

Revelation 4, 5. View of Scenery As It Appeared to St. John



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

IN OUR LAST LECTURE we mentioned these several points –

1st, That the writer of the Apocalypse was St. John.

2nd, The geographical position and state of religion in the Churches.

3rd, The state of Jerusalem at the time St. John wrote, now that its city, temple, and services had passed away, and given place to one spiritual structure.

4th, The expectation of an anti-Christian power, before that the Lord should again visit the earth.

5th, We saw the commencement of those two kingdoms, between which a long struggle was to go forward for supremacy: the one headed by the persecuting pagan Domitian, the last of the twelve Caesars; the other by St. John, the representative of Christ's Church, and the last of the twelve Apostles, at that time suffering in exile.

In chapter 4. the scenery changes, or the Apostle's eyes are directed from it to that of a very different character.

When Moses drew near to the burning bush the Voice said to him, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Let us, not without a deep reverential feeling as of being in the presence of God, survey with St. John what we have now read in description.

The first and the grandest object exhibited in the vision is Jehovah, King of kings, seated as Lord of all on the throne of the universe. As if to encourage the Apostle, there appeared round about the throne that well-known and lovely memorial of the covenant of mercy – the rainbow, in sight like unto an emerald. There were seen seven lamps burning before this throne, in allusion to the seven Churches or candlesticks, said in chapter 5 to be the seven Spirits of God; hence showing the influence of the third Person in the Trinity as the inspirer of what is holy and right in His people. Our Church

adopts this idea in the hymn used in the ordination service –

“Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire!
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
That dost thy *sevenfold* grace impart.”

We take the four living creatures round the throne to be the representatives of the Church then in Paradise, and for this reason; – they sung a song of thanksgiving, and the chorus was, “Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tribe, and nation.” Such likewise were the twenty-four elders seated round the throne. Habited as priests, on thrones, having crowns on their heads, they sung, “Thou hast made us to God kings and priests;” and afterwards joined in the chorus, “Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” We should therefore say all these glorified beings represented the Church in its triumphant state to be accomplished hereafter.

Some think the number twenty-four represented the twelve Patriarchs and the twelve Apostles; the one body as founders of the Jewish, the other of the Apostolic Church. To explain definitely what all those living creatures meant may be impossible; but, generally, we may judge by the song that they were “the spirits of the just made perfect.”

Such was a part of the company seen on this occasion; besides which we read there were angels attendant, in number ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, who united with these other spiritual intelligences in singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, gives a lively description of this Church of Christ as begun on earth, and seen through all its prospective changes until it is lost in eternity. After showing how all the old saints lived by faith, and died, and are witnesses by which we are compassed about, he says, “Ye are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, – To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”

We come now to that part of the vision which relates to this Mediator. Around the throne was the concourse described as looking on; and, behold, there was a book in the hand of Him that sat on the throne: but it was closed and sealed. And when a strong angel proclaimed, “Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals?” not one of the assembled throng was able to stand forth. As St. John, the representative of the Church on earth, was weeping because no man was found worthy to open it, One of a higher nature stepped forth and took the book; and the elder said to St. John, “Weep not; the Lion of the tribe of Juda hath prevailed to open the book,” And when the SAVIOUR, – for he indeed it was, the Lamb as it had been slain – had taken the book, the whole angelic company burst forth into acclamations of praise, and heaven rang with the song, the new song, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals: for thou hast redeemed us to God, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and

priests.”

Before we enter into the examination of the subjects contained in this book of the future, I would beg you to observe the scenery of the vision which appeared to surround St. John. This must be understood in order rightly to decipher the emblematic language of the Revelation.

The first scene remained stationary throughout, viz., the interior of a temple similar to the Jewish temple. In one place it is called the “temple of God;” in another, at a later stage of the prophecy, “the temple of the tabernacle of witness.” (Rev. 11:19; 15:5) In the innermost part there was the throne of God, and voices are described as proceeding from this throne.

Three divisions were noted in the Jewish temple: – 1st, the most holy place, in which was the divine glory and the ark of the covenant: 2nd, the holy place, separated by a veil from the most holy, and in which stood the golden altar of incense, seven-branched lamp, etc.: 3rd, a court with a great brazen altar for sacrifice, wherein the priests ministered, while the multitude worshipped at its entrance. There was also an outer court for proselytes. These places are variously alluded to in different parts of the Apocalypse. We have already looked with the Apostle into the innermost; for no veil now separated it from the holy place. (Compare Matt. 27:51; Heb. 9:8, etc.) In chap. 6:9, there is allusion to the altar: “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain,” etc. In chap. 11:2, the outer court is referred to: “The court that is without the temple leave out, and measure it not.”

Further, as the Apostle looked round, landscape scenery broke on his view. Near him stood Mount Zion; and Jerusalem too, no longer a ruined heap, but a new and holy city bearing the much-loved name; – then, stretching far and wide, beneath and around, the miniature Roman world. Yet all was so placed that while Mount Zion and the temple appeared elevated above, the outer court seemed accessible to the inhabitants of the world below.

The object in view being to portray the future state of the Roman world, its changes and revolutions, decline and fall, together with the agencies that caused them, whether from within or without, and also to combine at the same time the history of the Church, adverse or prosperous, whether internally pure and holy, or verging towards apostasy, whether externally enlarged and protected, or persecuted and in distress – could any arrangement be better suited for the purpose than the one described?

To represent Christ’s worshipping Church, there was the symbolic temple. In its most holy place symbolizing heaven, was the enthroned Saviour, with the spirits of the just made perfect. In its holy place (or passage to the most holy), the spirituality of the Church on earth was figured out, as seen and judged by Christ; while the temple-court showed what was observable to the eye of beholders in its visible and outward worship; and the court without the temple, the Gentiles that truly or untruly might conform to Christianity. (Rev. 11:2) To depict the Christian body in its citizenship, there was the Mount Zion, its base on earth, its summit reaching towards heaven. Besides which, in order to represent the true Apostolic line of the Christian ministry, there was St. John in his representative character, present all

through upon the scene to take his assigned part in the figurative drama as it proceeded.

In landscape around the heaven, with the sun, moon, and stars, symbolized, as we have noted elsewhere, the secular powers, whether exalted or cast down, shining or eclipsed. The atmospheric changes, storms of hail, overflowing rivers, etc., from without the landscape, might suitably figure foreign invasion; while its earthquakes depicted commotions and political revolutions within. There was furthermore a certain geographical resemblance to the Roman earth in the general landscape, with its four quarters, its frontier rivers, its inland seas, etc., which allowed for the visibly marking any particular place affected.

As to the book, it was probably a roll, a very common form amongst the Romans, and almost universal amongst the Jewish sacred books. It was written within and without. Thus, it would appear, additional particulars and details might be supplied without breaking the thread of the history. It was visibly sealed with seven seals – seals to be successively opened in order. On the breaking of the seventh seal there appeared seven angels with trumpets to evolve its events; each of which trumpets had its symbolic visions and peculiar history successively exhibited: all with correspondent writing or painting in the inside of the unfolding roll. Besides which there was superadded a writing on the outside, constituting a necessary and most important supplement to the prophecy. Once more, in evolution of the seventh angel's trumpet, a succession of seven vials was announced as to be poured out on the earth, filled with judgment; the last of them detailing events that are still future, and reaching even to the period when the present dispensation shall close, and time shall be no more.

In the days of St. John there had been dramatic displays and acting at Rome with all that imperial power and wealth could impart of pomp and splendor. But, in the comparison, how poor and mean! The grandeur and dignity of this drama who can express? Its subject – nothing less than the conflict between the Church and the World to the end of the age; its moral – that however now the ungodly may prosper, and however scorned and persecuted the people of God may be, yet will success and glory be eventually transferred to the Church, and Christ shall reign for ever. And then such music, such actors, such an audience!

Let us observe also the difference between the way in which we regard events, seeing only the effects, and the way in which they were revealed to St. John, with the secret springs and motives that originated them in the secret recess of the holy of holies, the Divine presence. As he beheld what passed in the inner temple, he would observe that nothing done on earth was there unknown or unobserved. Thither came up for a memorial the sins of its inhabitants, each with its call for judgment; thither, in striking contrast, whatever concerned the Church militant. Not a sigh could escape from its members, not a suffering vex them, but its vibration was heard and its perturbations felt there. Thither rose up the cries of the martyrs from beneath the altar; thither, as the sweet incense, the prayers and adorations of the saints. And mark the results! It was when the cry of his persecuted Church rose up that the sentence was given for the supremacy of the oppressing power to pass

away. And, amidst all the judgments denounced against mere false professors in Christendom, provision was seen to be made that no real evil should assail the faithful.

We find in this book also much as to the ministry of angels. They are the actors throughout in the scenes described. They direct the tempests, sound the trumpets, pour out the vials, scatter the fire, gather the vintage; just agreeably with what is said of the angelic offices in other Scriptures.

St. John, we must bear ever in mind, was the representative of the true Church, or rather of its chiefest minister, at the time of each vision of the drama, as the drama went on. In this his character angels interpreted to him, and the saints of the Church triumphant showed their fellowship of spirit. Were not the words of our poet truly written –

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth Unseen”?

Continued in [Revelation 6:1, 2. The First Seal](#)

All chapters of The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae*

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