

BEHOLD, HE COMETH!

An Exposition of the Book of Revelation

By Herman Hoeksema

Edited and partially revised by Homer C. Hoeksema



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“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

—*Revelation 1:7*

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Editor's Preface

The following pages contain the deceased author's exposition of the Book of Revelation which first appeared serially in the magazine of which he was for many years the editor, *The Standard Bearer*. Tentative plans for publication had been made before the Lord took him to glory. In fact, the title of this volume is of the author's choosing. However, before final preparation of the contents could be completed, the author died. My father and I had consulted on some of the preparations for publishing. Besides, I fell heir to the vast amount of notes and sermon outlines on the Book of Revelation which he had amassed over the years of his long ministry. This made my task of editing much easier. My part in this volume has been mostly editorial. The only exception to this is a few chapters involving parts of Revelation 19-22 which the author himself would have rewritten. Due to various circumstances, as originally written, these chapters were very abbreviated and were not consistent with the others in length, style, and format. On the basis of my father's notes and sermon outlines, I have revised and expanded these few chapters in the hope that this would enhance the value of this commentary.

Perhaps a few biographical notes will not be out of place. The author loved to preach and to teach from the Book of Revelation, perhaps more than from any other book. Twice during his long service as pastor of a large congregation he preached through the entire book. The first series of sermons was shortly after World War I. The second series belonged to the era of World War II. The latter series I remember well from the days of my youth. Besides, more than once the author led his large adult Bible Class through a detailed study of parts or all of the Book of Revelation. His sermons, of which there were two complete sets totaling well over a hundred sermons, were characterized by lucid, simple, and yet thorough exposition; and they were delivered with a warmth and fervor which kept a large congregation at spell-bound attention Sunday after Sunday. It is my hope that something of these virtues is reflected in this commentary, which, for the sake of both interest and clarity, was written in essay form, rather than in the form of a verse-by-verse explanation.

May the Lord so bless this effort and sanctify this explanation of the last book of Holy Writ to the hearts of the readers that we may look more earnestly for the coming of our Lord.

—Homer C. Hoeksema

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

(Revelation 1:1-3)

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Introductory Remarks

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

These words should be sufficient justification of the attempt to expound this last book of Holy Writ, if, indeed, the earnest endeavor by a minister of the Word of God to deliver God’s message to the church of Christ in the world from any part of the Scriptures ever requires an apology. A satisfactory exposition of the Book of Revelation is considered impossible by many. The book is so full of symbols and allegories, and its true meaning is couched in such mysterious language, that one can never feel sure that he has discovered its real sense. And the history of the interpretation of this book of the Bible apparently corroborates this opinion. Many a commentary has been written on the Book of Revelation; numerous treatises have been published on individual parts of it; and the explanations offered are as numerous and divergent as the scholars who attempted to expound the book. Thus it is alleged. And the conclusion is drawn that it is better to refrain from any attempt at explanation, or, at least, to wait until “the things that must shortly come to pass” are being realized. If, then, an apology would seem to be in order for offering our own interpretation, we would appeal to the last verse of the passage treated in this chapter. The book is intended to convey a blessing to them that endeavor to acquaint themselves with the contents of it and that keep the words of

this prophecy. It must be possible, then, “to read and to hear,” to understand “what the Spirit saith unto the churches” through this part of the Word of God. It may not be possible to satisfy the spirit of curiosity in which many approach this last book of Holy Writ; but one may surely so understand the “meaning of the Spirit” that he receives the blessing which is here promised.

To obtain this blessing will be more than sufficient reward for our endeavors.

It is quite customary to preface the exposition of the Book of Revelation by a discourse on extraneous matters, such as questions concerning the author of Revelation, the time of its composition, and the proper method of interpretation. We shall not try to add anything to all that has been written on these questions, neither shall we determine upon a definite method of exposition at this stage. Much has been written about the authorship of the book. I presume that all the internal and external evidence that can throw light upon this question has been presented; and opinions are still divided. Some claim that the author is the apostle John; others argue that the John who is mentioned as the author in the book itself cannot possibly have been the apostle “whom Jesus loved.” It would be quite useless to repeat the arguments employed in favor of the one or of the other view. One who is interested in the question may consult any commentary on this book. I do not consider the question of any importance. The canonicity of the book does not depend on the apostolic authorship. Nor is the correct understanding of its contents contingent upon the proper solution of this question: if it were, Scripture would surely have given us definite information on this point.

The same is true of the question concerning the time when this book was written. Here also opinions are divided between an earlier and a later date. Although, therefore, it is our personal conviction that the author is the apostle John and that the book was written about the year 95 A.D., we do not consider the matter of sufficient importance to add to the mass of material that has already been written on these questions.

As to the proper method of interpretation, we would rather let the text speak for itself and let it become apparent from our interpretation which method we prefer, instead of announcing such a method beforehand. Several methods have been applied; and the weakness of

them all is exactly that they are *methods*, and that they often have been applied too stringently, so that the contents of the Book of Revelation were forced into their scheme. This is especially true of the church-historical method, according to which the various visions of the book are more or less clearly and definitely traced in the history of the new dispensation. But also the futurist and the praeterist method of interpretation must plead guilty of this. According to the former, almost the entire contents of Revelation must be considered as referring to the distant future, the time immediately preceding the second coming of the Lord. According to the latter, most of the prophecy of this book must be regarded as having been fulfilled in the past, particularly in the fall of the mighty Roman empire. What must be considered the correct method of interpretation must be determined by the contents of the book itself, however; and what method we prefer will become apparent in the course of our explanation.

The first three verses of chapter 1 contain what may be called the superscription of the whole Book of Revelation. It announces the contents of the book: it is a revelation of Jesus Christ and throws light on the things which must shortly come to pass. It informs us how this revelation was received: it was given by God, through Christ, through the instrumentality of an angel, to His servant John, and by John to Christ's servants. And it closes with the beatitude to which we already called attention: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The book, then, presents itself as "revelation of Jesus Christ." The original word for "revelation" is *apokalupsis*, from which our "apocalypse" is derived. It denotes the act of uncovering something that is hid, as, for instance, the unveiling of a statue. In the Biblical sense it denotes that act of God whereby He makes known to us the things concerning Himself and the kingdom of heaven, "the mysteries" of the kingdom of God. For these things are not of this world. They cannot be perceived by our natural senses. Nor can they be conceived by the natural understanding. They belong to another world than ours, to the spiritual and heavenly order of things, "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," (I Cor. 2:9). They cannot be apprehended, therefore, unless God reveals them to

us, “unveils” them, and unless there be a spiritual eye to see, a spiritual ear to hear, a spiritual mind to understand them. The word “revelation,” then, denotes that act of God whereby He discloses to us that other world, the things of His heavenly kingdom and eternal covenant.

Now the text speaks of a “revelation of Jesus Christ.” In the original the name “Jesus Christ” stands in the genitive case (*apokalupsis Iee-sou Christou*); and the question is whether this is to be regarded as an objective or as a subjective genitive. If the latter is correct, the meaning is that Jesus Christ is the subject, or author, of this revelation, that He is the revealer of the things contained in this prophecy. If the former is the true interpretation of this genitive, the expression denotes that Jesus Christ is the object of this revelation, that He is the One that is “unveiled,” revealed, in this book. The common interpretation takes the genitive in the subjective sense: the revelation which Jesus Christ gave, of which He is the author. In fact, practically all commentators take this sense for granted, and hardly allow for the possibility of taking the genitive in the objective sense.

Yet we believe that there are important objections against this view, objections which are so weighty that we prefer to understand the expression in the objective sense, so that it means that Jesus Christ is revealed to us in this last book of Scripture. In the first place, we call attention to the fact that the expression “revelation of Jesus Christ” usually, if not always, has this sense in Scripture. In I Corinthians 1:7 we read: “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ASV. The KJV has erroneously: “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”). It is evident that the meaning here is: “waiting for the day when our Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed.” The genitive, therefore, is objective. The same is true of the expression in II Thessalonians 1:7: “at the revelation of the Lord Jesus” (ASV). The King James Version gives the sense correctly: “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed.” And again, the same expression occurs in I Peter 1:7, and in the same sense, i.e., with reference to the second coming of the Lord: “unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation (KJV: “appearing”) of Jesus Christ.” And even in II Corinthians 12:1, where the expression is somewhat different in form (the plural “revelations” is used), the objective sense is by no means impossible. And this is the meaning of the genitive in similar expressions, such as “the revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” Romans 2:5; “the revelation of the sons of God,” Romans 8:19;

“the revelation of the mystery,” Romans 16:25. In all these instances the genitive can only be understood in the objective sense. The analogy of Scripture, then, is decidedly in favor of the view that also in Revelation 1:1 the expression “revelation of Jesus Christ” must be understood as indicating that in this last book of Scripture Jesus Christ is the One that is revealed. In the second place, not Christ, but God is the author of all revelation, even though this revelation takes place through Jesus Christ and is concentrated in Him. God is the revealer; Christ is God revealed unto us. In fact, this is even plainly stated in the words of verse 1: God gave this revelation unto Christ. And, in the third place, this is exactly what we have in this book: a revelation which reveals Jesus Christ to us. The revelation of Jesus Christ is the central and all-important theme of this prophecy. For all these reasons, then, we understand the phrase “revelation of Jesus Christ” in the objective sense.

Now this is of importance with a view to the proper interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

We should constantly bear in mind that this prophecy purposes to be a revelation of Jesus Christ. It may be said, of course, that all Scripture is a revelation of the Lord. He it is Who is revealed in the protevangel of Genesis 3:15. And all through the Old Testament, in direct prophecies as well as in types and shadows, the revelation of Jesus Christ is the main theme. Centrally we have the revelation of Jesus Christ in the fullness of time: in His incarnation, public ministry, word and work, death and resurrection, ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God the revelation of Jesus Christ, to which all the prophets and shadows of the old dispensation pointed forward, is become an accomplished fact. And it is that accomplished revelation that is interpreted to us by the Spirit of Christ through the authors of the New Testament Scriptures. Yet the revelation of Jesus Christ is not finished. He appeared from heaven, came in the flesh, died and arose and departed again to the Father. We saw Him for a while, but we see Him no more. He dwelt among us, performed His work upon the stage of this world; but He disappeared again without changing the stage on which He was revealed and accomplished His work. Although He is with us now by His grace and Spirit, yet He is hid from us. His revelation, therefore, is not finished: for in this world we see Him not. And yet, even now, even throughout this dispensation He is operating in this world of our present experience. For He has all power in heaven and on earth; He is even now King of

kings and Lord of lords; and He controls all things and governs them unto the perfection of His church and His final appearance in glory. Then, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He shall be revealed in glory, never to be hid again, when He shall appear never to disappear again,—then shall His revelation be perfected.

Of this final revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that is connected with it, all that leads up to it in this dispensation, this last prophecy of Holy Writ speaks. That is its theme. How the Lord is related to the things that come to pass throughout this dispensation, how through them He is coming all the time, and how He will ultimately come in all the glory the Father hath given unto Him, all this is disclosed to us in this “revelation of Jesus Christ.”

This we must remember in our interpretation of the book. It would show us the things which must come to pass in a new light. We can only perceive them from an earthly viewpoint, as mere “history.” And from this viewpoint the picture is rather a gloomy and hopeless one. We see wars and hear of more wars, ever widening in scope and increasing in intensity. We see vanity and death, earthquakes and destruction, a creature that is subject to vanity. But this last book of Scripture would show us these same things in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. We are asked to look at the history of this dispensation as it were from above. Bearing this in mind we will not approach this book with the purpose of satisfying our idle curiosity, to inquire just what may be the course of events in the history of this world. Why should we be anxious to know the future course of worldly events? What consolation would there be in such knowledge? Did not the Lord teach us that we should take no thought even for tomorrow? Nay, but we shall approach the Book of Revelation in the expectation that it will instruct us with respect to the significance of this present history in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, and that it will give us an answer to the question: how must all things lead to the final revelation of our Lord in glory? And if we succeed in thus interpreting the book that “we see Jesus” in all the events of this present time, we shall not fail to receive the blessing that is promised to them that read and hear the words of this prophecy!

The Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass

In the light of the preceding it will also be possible correctly to understand the text when it informs us that God gave this revelation to

Jesus Christ in order “to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.”

To “shew” these things does not merely mean to lift the veil that hides the future from our view. If this were the meaning, the Book of Revelation would really present us with a history of this entire dispensation written beforehand. We would then be able to trace the fulfillment of this prophecy step by step in the consecutive events of this present time more or less accurately, and to determine approximately, if not exactly, what time it is on the world-clock. It would follow that we would also be in a position to predict “the day and the hour” of the coming of the Lord. This view really underlies the church-historical method of interpretation of this book. The various visions of this book are directly applied to certain definite historical events which are supposed to be clearly predicted here. The very fact, however, that interpreters of this class differ widely in their choice of the events to which these visions are supposed to refer is sufficient reason to condemn this method. Besides, as we said before, it is not necessary for the believer thus to be able to foretell the future. To be sure, the Book of Revelation shows us in general outlines what will be the course of events in this dispensation with a view to the coming of the Lord and the perfection of His kingdom, but not in the sense that this prophecy is a history written beforehand.

To “shew” the things that must shortly come to pass means to reveal them to us in a new light, in their real significance, as a part of God’s own program, as a revelation of the coming Lord! We must “see Jesus” even in the events of the present world. We must have sufficient light to “hold fast that which we have,” even in the midst of the confusion and darkness and gloom of the picture presented by the history of the world and of the church in the midst of the world. To enable us to see the events of this present time in the light of Christ’s coming,—that is the purpose of this book.

Hence, the things that must shortly come to pass must be shown to *Christ’s servants*. By the term “servants” is not meant a special class or group of believers, such as the apostles, but all the believers in their relation to Christ as their Lord. They are His servants. They were liberated from the dominion of sin and the slavery of the devil in order to serve Christ with a new obedience. His Spirit dwells in them. In Him they are new creatures. His Word they possess and love. They are His

friends, because they do whatsoever He has commanded them. And let us note that only His servants can receive the words of this prophecy, and that they alone have need of them. Nay more, it is only in the measure that we are faithful to the Lord in the midst of the present world and walk as His servants that the light of this revelation of Jesus Christ can possibly brighten our pathway. Then, indeed, we shall have tribulation. For as they have hated Him, so they will hate His servants. The servant is not greater than his Lord. Then the things which are below and the events of this present time shall have no comfort for us, until we see all things in the light of this prophecy. But seeing them in this light, we shall be of good cheer, being confident that our Lord hath overcome the world!

Two details we must still consider in connection with these things which come to pass: 1) they *must* come to pass; and, 2) they will come to pass *shortly*.

It is good for us to know, as we look about us in the world, that the things that take place *must* come to pass. This *must* expresses the necessity of all the events of this present time from a two-fold aspect. First of all, it points us to the eternal and perfect and all-wise counsel of the Almighty as the ultimate reason and ground of this necessity. All things are but the unfolding of the eternal good pleasure of the Most High. They are, indeed, determined. All things are determined, large and small, good and evil. But they are determined not by cruel fate or blind force, but by the counsel of the all-wise Creator of all things. When we accept the Word of God and believe that all things *must* come to pass, our hearts find rest because they find rest in Him! And, secondly, this *must* points to the end, the *telos*, the final destination of all things: the perfected kingdom of heaven and its revelation in the day of Christ. This second aspect of the *must* is, of course, inseparably connected with the first. Just because all things have their ultimate reason and necessity in the counsel of God, therefore they must come to pass in order to realize the divine end of all things: the tabernacle of God with men! We may express the same thought thus: all things come to pass because Christ is coming! What a glorious assurance of hope even in the darkest moments of history! Let us declare this truth as His witnesses in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation!

These things must come to pass *shortly*. This expression cannot be used to sustain the view that practically the entire contents of the

Book of Revelation must be considered as being fulfilled with the destruction of the Roman Empire. For the idea that all things that must become history before the final coming again of the Lord will be realized shortly is not at all foreign to the New Testament. "The night is far spent; the day is at hand," the apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome (Rom. 13:12). And the apostle Peter exhorts us: "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer," (I Peter 4:7). To the church of Philadelphia the Lord Himself declares: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown," (Rev. 3:11). And again, in Revelation 22:7 we read: "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." And in vs. 12 of the same chapter: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." In the last three passages the word translated "quickly" is the same as that which is rendered "shortly" in 1:1. And this is, indeed, the meaning. The Lord comes quickly. He does not tarry. He is not slack concerning the promise. And this implies that the things which must come to pass before that final coming and in the process of that coming must also come to pass shortly, or quickly.

This may not appear so to us. Centuries have elapsed since these words were written, and still they have not been fulfilled. Nineteen centuries to us seems a long time, hardly to be denoted by the term "shortly." But we must remember not only that God's measure of time differs from ours, but also that tremendous things must come to pass before the end shall be. The whole church must be gathered: the fullness of the Gentiles and of the Jews. The measure of iniquity must be filled. Antichrist must reach his culmination and have his day. Gog and Magog must play their own part in the things that must come to pass. If we consider the nature of the things that must come to pass, we begin to see that they do, indeed, occur with astounding rapidity, especially in our own day. However this may be, the Scriptures teach that all things come to pass quickly. There is no delay, so that also the view that God restrains the progress of sin is contrary to this Scriptural teaching. All things hasten unto the end!

Which God Gave unto Him

This revelation, then, of which Jesus Christ Himself is the object, "God gave unto him," the text informs us.

Of all revelation, and therefore also of this part of it, God is the sole Author. We must think here, of course, of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and not merely of the Father as the First Person of the Holy Trinity. We must make a distinction, therefore, between God and Christ as the Mediator in His human nature. Scripture, although clearly teaching that Christ is the eternal Son of God, very God, equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, nevertheless makes this distinction. This is very evident from those passages which speak of God as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God is the God also of Christ, the Mediator according to His human nature. And this God is the Author of all revelation. Hence we read here: “which God gave unto him.”

It is a thoroughly Biblical conception that also Christ in His human nature receives all revelation from God. This is not only taught here, but also in such passages as John 5:19, 20; John 7:16; and John 8:28. There is, of course, a difference between Christ and us with respect to the way in which God’s revelation is received. We can receive the revelation of God only indirectly, through Christ, through the “apostles and prophets,” through the Scriptures; but Christ, because He is the Son of God in human nature, received that revelation directly and immediately, without the intermediation of other agencies. But this does not alter the fact as such that also Christ receives all revelation from His “God and Father.” God gave this revelation to Him. And this particular revelation was given to Christ after His exaltation. It is wholly in harmony with His position at the right hand of God, according to which He has all power in heaven and on earth, stands at the very pinnacle of all creation, that God gave this revelation to Him. For to a position of supreme power and authority belongs the possession of all knowledge and wisdom. Later in the Book of Revelation (chapter 5) somewhat the same thought is presented symbolically in the vision of Christ’s taking the book with its seven seals from the hand of Him that sitteth on the throne. But this we hope to explain in the proper place.

And He Sent and Signified It

Having received this revelation from God, Christ communicated it to His servants. He did so by “signifying” it to His servant John through the mediation of “his angel.”

The original is somewhat difficult to translate. Instead of the words, “and he sent and signified it by his angel,” we read: “and he signified,

sending (or: having sent) through an angel.” The aorist participle of the Greek verb for “to send” is used; and for this we have no exact equivalent in the English language. Let me just say about it that the aorist in Greek stresses the act as such, rather than any time element.

The idea, therefore, is plain enough. The text emphasizes two elements.

In the first place, it gives us to understand that when Christ communicated the revelation which He received from God to His servant John, He “signified” it. This means that He cast it into the form of signs and symbols derived from our earthly life and experience. The Book of Revelation is a book of visions, full of signs and symbols. And this “signifying” must have been necessary. It seems to imply that the form in which Christ imparted this revelation to His servant John differs from the form in which Christ Himself received it from God. Christ is heavenly, the Lord of heaven, the resurrected Lord in glory. He is able to receive the revelation of heavenly things directly, in heavenly form. But we are still earthy, in our humiliated body. And we cannot receive the revelation of heavenly things in other than earthly forms, signs and symbols. This, then, is one of the truths that must constantly be kept in mind if we would interpret the Book of Revelation, though it is also one of the principles of interpretation which is very frequently violated by many commentators. Christ “signified” the revelation which He had received from God to His servant John.

In the second place, this signification took place through the mediation of “his angel.” It appears from the rest of the book that different angels were employed to bring these visions to the perception and mind of John. Yet it is not improbable that one particular angel served as the “interpreting angel,” and that the reference here is to this angel particularly. It is *Christ’s* angel because the Lord is exalted far above all powers and principalities, and above every name that is named. The angels, too, are His messengers, sent out in His service. Nor is it strange that an angel here mediates to communicate and signify this revelation to John. Angels often appear in Scripture as the medium of revelation, not only directly, when they proclaim the Word of God, as at the incarnation and at the resurrection of the Lord, but also indirectly. We know that the law of Sinai was given by the disposition of angels, Acts 7:53, and that it was ordained by angels in the hand of Moses, Galatians 3:19. And that in some such capacity an angel also mediated in the communication of this revelation to John is reaffirmed in chapter

22:6. Somehow, therefore, an angel was employed as agent to bring the visions of this book before the eye of the seer.

This seer is simply called “his servant John.” As was stated before, we believe that this was John the Apostle, although this is often disputed. We do not consider the question of importance for the interpretation of this book. Of many parts of Holy Scripture we do not know the human writers. But it seems to us, apart from all other considerations, that in the light of Scripture there can be no doubt that this “servant John” is the apostle of that name. Who else could thus designate himself without further qualifications and expect that his readers would know who was meant? Surely, one that is acquainted with Scripture can think of no other. That he is not called “the apostle of Jesus Christ” in this passage does not alter the matter. In his First Epistle the apostle John does not introduce himself at all, while in his second and third letters he merely calls himself “the elder.” Besides, even Paul does not always introduce himself in his epistles as “the apostle” (cf. I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon, 1); and he also designates himself as a “servant of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). And on the isle of Patmos, as the recipient of this revelation of Jesus Christ, John is not so much an apostle (one that is sent) as simply the servant of Christ. Although, therefore, we consider the question one of minor importance, we hold that this “servant John” is none other than the apostle “whom Jesus loved,” especially on the ground that there was no one who was so well known as the apostle that he could afford to announce himself simply as “his servant John,” or “John” (vs. 4), or “I John” (vs. 9).

Through John, therefore, this revelation of Jesus Christ is given to the church, “the servants” of Christ. For he “bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” These words, if taken by themselves, might refer to John’s work and calling as an apostle in general. Always it was his calling to witness of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus. Yet it is more natural to interpret them as referring to his recording the specific Word of God and testimony of Jesus in this book. And this is certainly demanded by the last part of this second verse: “all things that he saw.” “The testimony of Jesus Christ” may be understood either in the objective sense (the testimony concerning Jesus Christ) or in the subjective sense (the testimony of Jesus Christ). In the light of the context, the latter is to be considered as the correct interpretation. It was Jesus Christ Who

received this revelation from God and Who communicated it to John. He, therefore, is the prime Witness of it. He it is that bears testimony concerning this revelation, which is the Word of God. And in verse 5 He is called “the faithful witness.” Of this Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ John bare record. The original word for “bare record” does not in itself signify the act of recording the visions in a book. It merely means “testified.” We know, however, that John was commissioned to write them in a book, verse 19, and that, therefore, this is the form in which he communicated the things which he saw to the churches.

Blessed is He That Readeth

Finally, the Book of Revelation is commended to the recipients by the promise of a blessing: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

The blessing here spoken of, no doubt, is in the ultimate sense of the word the inheritance of the glory of the eternal kingdom in the day of Jesus Christ, the “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,” which is reserved in heaven for the believers, “the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,” (I Peter 1:4, 5). It is the blessedness of the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, of the new creation, wherein righteousness shall dwell and where the tabernacle of God will be with men forever. To this ultimate state of blessedness the whole Book of Revelation looks forward. Yet this does not necessarily exclude a blessing for the present time. On the contrary, it rather includes such a present blessing for them that receive and keep the words of this prophecy. As long as we contemplate the things of this present time, the things that come to pass in this world, from a mere earthly, human, historic viewpoint, there is nothing but darkness and hopeless misery. For “vanity of vanities, all is vanity” is true of the whole of present existence. We lie in the midst of death; and there is no way out. In spite of the optimistic outlook and predictions of the prophets and leaders of this world, things grow more hopeless as time goes on. And serious men of the world begin to ask the question anxiously whether our whole civilization will not totter into ruins. The world is not improving though it is developing in a cultural sense. It is plainly getting worse. In times like the present we are strongly reminded of this. Not only do we witness the horrors of war after war; but every war

is worse than the former, and this in the face of all mere humanitarian efforts to establish a lasting peace. Besides, the people of God also partake of the “sufferings of this present time;” and when they are faithful and keep the “word of Christ’s patience,” they will be called upon also to suffer with Him. But “blessed are they that hear and keep the words of this prophecy” even now, even in the midst of this present darkness and death and hopelessness. For if we may look at these same things in the light of this “revelation of Jesus Christ,” and live in the expectation of His coming, there is peace and hope and joy. Then we will be of good cheer, for we know that He has overcome the world!

This blessing is not for all, however. It is not general, but particular, as are all the promises of God. God’s blessing is upon His people. His mercy is upon them that fear Him. Hence, this blessing is for him “that readeth” and for them “that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein.” The words “he that readeth, and they that hear” probably refer to the public reader of this book in the church and the listening congregation. We may thus paraphrase them according to their true meaning: “all that receive and understand the words of this prophecy.” But this is not sufficient. The mere hearing and natural understanding of this prophecy do not yield for us the promised blessing. We must also *keep* the things that are written therein. This surely signifies that we hear spiritually and receive the word of this prophecy in our heart. But it also signifies more. To keep the Word of God also means to obey it, to be doers of the Word. This is also applicable to this last book of Scripture in general and to many of its special exhortations in particular. Always we are exhorted to keep the Word of Christ’s patience; to deny ourselves; to separate ourselves from Babylon; to be faithful unto death; to hold fast that which we have, that no one take our crown; to consider it grace in the cause of Christ, not only that we may believe on Him, but also that we may suffer with Him. These things we must keep! If we seek the things that are below and try to serve God and Mammon, if we receive the mark of the Beast in our forehead or in our right hand, we certainly are excluded from this blessing. He that is seeking to save his life shall surely lose it; but he that is willing to lose it for Christ’s sake, shall save it unto life eternal! His is the promise and the blessing, now and forever!

The matter is urgent, and the promise is about to be realized!

For “the time is at hand!”

SALUTATION AND BLESSING

(Revelation 1:4-8)

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Most of the epistles of the New Testament begin with a salutation of the writer to the readers, a salutation which always assumes the form of a benediction. Such blessings or salutations are not mere pious wishes, but they are the Word of God in Christ actually blessing the people of God who hear and believe them. The blessings which they express and confer on them who so receive them by faith are always spiritual blessings of grace. They are merited by Christ and bestowed by Him, or rather by the Triune God through Christ, by His Spirit upon the church. This is also true of the Book of Revelation. The passage under discussion in this chapter may be considered John's dedication of, or introduction to, the entire book. By it the Book of Revelation is addressed to the "seven churches which are in Asia." About these we shall have something to say in a later connection. Further, our passage contains a most significant salutation, or blessing, in verses 4 and 5a; an ascription of praise by the church to Christ in verses 5b and 6; and, finally, a solemn assurance of Christ's coming, corroborated by a direct Word of the Lord, designating Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the

Almighty. These three elements will be the subject material of the present chapter.

Grace and Peace

The blessing is expressed in the following words: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”

The contents of this blessing are “grace and peace.”

Grace, as we know, has a variety of connotations in Scripture. It may refer to a virtue of God: God is gracious. Or it may signify an attitude which God assumes toward the creature, an attitude of favor; or more specifically it may denote that same attitude of favor with respect to the guilty sinner, so that for him it is favor that is forfeited. This last attitude of God is based upon the righteousness of Christ attained through His perfect obedience even unto the death of the cross. But the word “grace” also frequently denotes a power, an operation of the Spirit of Christ within the elect, whereby they become partakers of all the benefits of salvation, and the fruits of this operation or blessings of salvation themselves. It is in this last sense that the word is used in this passage, so that we may paraphrase the meaning as follows: “May God through Christ by the Spirit operate with His grace in your hearts so that the gifts of grace, the benefits of salvation, may become yours.”

Of this grace the church is continually in need. For grace is not a blessing which is bestowed upon the believers once for all, so that, having received it, they possess it in themselves. On the contrary, they live only through a constant influx of grace, which blesses them as an ever-refreshing stream out of God, through Christ, in the fellowship of the Spirit. And on their part, they receive this grace of God by faith and through prayer.

One of the chief and first fruits of this grace is peace. Peace is peace with God. It always is. Apart from peace with God there is no peace. This is the fundamental reason why the quest of the ungodly world, outside of Christ, for peace on earth is a vain dream which must ever end in a cruel awakening in the reality of a world of war and unrest. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,” (Isaiah 57:21). But “being justified out of faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ,” (Romans 5:1). This peace is, first of all, the blessed tranquility of heart and mind that results from the consciousness that God is at peace with us because our sins are blotted out and we are justified. Secondly, it is also the experience that in principle there is peace in our heart toward God: we are no longer motivated by enmity against Him. And, therefore, they that have this peace are also at peace with one another; they are peacemakers. And, finally, having peace with God, they have peace with all things. For they know that if God is for them, nothing can be against them: “All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose,” (Romans 8:28). This peace, then, is not another blessing in addition to grace, but is the fruit of the latter. It is the peace of grace.

What a wonderful blessing is here pronounced upon the seven churches of Asia and upon the entire church in the world! For the church of all ages is represented by the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. To realize the full significance of this benediction we must bear in mind that, according to the viewpoint of this book of Scripture, the church in the world is always in tribulation. With the church in tribulation we must take our stand. She is in the world. And that world is in darkness. The world in the Book of Revelation is not a world improved and ennobled by “common grace,” a tolerably good place for the church to live in; but it is the world under judgment, whose condemnation is an accomplished fact, (John 12:31; Colossians 2:15). It is the anti-christian world, which sets itself against God and His Christ, persecutes His people, and always would force them to adopt the mark of the beast. It is the world of the wicked who “are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt,” (Isaiah 57:20); the world as it is full of malice and envy, strife and war and bloodshed, terror and destruction, as we see it today, now the very foundations are shaken and the proud structure of modern civilization threatens to tumble about our heads into ruins! In that world this blessed Word of God in Christ is heard and realized: “Grace be unto you, and peace!”

From Him Which Is...

Is it possible that the church in the world may really possess this peace? Indeed it is; and the elaborate and detailed description of the source whence this peace of grace is derived is designed to assure us of the reality of it. The author might simply have written: “Grace unto you,

and peace, from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” But he would assure us of the absolute certainty of this blessing. Hence, he writes: “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”

The words “who is, and who was, and who is to come” refer to God, the Triune. The three-fold description of the Author of the blessing of grace and peace must not be interpreted as if the first part (“which is, and which was, and which is to come”) refers to the First Person of the Holy Trinity, the last part (“and from Jesus Christ,” etc.) to the Second Person, and the second part (“and from the seven Spirits,” etc.) to the Third Person. For although it is, of course, true that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God according to His divine nature, yet here He does not appear as such, but as the Mediator. And although, as we shall see presently, “the seven Spirits which are before his throne” certainly are the Holy Spirit of God, He does not appear here as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, but as the Spirit of Christ. Hence, the first part, “which is, and which was, and which is to come,” does not refer to the Father as the First Person, but to God, the Triune, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This Triune God is revealed here as the One “which is.” This has all the emphasis, as is especially evident from the form used in the original. It denotes God, not as existing in the present, but as the absolute Being, the One Who eternally *is*, the Self-existent, the Uncaused, the ground of Whose Being is in Himself alone, in Whom there is no change nor shadow of turning. The reference is probably to His name Jehovah. But this eternal God, Whose Being cannot be measured or limited by time, revealed Himself in time. To this revelation of Himself in time refer the other two expressions, “who was” and “who is to come,” (or: “the coming one,” *ho erchomenos*). He was, He did come in the past. He came in creation; and, in the fullness of time, He came in Christ. He is the same God Who made all things in the beginning and Who revealed Himself in His Son. And when He created all things, He did so with a view to His coming in Christ. All His works are known to Him from the beginning. They all are and develop according to His determinate counsel. According to that counsel He is coming, always coming, coming ever since He first came in the beginning. And still He is the coming One, coming to us as the God of our salvation; and He will not cease to come

until He is eternally present with us and His tabernacle shall be with men. This cannot fail. Whatever powers of darkness may rise against Him, the Eternal One is coming in Christ Jesus our Lord. And it is He Who causes His Word of blessing to proceed to His church: "Grace be unto you, and peace!" Surely, in spite of all hell this peace is ours!

And From the Seven Spirits...

But, you say, how can this peace from the eternal God be our possession even now? The answer is that it is instilled into our hearts by "the seven Spirits which are before his throne." These seven Spirits must not be degraded into created spirits, or angels, as is done by some, nor abstractly generalized into "seven modes" of God's existence, as others would explain the words. Let it suffice to object against these and similar interpretations that these "seven Spirits" are here presented to us as belonging to the source of the blessings of grace and peace, and that, therefore, they are divine and denote a personal agent. They certainly refer to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the blessed Trinity.

And yet we must say more than this. The term does not denote the Holy Spirit as He is in God. Why should He then be called the "seven Spirits?" The Holy Spirit in the Trinity is one. And why should it be said of these seven Spirits that they are "before his throne?" The Holy Spirit as Third Person of the Holy Trinity is very God, co-equal with the Father and with the Son. He is not "before the throne" of God; but He is on the throne, the sovereign ruler of heaven and earth. The words, therefore, must be applied to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the exalted Christ and as He is poured out into the church, to make us partakers of the covenant blessings of grace and salvation. We must remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was humiliated and obediently humbled Himself even to the death of the cross, and Who by His perfect obedience obtained for us eternal righteousness and life, was raised from the dead and by the power of God was made exceedingly great and glorious, being exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. That glorious Lord and Mediator also receives from the Father the power to apply all the blessings of salvation which He merited to those whom the Father gave Him before the foundation of the world. This saving power He possesses through the Spirit that is given Him as Mediator and Head of the church at His exaltation, and Whom He poured forth into the church, that He may dwell in her forever. For He, the Lord Jesus

Christ, “being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear,” (Acts 2:33). This Spirit is “the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you,” (John 14:17). He is the Comforter, through Whom the Lord Himself came again to His church, and Who abides with us forever, John 14:16, 18. He is the “Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father,” and the Spirit that “beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God,” (Romans 8:15, 16). He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, by Whom we are liberated from the law of sin and death, Romans 8:2. He is the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, Who will also quicken our mortal bodies by that same Spirit, Romans 8:11.

He is called “the seven Spirits,” for the number seven denotes the fullness of God’s covenant grace, and the fullness of the church in which He dwells is also indicated by the same number. For there are seven churches in Asia, and there are seven candlesticks and seven stars, Revelation 1:11, 12, 16, 20. And the Lamb, Whose Spirit He is, has seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, Revelation 5:6. He, the exalted Christ, is said to have the seven Spirits of God, Revelation 3:1. And these seven Spirits, or the Spirit of Christ as He dwells in the church with His seven-fold fullness of life and grace, are “before the throne” as “seven lamps of fire burning” to the glory of God, Revelation 4:5. And before the throne is the church, serving God day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne dwells among them, Revelation 7:15. There can be no question, therefore, that “the seven Spirits which are before his throne” refers to the Holy Spirit as He is given to the exalted Christ and poured out into the church. And it is that Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of life and of truth, the Spirit of adoption and of the fullness of His seven-fold grace, the Spirit Who is given us, dwells in us, never leaves us, Who is the divine agent of this blessing of grace and peace. Can there be any doubt that this peace is and forever will remain ours?

And from Jesus Christ...

Again, you may probably complain that you are wholly unworthy of this blessing and that, therefore, you cannot apprehend this word of benediction as addressed to you personally. You lie in the midst of

death, and sin cleaves to you and marks your every step on the way you walk. How then can this divine grace and peace be intended for you? But the text removes also this objection when it fastens the eye of faith upon Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead, prince of the kings of the earth. He is the faithful witness. Witness He is, for as the Servant of Jehovah He is God's prophet, Who always bears testimony of the truth of God. He did so during His sojourn on earth, for as He said before Pilate: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," (John 18:37). He still does so in the church, for it is He Who gave us the Scriptures and Who leads us into all the truth by His Spirit. And He is the witness also in this book, Whose Word is quite sufficient for your faith to trust in, when He says, "Grace to you, and peace." For He is the *faithful* witness. For His doctrine is not His, but the Father's which sent Him, John 7:16; and He speaks that which He has seen with His Father, John 8:38. He always acts and speaks in harmony with His position as witness of God: for He does nothing of Himself, but as His Father hath taught Him, He speaks in the world, John 8:28. The Lord God hath opened His ear, and given Him the tongue of the learned that He should know how to speak a word in season, Isaiah 50:4, 5. And no matter what men may do unto Him, though they smite Him and pluck out His beard in their fury, and cover Him with shame and reproach, He never changes His testimony and does not compromise the truth, Isaiah 50:5, 6. He was faithful unto death, even the death of the cross. In life and in death you may rely on His Word: "Grace and peace unto you."

And He is the first begotten of the dead! Let this especially be the object of your contemplation, the ground of your assurance: Jesus Christ is the first begotten of the dead! The resurrection, but then emphatically the resurrection of Jesus Christ, should be the ground of your hope, the object of that faith that fills you with joy and peace. Peace, if ever it is to be ours, cannot be of this world: it must come from the other side of death. Here we lie in the midst of death. How than can we have peace? But hark! this voice that speaks of grace and peace is not of this world. It does not sound from somewhere among the deep death-shadows in which here we grope and find no way out. It is the resurrection-voice! He that speaks stands at the other side of death and the grave as the Risen One! That means that He was dead and is

alive again and lives forevermore. He is alive with a new life, a glorious, a victorious life. He was in death, and went through death, and He now lives as never one lived before. And what is more, as He passed through death, He left the way open! By faith we behold Him there, on the other side of death; and looking at His glory from our present darkness, we know by that very token that there is a way out! As a man groping in the black and fearful darkness of a deep cave beholds in the distance the glimmer of glorious sunlight and takes courage to continue his way in the one direction of that light-spot in the distance, assured that there lies his deliverance, so the believer groping in the darkness of the shadow of his present death, beholding by faith the glory of the Risen Lord, knows that there is a way out of death into the glorious liberty of the children of God! For, mark you well, He is not merely risen: He is the first begotten of the dead! And the firstborn is he that “openeth the womb” and prepares the way for all his brethren. Thus Christ was in the womb of death, was born from death, opened the womb of death for all those whom the Father gave Him. And it is He, standing in that spot of glorious light, Whom you see from your present darkness, Who calls to you: “Grace and peace to you!”

No power is able to deprive God’s people of that blessing or to prevent the ultimate realization of the peace which is promised them in the day of Christ. For He is Lord. He is Prince, too, of the kings of the earth. This does not mean that Jesus Christ is King also of the state in the sense that worldly magistrates rule by His grace. For in the Book of Revelation the kings of the earth are the antichristian world rulers. They acknowledge not the Christ of the Scriptures as their Lord. They do not delight in doing His will and ruling in harmony with it. On the contrary, they are the rulers that are pictured in the Second Psalm, who set themselves, and take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying: “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us,” (verses 2, 3). But He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh and have them in derision. For He hath anointed His King and set Him upon His holy hill of Zion. And this King shall rule the antichristian powers with a rod of iron and break them in pieces like a potter’s vessel, Psalm 2:7-9, Revelation 2:27. Christ is the Prince of the rulers of the earth! Though they may rave against Him, yet must they do His will. Even the Neros and Caligulas and Domitians, the Hitlers and Mussolinis and Khrushchevs are His servants in spite of

themselves. The church is perfectly safe; her salvation and final victory are sure. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," (John 16:33). "Grace unto you, and peace!"

The Doxology

Already the church receives this blessing of grace and peace. And she responds in joyful adoration to the pronouncement of this benediction. She confesses this Christ even now, even in the midst of this world and its antichristian rulers; and to Him alone she ascribes all glory and dominion forever and ever. This is the meaning of the doxology which now follows in the text: "Unto him that loved us (or: "loveth us," ARV), and washed us (or: "loosed us," ARV) from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests (or: "a kingdom and priests," ARV) unto God and his father (or: "unto his God and Father," ARV); to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Jesus loved us; or, if the reading of the American Revised Version is the more correct, He loveth us. Essentially there is no difference between these two readings. If we read the past tense, the emphasis falls on the historic fact of the death of Christ on the cross, where He manifested His love once for all; if the present tense is taken as the better reading, the thought of His present and enduring love for us is stressed. But if He loved us on the cross, will He not love us still and forever? And if He loves us now, is it not because He loved us on the accursed tree? The same may be said of the two readings "washed" and "loosed" us from our sins in His own blood. Principally there is no difference between the two. They imply that the blood of Jesus is atoning blood because by His death He fully satisfied for all our sins. They mean that He not merely shed His blood for us on the accursed tree, but that He also applies its atoning power to us. They signify that by the application of that atoning blood to us we are liberated not only from the guilt of sin, but also from its dominion and corruption: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death. And thus He made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, or a kingdom and priests unto His God and Father. Christ makes us a royal priesthood, or a priestly kingdom.

The ideas of priesthood and royalty belong together and are inseparable. One who is not a priest unto God can never be a king; the antichristian rulers of this world are mere usurpers and will surely

be dethroned. For the deepest notion of priesthood is that of perfect consecration to and love of God, manifested in perfect obedience and willing service. A priest consecrates himself and all things to God. And the idea of the kingly office is that of reign and dominion. A priestly king is a servant-king; a kingdom of priests is a kingdom in which all submit themselves to the living God and reign in His name and under Him over all the works of His hands. Such a royal priesthood Christ makes us through the marvelous power of His grace. By the power of sin we became slaves of the devil, rebel kings, who proposed to rule over God's works apart from Him, against Him. Such is the awful folly of sin. But through the atoning blood of the cross we have been forgiven that folly, we have been perfectly justified, we have obtained the right to be delivered from the slavery of sin and the dominion of the devil, the right to be received into the blessed service of God once more, and in that service to reign over all things. And through the grace of the Lord Jesus, by His indwelling Spirit, we are actually delivered, translated out of darkness into the marvelous light of God, and formed into a kingdom of priests. For indeed, God's people are a kingdom, and not merely a multitude of kings. They are a unity, a kingdom over which Christ rules as the chief Servant of Jehovah, the High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec, Who has a name above all names, and in which His brethren reign with Him, each in his own position and all serving the purpose of the whole, that all may be to the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such a kingdom of priests the church is even now: for by faith they partake of the victory and royal dominion of their Lord. But not until the day of Christ, when the eternal kingdom of glory shall be ushered in, when all the elect shall have been gathered and the body of the Lord shall be complete, when also our humiliated bodies shall be made like unto His most glorious body, and when all things shall be made new and the tabernacle of God shall be with men in the new heavens and the new earth, shall this kingdom of priests be fully realized.

In the consciousness, then, of this great love wherewith the Lord loved and still loves us, and of the marvelous grace whereby He hath liberated them from the power of sin and death and formed them into a royal priesthood, the believers ascribe glory unto their Lord: "to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Glory is the radiation of infinite, divine goodness and perfection.

God alone is glorious. The creature can only reflect His glory, can never possess any glory of its own. Whatever glory may be seen in creation has its source in God. The highest and fullest revelation of that glory is in Christ. All the divine perfections shine forth through and in Him. For it was the Father's good pleasure that in Him all the fullness should dwell, Colossians 1:19. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, Colossians 1:15. And in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, Colossians 2:9. In the days of His flesh this glory was hid by His humiliated body; only occasionally it flashed through when He spoke with authority or revealed His power in the miracles which He performed. And on the mount of transfiguration the apostles beheld His glory for a moment. But through His resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of God, Christ is glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, John 17:5. All the divine goodness shines forth through Him, radiates from Him. This is possible, of course, only because He is the very Son of God in human nature. No mere man could possess this glory; and to ascribe this glory to any other than the exalted Christ would be idolatry and blasphemy. But the church knows that He is the Son of God, the final and highest revelation of God the Father, worthy of all glory and honor. She ascribes glory to Him in this doxology.

And she also is taught here to acknowledge Him as the One Who has dominion. Of course, He has dominion, that is, authority and power to reign, to declare His will and to demand obedience, to judge and to execute judgment, in the absolute sense of the word as the Son of God. As God He is sovereign. But the reference in the text is to the dominion, the power and authority, which He received from God as the glorified Christ, in His human nature. All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth. Christ stands at the pinnacle of all created things. He has received a name which is above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Philip-pians 2:9-11. He has dominion over the church, whose King He is; and He has dominion over all things, even over the powers of darkness, which He has overcome and which cannot move against His will. In the church this dominion is a reign by grace through His Spirit and Word: His people are gladly His, and it is their delight to acknowledge

His authority and to do His will. Hence, in the words of our text they ascribe this dominion to Him. And in the world and over the powers of darkness He rules by His might, in spite of themselves. And also these, when they shall have been put down finally, and cast into outer darkness, shall acknowledge this dominion; and every tongue shall have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! Not Satan, not the servant of the devil, but the Servant of Jehovah alone is Lord forever, that God may be all in all!

Forever shall this dominion be.

Glory and dominion are His even now, and the church acknowledges this in her doxology, according to the text. She means to say: "Glory and dominion are Thine now; let them be ascribed to Thee." But this glory and also this dominion will be His forever. Christ will never abdicate. By some it is argued that the royal power and dominion which Christ now has at the right hand of God will terminate when He shall have finished His work and when His kingdom shall have been completed. The present power and dominion He possesses in order that He may be able to perfect His kingdom. When that shall have been accomplished, He shall reign no more, but be in subjection to the Father. The eternal and sovereign God will then reign directly, without being represented by Christ. This conception is based chiefly on the statement in I Corinthians 15:25, 28: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." But with this view we cannot agree. The text just quoted from I Corinthians 15 does not teach that Christ shall ever cease to reign. That He now reigns until He hath put all enemies under His feet merely expresses that this complete subjection of all enemies under His feet is the purpose of His reign, the end that must be attained. And that, when this end shall have been attained and all things shall have been subdued under Him, He Himself will also be subject unto the Father does not mean that He will reign no more, but merely that He will reign as the Servant of God forever, reign under Him. All things shall forever be subject to Christ; with all things Christ shall be subject to the Father; and thus God will be all in all! For all Scripture teaches that Christ's dominion will never cease, that He will reign forever. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that

which shall not be destroyed, Daniel 7:14. And the doxology which is put into the mouth of the church in the text under discussion ascribes glory and dominion to Him forever!

Behold, He Cometh

The passage closes with a solemn assurance of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

We say that this is a *solemn* assurance, in the first place, because special attention is called to the fact of Christ's coming by the introductory word "behold." It is as if the Word of God here would have the church conceive of this coming as a present fact: always the church must have the eyes of hope fixed upon that final event. Constantly she must stand in the attitude of expectancy and longing, the attitude of the bride looking for the coming of the Bridegroom, with the prayer on her lips: "Come, Lord Jesus!" And, secondly, this is a solemn assurance because of the double corroboration, "Even so, Amen!" The word "amen" is a Hebrew word. It means "it is firm, established, immovable; it shall surely be." Let the church never doubt, never grow faint: the Lord will surely come! The time may seem long, but He cometh. The suffering of the waiting church may be severe, and it may seem sometimes as if the Lord were slack concerning His promise; but He is surely coming. The promise is sealed with a double oath: "Even so, Amen!"

The words refer to the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, His literal and personal and visible return, the parousia, which will mark the end of all history and usher in the eternal state of heavenly glory in the new creation. For the history of this world will not reach its consummation by way of a gradual process of development, but by a catastrophe, a final wonder: the appearance in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this final coming the text refers. It is true that the Bible does speak of His coming with the clouds of heaven all through the ages of this dispensation. Did not the Lord Himself thus testify before the high priest in the hour of His condemnation: "Henceforth (ARV) ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven?" All through the ages He is coming. Ever since His exaltation

at the right hand of God He has been coming. For He reigns supreme and so directs all the events of this present time that they must lead up to and end in His final coming. He is coming in the sense that He is on the way. And He is hastening! The Lord is not slack concerning His promise. Nevertheless, in the text here the reference is definitely to His final and visible appearance, when “every eye shall see him.”

That His coming will be “with clouds” may have a literal fulfillment, so that He shall appear in the clouds of the sky. However, the symbolical significance of these clouds must not be overlooked. Clouds in Scripture are symbols of majesty and judgment. Thus we read in Psalm 18:6-12: “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.” And in Psalm 97:2 we read: “Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.” On the mount of transfiguration “there was a cloud that overshadowed them,” (Mark 9:7). And when He was taken up from the earth, “a cloud received him out of their sight,” (Acts 1:9). He cometh with clouds, not again as the suffering Servant of Jehovah, but in all the glory which the Father hath given Him, in royal majesty and to judge the world in righteousness!

In His coming He will be visible to all. “Every eye shall see him.”

His own, who looked for Him with longing, shall see Him; but also the enemies shall see Him. The latter even has the emphasis in the text. They that pierced Him are mentioned particularly. The prophet Zechariah had prophesied that “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” would “look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” And, no doubt, that prophecy refers to the crucifixion of the Lord, when the Jews literally pierced the Son of God in human nature, though also there the words have a wider significance and may be applied to

all the sin and rebellion of the people of Israel throughout their history. This rebellion only culminated in the crucifixion of the Servant of Jehovah. But the looking upon Him and the mourning for Him of which the text in Zechariah speaks are not the same as in the words of our passage from Revelation. There, in Zechariah, they cast upon Him a saving look and mourn for Him in true repentance, as they did, indeed, on the day of Pentecost and ever since, whenever the Spirit of grace touched the hearts of sinful men. For the looking upon Him and the mourning for Him in the prophecy of Zechariah are presented as the result of Jehovah's pouring upon His people the Spirit of grace and of supplications, Zechariah 12:10. Here, however, in Revelation 1:7, they look upon Him in His final coming. They that pierced Him, no doubt, are literally the Jews, and particularly those who crucified Him. But this does not mean that the expression "they that pierced him" is limited to them. It has a wider significance. It includes not only all the Jews who rejected Him, but also all who ever came into contact with Him, despised Him, and crucified the Son of God afresh. They shall be from "all the tribes of the earth." And therefore, seeing Him, all the tribes of the earth shall mourn. They are the hostile tribes, the anti-christian forces of the world. They mourn and wail because of Him, or literally, according to the original, "towards" Him. Seeing Him Whom they despised and hated and opposed in His glory and power, they are filled with consternation, realizing that His fierce wrath will strike them down and consume them. But for the church it will be the hour of complete and eternal redemption and deliverance, the realization of all their hope and longing.

All this is steadfast and sure. For it is God Who here speaks, the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." He is the "Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His good pleasure. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters respectively of the Greek alphabet. The meaning of these symbols is explained in "the beginning and the ending." He is the Lord, the Lord God (ARV). He is the beginning of all things, and therefore also the ending. He is their sovereign Creator, the Fount out of which are all things. And in Him all things have their purpose. Even as all things are out of Him, so they are also unto Him. From the beginning He made all things with a view to the end: the alpha is connected with the omega, the one must inevitably lead to the

other. And whatever lies between the alpha and the omega is through Him. He controls all things in such a way that His counsel is accomplished, His design is fulfilled, His end is reached. And that end is the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” the firstborn of every creature and the first begotten of the dead, as the One in Whom all things in heaven and on earth are to be united forever. Then, in the new creation, the tabernacle of God shall be with men; and God shall be all in all, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And nothing can prevent this Omega. For God is Lord, and He is the Almighty. He is not merely supreme in power, more powerful than all other powers combined; but His is all the power, even the power of the creature, the power also of the forces of darkness. They have no power but from Him. And He uses them, willingly or in spite of themselves, for His sovereign purpose. He is coming, therefore, surely and irresistibly, always coming through the ages of history, coming from the alpha to the omega, from glory to glory, His own glory, until all His glory shall forever shine forth in the perfect revelation of Jesus Christ!

Peace, therefore, unto you who look for the coming of the Lord: the peace of grace, peace in the midst of the conflict and sufferings of this present time!

For behold, He cometh with clouds!

Faith is the victory!