

The Good News of God's Purpose in the Apocalypse

"Selections from the Writings and Ministry of G. V. Wigram."

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Better gospel than can be gleaned from the Apocalypse I know not.

It is the book of the actings of God *in power*; in power for and by His Christ, in spite of man's and Satan's wickedness. The world, the flesh, and the Devil, with all His wiles, get ejected to make way for God (even the Father), for the Christ (who is the Son of the Father), and for the blessed Spirit (our Present Comforter). First, Christ comes in to look after the candlesticks He had set up in the churches to give light for God. Satan had again succeeded upon earth to show how little trustworthy man was; but Christ, in the midst of judgment remembers mercy, and separates each one that hath an ear to hear. No refuse fare is theirs; but stores as goodly as is their Saviour's own portion.

Then John, caught up into heaven, finds that notwithstanding all man's failure below, there is an all above that is secure, and the secret of the security is this; the Lamb upon the throne has power and title before the Lord God Almighty, to all that He reserves to Himself on the one hand and on the other hand, He has a heart and a mind to use all for His own, the poor broken people whose trust is in Him. The reserved book is taken by Him from the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, and opened to John — to John, for us.

The first four seals tell of the stage of earth and man upon it — judgments reveal it. The fifth shows the housed-security of those who have suffered on it, and their now unhindered sympathy with the righteousness of God's judgments, and the graciousness of the sympathy to them as of the patience, for the sake of others, of Him who governs all. The sixth seal shows the moral state of man on earth. The injurious and blasphemers of God are ever dark enough in their suspicions of Him, to read Him according to what they themselves are to Him-ward.

A parenthesis, deep with meaning, follows. The church was housed already — that church which Israel never dreamed of, for it was the secret and the mystery of God. If she be housed — what next remains of the three great objects, "the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church of God," but the Jews and the Gentiles? These are for earth, she was for heaven. True, and yet it is the Lord's prerogative to act as He wills — and here He shows how deeply He delights in mercy and in grace. Resurrection and heaven seem to go together. But the risen and ascended Lord has to rule on earth too. He will separate for resurrection from the earth whom He will. He will call a remnant. 144,000 Jews — of the earthly kingdom 144,000 — sealed that they may go unscathed through the judgments. He will call likewise, and have an innumerable company out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. The ektromatal church (born out of season) may be the Bride, and those posthumous children may not be of it, but they shall be in resurrection to behold, and themselves to be witnesses of the heavenly divine grace of Him who is Head of His body, the church, King of Israel, and the Covenant of the Gentiles. And not till these have been shown in the seventh chapter, do we find the censer by which prayer had mounted up to heaven filled with fire and cast down *to the earth*, as the sign of judgments to begin upon earth.

What follows can hardly be justly appreciated without recalling the state of things when Christ left the earth, and thereupon set up a new witness. The Jews were under judgment, and had to ask leave of the representative of the Head of the image of Daniel — the Gentile dynasty — to murder the Messiah. This leave was freely given (by that which had a beast's heart), and even Herod and Pontius Pilate struck hands in friendship, making up an old quarrel in the murder of the Prince of life. That

Prince of life, from heaven, sent down the Holy Ghost — power to sustain the testimony of His weak servants — to Jew or Gentile. The body in service is found, however, judged in the churches (Rev. 2 and 3 of this book), and, as we know, went on from bad to worse. Let any one that wishes to see the prophetic picture of it compare the sins of profession with the sins of the pagans. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was." (2 Tim. 3: 1-9.) "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust one toward another: men with men working that which is unseemly and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1: 18-32).

Now, it is upon the three-ply knot of wickedness that God has to act, when judgment does begin. A Gordian knot in which Jewish iniquity, Gentile godlessness, and religious ungodliness are all found.

And even the maze is greater, for the two and the ten tribes are found to have different positions and different experiences in the last day; and, as to the Gentiles, not only does the image find its place and judgment, but also nations external to the *prophetic* earth (Gog and Magog, Tubal and Meshech and Rosh) come into question; while at the same time the religious corruption will not be merely what it ever has been, but Satan-inspired, and man-worshipping. Now, what would man do with such a mass, but reject it all in the lump; not so Christ: in the midst of judgment He for the churches remembers mercy, and in mercy He for others remembers judgment. To cut off the wicked from among the godly, and to take forth the precious from among the vile, are two acts which, though differing, both tell of mercy as of judgment.

So when a cup of iniquity has been allowed to fill itself in a place that is consecrated, and the iniquity becomes so full that there is now no room for Christ, no answer from within to His name, heaven-sent judgments, in such a case, have still mercy in prospect. Now, such is the state of things and circumstances, supposed in these eighth and ninth chapters, Jews, Gentiles, and religious profession, are each of them upon territory in a place which Christ is to fill. None of them, at the time supposed, have room for Him, nor an ear to listen to Him. Heaven-sent judgments tell — not only God's estimate of the state — but, in this case, a claim over the place; and are the prelude to the introduction of Christ.

It is a great truth, little thought of, that if God meets any one, or comes into any place, He ever is what He is; that which comes under various circumstances out from God, to the parties or place, takes its form according to what the state of that place or party may be, and according to God's thoughts and plans about it.

In Revelation 8 and 9 we get judgments of a peculiar character. They are not the mere disciplinary acting of God in His moral government, these actings, as in the book of Esther, so assuming the routine character of the world's course, that it needed a simple faith to see God *hidden* in the course of events. Nor are they, again, as those judgments of the first four seals, in the sixth chapter, the chastening rod of God in plagues, kept in His own hand, as the sword, famine, and the pestilence. Nor are they the desolating, all-destroying blasts of His wrath, against what is being cast out from before Him as judged. They are awful judgments, telling that there is a righteous God who judges, judgments which turn the tide and current of man's wickedness, to accomplish the Lord's own purposes. And be it remembered, that man's forgetfulness of God, and of any titles in God, blots not out either God or His titles. He lives still, and He acts in spite of man's forgetfulness of Him as the Creator, as the God of Providence, God of heaven, and of the whole earth, etc.; and, when He will, He shows that He still holds man responsible; and He exercises judgment, upon a Nineveh, or upon an Egypt, upon all, as He wills.

In Revelation 10, God's claim to the land of promise is put in by the wonderful messenger there revealed — who is evidently the Lord Himself. That claim having once been put in, Jerusalem comes into question; and its strange moral state, and the strange moral state of the Gentiles, are brought to light in Revelation 11.

The chapter of the power and testimony of the two witnesses, evidently is not according to Paul and Peter's time and position, but according to that of Moses and Elias.

Precious, to the heart that loves Christ, the rejected man of sorrow; precious to the heart, that for His sake is willing to be rejected here below, is the plain evidence of this eleventh chapter, viz., that the very scenes of the suffering of Christ are remembered by God; and that, therefore, a time will come when on this earth, and, in that part of it, an irresistible testimony shall be raised for Him who, if Lord of heaven, is also Lord of earth too.

That which seems to me to be emphatically the gospel of the tenth and of the eleventh chapters, is this; that however wicked the nation Israel might be, and however much Satan might have been permitted, on account of Israel's sins, to get the land into his possession, and (their sins having separated between themselves and God) even to fill the land (which should have been full of God's displays and testimonies for Himself, amid a feeble but dependent and obedient people) with all sorts of wickedness; — still, notwithstanding all this, the rightful Heir had the title to the land. And, if Israel knew not how to hold their land and welcome their King to it, their King was recognised on high, as worthy to take the land — and to judge His enemies in it, in order that He might gather back, in grace, the very nation that rejected Him, to the very land where they rejected Him. The title deed, and the

counsel about the land, and about Jerusalem, had Christ Himself as their object, and, primarily, Him alone, who, though God, would dwell with men.

This peculiar place of the seed of the woman in the divine mind, plans, and counsels — this way, that a title stands good in Him for Himself, and for those whom grace may take out from among the rebellious; this germinating of power to the establishing and making good of Christ's titles and claims, in spite of everything, is of the very essence of the Gospel, is the very gospel of God's power itself — "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head."

And to any soul that knows the murderous, lying, cruel character of Satan — the fretting, vexing, character of sin in itself — and the awfulness of being in opposition to God — the truth that God does mean to prepare scenes in which His own power and name will have full sway — and all that cannot yield subjection or amalgamate therewith, be for ever excluded — is good tidings of great joy, and as a pleasant land of rest, though seen in the distance, from the midst of a roaring, tumultuous ocean.

Well, this is seen, and the machinery connected with it, in the eleventh chapter. Jerusalem on earth is claimed by the Lord, as a place of testimony for Himself, claimed against all the powers of darkness; and the testimony made good: for who can withstand God? The testimony closes in death, however, and in the partial triumph of the adversary. But Death and Resurrection are God's way of acting; and the witnesses, raised, ascend up into heaven — their enemies beholding — and a judgment from God follows.

The kingdoms of this world are about to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ — the joy of heaven sounds out (and well it may), and the security of all blessing is shown — the ark of the covenant is shown in heaven. All is secure then in the highest. God and His Christ are there — the purpose to bless is sure in the temple in heaven — and the time is come!

But if the spring is full of living water — if the full power of God's delight in His anointed Son is ready to show itself forth in a kingdom and glory — what of the channels through which this glory is to flow? What of the places into which it is to flow? On earth all is evil, because Satan has power, but the power of Satan is that he has a place in the heavenlies above the earthly range of things. The heavenlies are cleared out in the twelfth chapter — and principalities and powers of evil shall never again hold them in possession. And is there no good news, no joy in the thought, that this citadel of the adversary's power shall be cleared out by Him who is above the adversary, and who is our Lord and our God, and that He shall take possession of the place with us?

Revelation 12 is the explanation of many a sorrow, and many a difficulty now — for it shows us where the adversary is, and what he is doing, But this same chapter gives us the power to rejoice, for it shows more clearly than any other portion of the coming doom and downfall of him that opposes us.

Cast out from heaven, his wrath is all the hotter upon earth — but all his rage works TOGETHER with the all things, to show how God acts, and how He can turn even the adversaries' rage to His own glory.

Evil may be hurried on, with fearful rapidity, by Satan — but God uses all the sorrow to work out Israel's repentance; and, even before that is accomplished, he works out, from the ranks of Satan, a mass of Jews and a mass of Gentiles — forced out by the very pressure of evil — but forced out to find God! Oh His ways are perfect, and He works from Himself!

There are those of all kindreds, tongues, and nations, who suffer for Him, Rev. 13: 7-10, and Rev. 20: 4.

And there are on the Mount Sion (Rev. 14) 144,000 with the Lamb, having His Father's name written upon their foreheads. How touchingly is the joy in heaven here described! verses 2, 3. And have not our hearts the foretaste of the blessing?

Verse 6, The everlasting Gospel.

Verse 8, The announcement Babylon is fallen.

Verse 9, The warning to separateness from the beast, his image and mark.

Verse 13, The blessedness of the dead.

Verse 14, The Son of Man come for the harvest.

And verse 17, *Another* angel for the vintage.

Triumph over evil must be *divine* to be real. If the flesh or fleshly energy attempt it in any of us — success there cannot be. But who is in the Spirit and cannot see how the destruction of evil is God's glory, and how His grace shines out in His giving man to participate with Him. The seven angels with the seven last plagues, which fill up the wrath of God are seen; but at the same time (all joy in the thought!), those that had gotten the victory over the beast and his image and his mark. Faith is victorious ere God in judgment removes the evil with which faith had to contend. These victors stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God; and they praise and magnify the Lord God Almighty. Who more fit to do so than those who through Him and His grace had overcome the evil? They have judged and overcome the evil before God sweeps it away. They have vindicated God in what He does. The full connection of these plagues with God is shown (Rev. 15: 5-8), and the judgments roll on through Revelation 16 on the circumstances and places of evil.

And are our hearts and souls so possessed by the power of God, that we overcome daily and practically all that which God is about to judge? Happy he who can *thus* say, "To me to live is Christ."

Babylon's iniquity as the great whore, and her judgment (Rev. 17) and Babylon as a city (Rev. 18), both the abomination of God, are shown and judged. And is it not joy to know that all the nets by which Satan has ensnared souls, all deceitful appearances, all the confusion of flesh with spirit, all the spiritual wickednesses shall be openly judged of God, and that the world and the flesh shall come shortly into judgment here below, God will then and thus justify, not only Himself, but every faithful act of the weakest saint, who may have had to take forth the precious from the vile, and been counted a fool for not living in Sodom. Surely there is joy both in the thought of God's destroying all Satan's network, and the very traps with which he now catches souls. With those at least to whom the snare is broken, and who are escaped, with them there can be no desire that God should deal gently with that which they have judged. And when Babylon the whore, Babylon the city, is judged, where shall we be the while?

Revelation 19. Heaven thrills with joy when the news is heard on high. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of

prophecy" (Rev. 19: 6-10). Such fruition of joy lies before us!

But all is not yet done. For if the nests of iniquity are destroyed — if the framework, religious and civil, of evil is destroyed, the heads still remain and the root too.

The King of kings and Lord of lords comes forth. The armies of earth are gathered against Him. The beast is taken and the false prophet; and both are cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant are slain. The heads and body of evil are thus set aside. How feeble is man, even when set on and backed by Satan, when he comes into collision with God.

Revelation 20. The ROOT of the evil, Satan, is then seized and bound for a thousand years. Then follows the display of God's spoils taken from Satan. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20: 4).

This is the first resurrection. Those who in the time of God's patience had, through grace and by faith and the Spirit overcome the evil, must be set forth as reigning with Christ a thousand years.

But the earth, which will witness their glory — and the men of it (though evil be banished all around during its continuance) will not be perfect. The creature, if left to itself, is but a creature still. Divine wisdom appoints a last trial of man. Satan is let loose for a little season, and there are those that take part with him.

Blessings and good government will not change man: — it is peace to our hearts to know that our springs lie higher up than in any creature-ground — even in God Himself. The fallibility of man, in the best circumstances, is never more forcibly shown out than in that which closes the millennium — nowhere more powerfully taught the blessedness of being able to say, All our springs are in Thee."

The general resurrection leads to the judgment of man's doings — as the first resurrection had been the just judgment of God as to the worthiness of Christ, a display of the fruits of God's re deeming love acting from itself for men through Christ.

The post-millennial blessing, Rev. 21: 1-8, and the detailed blessedness of the millennial glory, Rev. 21: 8. — 22: 6, need no comment.

The close, Rev. 22: 7-21, is solemn, but blessed.

No portion of the word more thoroughly shows the value of our all being "from," "through," and "to" God, and God alone — none more calculated to strike confusion upon the thought of self holding the place of spring, channel, or end (which is the religion of fallen humanity); none better fitted to act as a purge on the soul where a mixture of God and man may still be found.