

Musings on the Apocalypse

by J. G. Bellet

Outline of the Book & Preface (Revelation 1)

Outline of the Book

The opening of this wondrous book gives us its title and character, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him. For it will be found, I judge, to be a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in such characters of glory and power as he derives from God, or a revelation of him in the exercise of judicial authority.

Now, two exercises of judicial authority awaited him after he had ascended to God, and accordingly this book has two parts.

Revelation 1-3 gives us the first part. The Lord is here exercising judgment in the church, or among the lights of the sanctuary. This is called the things which are.

Revelation 4-22 give us the second part. The Lord is here exercising judgment in the earth, preparing it for his kingdom. This is called the things which shall be hereafter, or after these.

This is the general order of the book, but these two parts contain properly both a preface and a conclusion.

Preface

In the preface, Revelation 1 verses 1-8, we first learn that this wondrous book deals with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, God's counsels made known by Jesus Christ. Then we are told the manner in which Jesus Christ ministers this testimony to the churches, and blessing is then pronounced on him who acts righteously by this book by either reading or hearing it, and then by keeping the things which are written in it.

After this, the seven churches in Asia are called to listen, and after a benediction on them, the Lord Jesus Christ is announced as the one who is about to come with clouds, or in the solemnities of judgment, Daniel 7.13, Matthew 24.30, Matthew 26.64, a coming quite according to the judicial character of the book, and which is to make the kindreds of the earth wail because of him, and them which pierced him to see him to their confusion. But in the midst of such an announcement of the Lord as even this, the saints have two sweet and happy utterances put into their lips. On his being here revealed as the faithful witness, the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, they praise him as the one who had loved them, and again when his coming in the clouds as for judgment is announced, they invite his glory with full confidence still, and say even so, amen, for they have thoroughly learned that they may have boldness even in a day of judgment, 1 John 4.17. Then when these utterances of the saints pass by, the Lord reveals himself as the first and the last, a title which he frequently takes in this book, the very title too that he so constantly assumes when judging the idols of Babylon in Isaiah, see Isaiah 48, all this still assuring us that he is now about to speak in judgment again.

In the mouth indeed of every witness, here we learn that this book is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ which God, not the Father, gives him, or in judgment, not in grace. But this is only here at the close of the volume of the New Testament, for I may observe that the Lord has ever sought, so to speak,

to publish his name in grace before he does so in judgment. In some way or other he will and must make himself known, for that is his glory, but he seeks the rather to be known in goodness than in judgment, if men will hear.

We have this variously illustrated. To Egypt, for instance, the Lord made himself known in Joseph, the witness of his goodness, for by Joseph he filled Egypt's storehouses with all kinds of wealth. But Egypt forgot Joseph.

A king arose then who persecuted Joseph's people and said of his God, Who is the Lord that I should obey him? Then the Lord had to publish his name in that land in judgment, saying to the king, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord, behold, I will smite with the rod. He was now to be made known not in Joseph, but in plagues. So in Israel afterwards, the Lord Jesus Christ was offered to them as the chief cornerstone, the sure foundation, the one in whom they should find salvation and strength, but being rejected as such, he was to be revealed to them as the headstone of the corner.

In the power and judgment of an exalted stone, which was to fall and grind to powder. And so in the world now. This present dispensation is publishing God in grace.

He is beseeching men to be reconciled. But they who will not thus know him, neglecting the great salvation, must know him by and by in judgments. 2 Thessalonians 1.8 If the blood of the Lamb be despised, the wrath of the Lamb must await.

Revelation 6.16-17 The same one who was full of grace and truth now, will by and by, send the sword out of his mouth to execute judgment. Revelation 19.15 And this is the difference between the gospel and the revelation by Saint John. The gospel publishes the name of the Lord in grace, the revelation in judgment. The one flows from the Father, the other from God. Now according to all this, when we pass the preface and get into the body of the book, it is the

Lord, the Son of Man in the place of judgment, that we at once see. See Revelation 1.9-20 These verses introduce the first scene which the book discloses, and here Saint John sees the Lord as high priest prepared to judge the sanctuary.

He does not show himself to John as the priest at the golden altar, with the censer and the burning incense, but at the candlestick with the golden snuffers, as though he were inquiring, and that too for the last time, whether or not the lamps of the sanctuary would burn worthy of the place, or whether he should not be compelled soon to remove them. It is the Son of Man, with garments down to the foot, and golden girdle about his loins, with head and hair white as wool, eyes of flame, feet of brass, and voice of many waters, in his hand holding the seven stars, and in his mouth the two-edged sword, and walking in the brightness and power of the midday sun among the seven candlesticks. All this was an expression of judgment of the house of God, a revelation of the priest, not at the altar with incense, not even at the candlestick with oil to feed it, but at the candlestick with the snuffers to judge and trim it, as being out of order.

John shall hear himself personally and individually addressed with the wanted words of God's sweet love to us, Fear not! But still this is a vision that may well make the stoutest of the children of men to fall as dead.