Christ) with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel". (Psalm 2:9)

Christ's rule over the nations with an iron sceptre is not for the purpose of salvation but for the defence and deliverance of His captive people who are oppressed by the dragon and his army. Mobilised by the unseen agency of the dragon, the worldly powers combine to destroy the kingdom of Christ. (See Psalm 2:1-3). But Satan's purpose will not stand. He who ascends the throne

of all creation is unchallengeable because He is the victor over death, and there remains therefore no enemy that can stand against Him. The example of Pharaoh and his doomed host is well in mind here. John's vision in this chapter covers all examples where a similar situation prevails. Rev. 2:26-27: He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father." How quickly tyrants fall before the Word of God preached by His servants; and persecutions and oppressions are brought to nothing! The Church of God through her testimony and preaching of the Word sees the nations broken before her as with a rod of iron.

THE FLIGHT OF THE WOMAN

"And the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days."
Verse 6

The figure is taken from the flight of Elijah first to the brook Cherith by Jordan, and later to Zarephath in Zidon to the house of the widow. The duration of Elijah's flight was three and a half year or 1260 days. We have seen that this period is used prophetically and not literally in the Book of Revelation, as it also is in Daniel and is an indeterminate period of time, exact in the divine reckoning fixed and sure, but unknown and unrevealed to man. Here, as else where in the Apocalypse the 1260 days, or time, times and half time, relate to the total duration of the church's conflict with the antichristian power of this world, commencing at Patmos, and continuing till the time of the end. It is the identical period already described in the preceding chapter (11:2-3) when the temple court and the holy city must be trodden down of the gentiles - 42 months or 1260 days. God wisely hides from His people the actual duration of their trials so that faith will not be displaced from her office for we walk by faith, not by sight. It is based on the type of Elijah's flight in order that we may know that God is the same today and never forsakes His church. See Psalm 91 – "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty...." Psalm 31:20 – "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secret in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Psalm 32:7 – "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

A distinction is to be observed later in the chapter (v.17) between the woman and "the remnant of her seed". The church as a permanent feature of the Lord's

providence and care, is nourished perpetually by the Lord and is indestructible, although 'the remnant of her seed' (represented by individual believers), may often be exposed to the full might and cruelty of Satan and his agents. The individual children of the church may be harried and slain, as often they have been in history, but they always overcome, even in death.

It is sure from this figure of the church hidden in the wilderness that she is not an earthly, visible institution decked in all the pomp and pride of a kingdom of this world (as the Roman error teaches and practices). She is hidden, invisible, heavenly, and known only by the preaching of the Word and by her worship 'in spirit and in truth'.

WAR IN HEAVEN

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

And prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven.

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”
Verses 7-9

Here another principal character is introduced to the drama. Michael appears leading the armies of heaven against the Dragon and his devilish retinue. MICHAEL is Christ as we shall presently show.

War in heaven is not war in the tranquil abode of the Eternal One. Heaven (as we have already noted), is often used in Holy Scripture in the sense of that which is unseen, or superior to earth. When Paul would speak of his own mysterious exaltation to the very presence of God, he refers to THE THIRD HEAVEN (2 Corinthians 12:2). The 'war in heaven' in our verse, is a figure to indicate the mighty changes which took place in the spirit realm when Christ rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. There was then a casting down of Satan and his power - a blow from which Satan's kingdom has never recovered nor ever will. Satan's kingdom received a mortal wound. The foundations and pillars of the kingdom of darkness were shaken and dissolved as the heathen temple which was brought down in ruins by Samson. Darkness and death, the two most powerful instruments of Satan's dominion, by which he held the soul of man in ignorance and fear, were dispelled by the light of that new day which dawned

when Christ rose from the dead.

“Cast into the earth” signifies Satan’s fall from his former dominion over the nations. A great alteration has taken place since Christ came. The ancient tyranny of Satan over the mind and conscience of mankind, creating a state of universal idolatry, was broken for ever. The idols of the nations fell before the proclamation of the gospel, so that Satan, unable any longer to maintain his ancient heathen dominion, was compelled to adopt a new, more subtle form. Hence the early attacks on the doctrine of Christ’s divinity - attacks which have been renewed in our own time on the grand scale. Unable to stem the tide of truth he caused the subtle rise of sacramentalism in the church to substitute outward rites for the realities of Christ’s one true sacrifice for sin. In these latest of days Satan has created a new form of Paganism. We call it RATIONALISM - the last scourge of the church. This worship of the human mind is surely a token of doom. It is a phenomenon of the latter days and has no parallel in history.

That the casting out of Satan into the earth along with his devilish host, has to do with the coming in of the gospel, is indicated in the Saviour’s words when the Seventy returned from their mission to the towns and villages of Israel, rejoicing that ‘even the devils were subject unto them’: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” said the Lord (Luke 10:18). In other words, the Lord saw in the effects of the ministry of these disciples upon the unseen power of hell, a preliminary token of the mighty upheaval which would take place through His own glorious atonement, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

Through the preaching of the gospel the kingdom of God is established on the ruins of Satan’s empire. It is thus we understand the words of our chapter, that Satan is ‘cast out into the earth’. Too long the Evil One held the mass of mankind in bondage and darkness, but the time of gospel deliverance came and Satan was no longer able to maintain his ground against the Word of Light.

It was surely of this great turning point in spiritual history that the Saviour spoke, significantly in that last Holy Week leading up to His Passion – “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from thee earth, will draw all men unto me”. (John 12.31-32)

It was of this great event that Paul spoke to the Athenian philosophers (whose science, like that of too many of our modern philosophers, led them nowhere except to an altar inscribed, THE UNKNOWN GOD). The great apostle declared, “The times of this ignorance God winked at (tolerated), but now commandeth all

men everywhere to repent”. (Acts 17:30) Some of our up-to-the-minute preachers tell us this sermon was one of Paul’s great mistakes To such lugubrious depths has exposition descended in these modern times.

The Holy Spirit does not inspire His historians to record useless and mistaken sermons. This, like other recorded sermons in the Book of Acts is to be numbered amongst the greatest and most significant of declarations ever made to man. It was intended that it should live for ever as a monument to the grace, wisdom, and government of God.

WHO IS MICHAEL?

But who is this great personality who in imperial conquest leads the armies of heaven against the armies of hell? Who indeed, but the Prince of heaven Himself, Jesus the Son of God, who appears again and again in the holy record by a variety of names which denote His true identity and destiny, and the infinite glories and prerogatives of His office in the history of creation and redemption.

He is Emmanuel, God with us; He is the divine LOGOS or Wisdom, the expression of the Father's Being; His Name is WONDERFUL, the divine Enigma, in whom is manifest the Wisdom of God. He is the Second Adam, the Amen, the Ancient of Days, the Beloved, the Anointed, the Branch, the Corner-stone, the Light, the Life, and the Altogether Lovely. He is the Shiloh, the Seed, the Temple, the Sun of righteousness, the great Melchizedek - and much, much more that we have not space to record.

We must not therefore be stumbled to find that He is the Arch-angel Michael, mentioned but five times in Holy Scripture, and of these, three times in the Book of Daniel, once in Jude, and here in Revelation. Michael appears however on numerous other occasions though not by His personal name but under the title “The Angel of the Lord”.

There is only one ‘archangel’ mentioned in the Bible, and this is Christ. He is the archangel because it is given to Him, as the Eternal Son, the head of all creation, to be known to the angels as their king - Michael, ‘likeness of God’. In borrowed angelic form he makes Himself known to that bright and glorious company, for even the angels cannot see God except as He assumes a borrowed resemblance. The Incarnation is different. Christ never became an angel as such, but He truly became Man, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He will retain His visibility throughout all eternity as

glorified Man, one in nature with us, in the same body which lay in the tomb, but a body glorified, even as ours shall be after the pattern of His own resurrection.

“Verily he took not on Him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham” - Hebrews 2:16.

Difficulties have been imagined as to the identification of Michael with Christ because of the words of the communicating angel to Daniel- “Michael, one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13), as though Michael were only one among several equals. A little consideration shows this to be not the case.

In Daniel it becomes clear that angelic personages are attached by the Sovereign Ruler of all things, to the various thrones and kingdoms of earth, as the executors of divine providence for the exaltation or ruin of those earthly powers. It appears also that Satan too has his ‘princes’ who are allocated to certain areas of rule. We given read that “an evil spirit from the Lord” was sent to trouble Saul the king (1 Sam. 16:14). This mysterious verse means that as a judgment upon the disobedient king who had finally given himself over to apostasy and rebellion against God, the Lord authorised Satan to enter the field and take control over the monarch. We need not be surprised at this, for even Paul the apostle speaks of some false teachers whom he had “delivered unto Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20). The Lord ‘sent evil angels’ among the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness (Ps. 78:49). Again, God ‘gives over to a reprobate mind’ those who ‘do not like to retain God in their knowledge’ (Romans 1:28).

In the case of the nation of Israel no ordinary angelic prince was appointed to preserve and guide them. For Israel was the church; the bride of Jehovah, and Jehovah Himself must be her prince and preserver. Hence the angel says to Daniel, “Michael - your prince” (Dan. 10:21). Again, “At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people....” (Dan. 12:1) Michael therefore is described as ‘one of the chief princes’ because other powers supernatural had the special charge of other earthly kingdoms. But in Himself, Michael was their superior. As the ARCHANGEL, the Lord of all the angels, He was numbered with them, in the angelic form which He borrowed from them. None save He in whom the Godhead resided, could ‘stand’ for the people of God - not merely as their political head, but as their spiritual representative, their Saviour from sin and death.

Jude 9 is often quoted to try to prove the inferiority of Michael: “Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses,

durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.” The argument is that one who ‘durst not’ address Satan in railing terms could not be superior to him in power or rank. But the argument overlooks the word in Zechariah 3:1-2: “And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee”.

The rebuking of Satan, even by the Lord Himself, is never in abusive terms or the undignified language of raillery. Satan is a fearful being who, even in his fallen state, is to be treated with respect, inasmuch as he was created by God and even now, in his fallen state, fulfils the purpose which divine providence has decreed concerning him. Hence Peter denounces the impious who “are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, whereas angels who are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord”. (2 Pet. 2:10, 12).

The Christian should be careful how he speaks of Satan. The modern fashion of referring to this awful power in contemptuous terms, or in the language of abuse or ridicule, is to be deplored, and is probably dangerous. The Almighty Himself says (as we have just seen in Zechariah) “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan” - the same words which in Jude are attributed to Michael.

The ‘durst not’ in Jude does not convey the idea of ‘afraid to’ but rather is a recognition of the power given to Satan by God for the working out of the mystery of God’s holy purpose. Part of that holy purpose was the liberty given to Satan to bring about the crucifixion of Christ, according to the Saviour’s own words in the Garden, “This is your hour and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). It was Satan who, in accordance with the liberty allowed to him by the Most High, put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the purpose to betray the Lord Jesus (John 13:2). This fearsome office of Satan, the prince of darkness, to discharge the secret mission of God’s sovereign purpose in the crucifixion of the Son, indicates the overall government of God controlling the evil and the good, and causing evil to work itself out to its own destruction. Satan does not INTEND to do the Will of God when acting as the instrument of God’s purpose, but applies himself to his work as though he were independent of the divine control.

“THE BODY OF MOSES”

There have been varying attempts to explain the mysterious words concerning the body of Moses, and some of them are highly superstitious, especially those drawn from Jewish traditions. It is our view that the burial of Moses’ body by the Lord so that no man could find his grave, had a high spiritual significance. Moses

represented the Law and the Law could only lead to death. The Law-giver himself (Moses) must die and his body represented typically the Law which could not give life. The removal of Moses' body to heaven (he reappears with Elijah on the Mount of transfiguration -Luke 9:30-31) - was disputed by Satan as a breach of the Law, for the devil stands on legal ground when he accuses the conscience of the believer. He impugns the righteousness of God in granting forgiveness to the sinner. But Satan knew not until after the event, that the Incarnate God would take the sinner's place and endure the curse and the condemnation of those who had offended. His objection concerning the body of Moses was overruled by Calvary. We thus hold that 'the body of Moses' which was in dispute was actually the Law, which Moses represented and of which his body in the grave was the legal TOKEN of the LAW'S invincibility.

Here then is our great Michael who 'stands for' us, identified as the Son of God, the Lord of all things visible and invisible. He is none other than the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, He in whose glorious Person the Father reveals Himself and fully unfolds the mystery of His Being.

He (Michael) is the Defender of His people, the One who alone is competent to cast Satan down from heaven and destroy his kingdom of darkness, sin and death.

When we read of the communicating angel saying in Daniel 10:21, "There is none that holdeth with me in these things but Michael your prince," we must understand his words in relation to the conflict raging in the unseen, between the forces of light and darkness, concerning the Kingdom of God. The angel was referring to the succession of the empires in their relation to the Kingdom of Christ, and his words must not be interpreted as though there was disagreement among the heavenly powers. A free translation of the angel's words might be put this way - "He who raises himself up in all his strength and power to enable me to accomplish the task of bringing down the Persian empire in order that the Grecian kingdom might be raised up in furtherance of the Lord's decree, is none other than the Lord Himself, the heavenly Michael, your Prince and King."

Rightly understood, therefore, Michael is none other than the Eternal LOGOS, who was in the beginning with God, and who was and ever will be God.

It is He who comes forth in Rev. 12, to cast Satan down from the eminence permitted to him in OT times, so that the Kingdom of God might come to its full stature and commence its history of conquest over Satan even till the end of time and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Such a triumph as this could not be claimed by any created angel. This casting down of Satan took place at the resurrection of Christ. Victory over death, and over death's head, Satan, was the peculiar prerogative of Christ, not of any created being no matter how exalted. Therefore Michael is Christ.