

Musings on the Apocalypse

by J. G. Bellet

Revelation 4

But this judgment is delayed till all the foreknown family have come in, for God's long-suffering is salvation.

2 Peter 3.15. The fullness of the Gentiles must come in, and all be brought to the knowledge of the Son of God. Romans 11.25, Ephesians 4.13. Therefore, before we are led in our prophet to behold this second scene of judgment, or the judgment of the earth, we are given, I believe, a sight of the church in heaven, under the symbols of the living creatures and crowned elders round the throne, so that the rapture of the saints into the air had taken place at some untold moment between the times of our third and fourth chapters. Editors note, the twenty-four elders no doubt represent the whole company of the redeemed in glory from Adam down to the rapture, and not the church exclusively.

But here I would pause a little. We have not, I am aware, this ascension of the saints actually presented here. We learn it in the appointed Scripture, 1 Thessalonians 4, and that rapture will lead both to the Lord Himself and then to the Father.

But it is not these results that we get here. It is not the saints, either in the Lord's presence or in the mansions of the Father's house, that we see here, but the church before the throne of God Almighty, of Him who was, and is, and is to come, for whose pleasure all things were created. This is the scene we get here.

It is not the children before the Father, but the church in dignity before the throne. But how perfect is the wisdom of God in appointing all the reasons for revealing His mind and purposes! A view of the Father's house would not have been in character here, for this is the book, not of consolation for the children of the Father, but of judgment by which God and the Lamb are asserting their holy rights, vindicating their own praise, and delivering the long-usurped and corrupted inheritance out of the hands of its destroyers. The gospel by St. John conducts us to the Father's house.

Our path there ends as the path of children, in that house of love. But this apocalypse by St. John gives us the action that gets the golden city ready for us. And our path here ends as the path of heirs, in that place of glory.

For both are ours, the joys of children and the dignity of heirs, the house of the Father and the throne of the Son. Here, then, when taken into vision of heavenly things, it is the throne of God with its due attendance, and not the Father's house with the children that we see. It is the throne of God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of all things, around which is, therefore, thrown the holy pledge of the earth's covenanted security.

And it is the place, too, from which the subsequent action of the book, or the judgment of the earth, flows, and, therefore, lightnings and thunders and voices, the symbols of these judgments, hear issue from it. And it is the throne also which is to rule the world to come, or the kingdom at the end. And, therefore, the seven spirits, the symbol of that energy by which that kingdom is to be maintained, Isaiah 11 1-3, are here seen before it.

And in connection with this government of the kingdom, or world to come, we see the church in the symbol of the living creatures and elders also around it. But as to this wondrous subject of the living creatures, or the cherubim, I would observe a little more particularly. Whenever we see them throughout

Scripture, they are always attendants upon the throne of God, always reflecting by their action, or attitude, the mind and ways of Him who sits there.

Note, they were, therefore, I judge, made out of one piece of gold with the throne itself. See Exodus 25 19.

1. Thus they are seen at the gate of Eden, with a flaming sword, because there the Lord was expressing His own unrepenting righteousness in the law, driving, as He then was, the sinner out of His place.

2. Thus also they are seen over the mercy seat in the holiest, with fixed, delighted gaze, inquiring into the secrets of that throne of grace, because there the Lord was expressing His work in Jesus, the fixedness of His purpose, and joy in the gospel of His dear Son. Exodus 25 20. 1 Peter 1 12.

3. Thus also they are seen with unfolded wings under the God of Israel, Ezekiel 1, because then the Lord of Israel was about to leave His sanctuary, the apostasy of His people having disturbed His rest in Jerusalem. And they are here also seen reaching out their hands to take fire to cast it over the city, for then He commanded the judgment of its sins.

4. Thus also, as here, they are seen round the throne, still attending on it, to celebrate the praise of Him who sits there, and do His will, and learn His mind, still, therefore, reflecting His mind and ways.

But in this last place of the cherubim we observe a distinction of great importance. Hitherto, or in the first three instances, they were angelic, because the law had been ordained by angels, Galatians 3 19. With delight the angels inquired into the mysteries of Christ, 1 Peter 1 12.

And the angels waited on the Lord of Israel, Isaiah 6 2. But now the cherubim, or attendants on the throne, have become human, because the world to come is to be made subject to man and not to angels, Hebrews 2 5. And this throne in

Revelation 4 is the throne that is by and by to preside over the world to come. But this is glorious and wonderful. Poor sinners redeemed by blood are destined, through grace, to take the cherubic dignity and joy in which angels, unfallen angels, once stood, the angels themselves falling back, as it were, and opening their ranks to let redeemed sinners in, and then to take their own place around them as well as around the throne itself, Revelation 7. Angels are thus passed by, and the seed of Abraham taken up.

And it is blessed to know that angels themselves take delight in this. They desire to look into this mystery. God manifest in the flesh is seen of them, 1 Timothy 3 16.

Their own joy is enhanced by all this, for by it they have learned more of the shining and gracious ways of Him who created them, as He has redeemed us, and on whom they as we depend. Beggars from the dunghill are set as among princes round the throne. The living creatures and the crowned elders accordingly never, in the whole action of this wondrous book, move out of heaven, but there abide, either in the intelligence of the mind of God, or in authority under the throne, or in the holy office of leading the joy of creation.

See chapters 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, and 19. They abide in their sphere on high, while the action proceeds on earth.

Note, there was something like this order of living creatures and crowned elders in Israel, I mean in the way in which the ark was attended. The priests and the Levites surrounded the ark in a nearer and smaller circle, and then the twelve tribes, on each side three, encompassed it in a larger and more distinct circle or square. Thus the one had more intimacy with it than the other, as here the order of living creatures, elders, and angelic hosts around the throne. See numbers 1 through 4. End of note.

Such I judge to be the throne, with its attributes and attendants. It is the throne of the Creator and upholder of all things, from which is to go forth the

judgments which are to clear the earth of its corruptors and destroyers, and then to have connection with the redeemed earth in the world to come. But the throne being thus seen, and God's glory and pleasure as creator and governor of all things being thus celebrated, the question arises, who can he seat on the throne with himself? Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place? The earth and its fullness is the Lord's by the title of creation here celebrated and owned in Psalm 24, but it was his pleasure of old to set his image over these works of his hand.

Adam was given dominion, but Adam lost his place and forfeited his kingdom. Who then shall reassume the dignity, again ascend the hill of the Lord? Who is he whom the Lord God can reinstate in Adam's forfeited lordship?