

The Revelation as God gave it

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Dr. Joseph Hall, bishop successively of Exeter and Norwich in the 17th century, was pious, learned, and able. It may be well therefore to examine with care how such a man could write on the last book of the N.T. so as even to entitle his essay "The Revelation Unrevealed" (Works, Pratt's ed., x. 79-127). No doubt some in his day as in others taught unadvisedly, as in the "Five Lights at Walton," and "Zion's Joy in her King;" but he was not entitled to speak slightingly of Joseph Mede, John Archer, Thomas Brightman, or J. H. Alsted, who, notwithstanding many a mistake, were more enlightened in the prophetic word than himself. Let us then turn the wandering of so good a man to account by tracing if we can its source.

The first four sections are an effort to show that the Thousand Years' Reign in Rev. 20, till fulfilled, must be a riddle as insoluble as the number and name of the Beast in chap. 13. How unfounded is this appears from the latter scripture alone where the Beast's number is treated in the prophecy itself as quite exceptional. The very opening of the book disproves the assumption that prophecies need fulfilment to render them intelligible. It is an unbelieving denial of the value of prophecy; for thus they can only be understood when they are accomplished. All O.T. faith hung on unfulfilled prophecy. Thus expressly Noah condemned the antediluvian world; and Abraham enjoyed in peace what even Lot knew before fulfilment took place.

It was on the contrary, as Isaiah tells us (Isa. 41, 42, 44 - 48), the privilege of God's people to know both the former things, and new things to come, in contrast with the blinded heathen. So Daniel 9 understood precisely from Jeremiah's prophecy. Even the Jewish chief priests and scribes were not so dark when Jesus was born in Bethlehem; better far, Simeon, Anna, and others were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Indeed, before the Messiah presented Himself, the people were in expectation to which prophecy gave birth, and all were reasoning inwardly, as Luke says, whether haply John were He. The time, said our Lord, is fulfilled, when He began His public ministry. Prophecy had long proclaimed the place, the time, the characteristic marks, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow.

It is a false and unworthy maxim that prophecies in general, especially before they are fulfilled, are no other than riddles. For this puts the world and the church on the same ground of darkness and unbelief. The Lord on the contrary treats it as the privilege of His disciples to know as friends what the slave knows not, even all things which He heard from His Father; and the Spirit, when come, was to report to them the things to come. So the apostle Paul communicates to comparatively young believers in Thessalonica the correction of their mistake as to the dead saints, and convicts as error the alarm others were infusing into the living saints (1 Thess. 4, 2 Thess. 2). Again the Apostle Peter appeals to the faithful as *knowing beforehand* what God had revealed, even to the eternal things, the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3). As if to cut off anticipatively the bishop's discouragement, the Holy Spirit pronounces, in the first and the last chapters of that prophecies, a special blessing on reading, hearing and keeping the things written in it: a nugatory thing, if they consist of no other than riddles for men to guess at.

The truth is that the same Spirit Who alone enables us to understand the rest of scripture gives intelligence in the prophecies. Past, present, and future, are alike open to Him Who, as only He has told us of the first things when man did not exist to see or hear, so He has spoken up to the last, and

especially of His own glory yet to have its triumphant and blissful display in the universe. What more worthy, of God, what more cheering and elevating to His children! The consequence for the bishop and all of his way of thinking is a barren blank, instead of the bright anticipation of the fair and fruitful scene the Lord will establish according to the word for His own great Name. The unbelief of a believer has of course its limits; but it is a darkening principle just so far as it works; and this is as plain in the case before us as anywhere else.

Section 5 is a summary of Archer's view, which is wrong and defective in important respects. In the first place the bishop undertakes to show the universal error which runs through his whole writing; secondly, the chief paradoxes involved; thirdly, its consequents improbable; and, lastly, "such fair, safe orthodox constructions, as may be warrantably admitted of that dark passage of Scripture, the misprision [*i.e.* misapprehension] whereof is guilty of this controversy" (section 6).

Let us only now notice briefly section 7, in which the literal construction put on the prophecies is regarded as the great strain of error. Two passages are cited as instances, Zech. 2: 12, 10 [a singular mode of citing], and Isa. 65: 9, 10. Instead of seeing a future condition of glory for Judah and Jerusalem on earth, the bishop contends for no more than the past Babylonish restoration, and under that figure the comfortable condition of the church under the gospel.

Now is either of these a tolerable interpretation of either scripture? How does the context decide? "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts: *After the glory* hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand over them, and they shall be a spoil to those that served them; and ye shall know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah. And many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah in that day and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And Jehovah shall inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and shall yet choose Jerusalem again" etc. It must be remembered that the main body which returned from captivity had gone up long before under Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Is it credible that Zechariah's prediction was fulfilled in the little company that accompanied Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes? Certainly neither answers to the prophecy. They were both after the captivity, an earnest only of what is promised. But here it is to be "after the glory." So, in Ps. 102: 16, His appearing in His glory goes with His building up Zion; and thus it is, as the verse preceding says, that the nations shall fear His name and all the kings of the earth His glory. It would be the grossest exaggeration to pretend that anything like the psalm or the prophecy was fulfilled in the returned remnant.

Are these words accomplished in the church? Why, the essence of our calling is in contrast with it all. For us Christ is received up in glory. Here He was rejected even to the death of the cross, and is now glorified on high. Our life is *hid* with Christ in God; and when He shall be manifested, then shall we also with Him be manifested in glory. Meanwhile the fidelity of the Christian and of the church is in sharing His rejection on earth with Him. The worldly-minded were the first we read of who ignored and forsook this true place here below, to which we are called in contrast with Israel of old and by-and-by. "Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have reigned without us; yea and I would that ye did reign that we also might. reign with you." it was a mistaking of and a departure from Christ's mind. "For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and to men" (1 Cor. 4). But the place promised to Israel is power over the nations which spoiled them. In this way, as in others, will Jehovah prove how dear they are to Him in the day when He shakes His hand over the Gentiles. Never since the Babylonish captivity has this been true either of the Jews or of their Gentile masters; but it will assuredly be when

their heart turns to Him Whom they slew. Then shall Zion sing, and Jehovah dwell in their midst, and many nations join themselves to Jehovah; but in Zion will be His earthly seat and centre, when He is risen out of His holy habitation, and all flesh must hush before Jehovah.

Again, how baseless is the traditional prejudice as to Isa. 65: 9, 10! No Christian doubts, that the Jews' rejection of their Messiah (as in Isa. 49 - 53) has brought a fresh scattering on themselves, in addition to the penalty of their old idolatry. On that, during the fall of the disobedient and gainsaying people, God is found of the Gentiles who sought Him not, according to Isa. 65: 1, 2. But as plain as is Jehovah's judgment of the wicked among Israel in vers. 3-7, so is His mercy to in elect remnant of that people in the verses that follow; and both in a day of executed judgments, which usher in a season of blessedness for the earth and all creatures on it, in a way beyond all example since sin entered the world. Hence we hear of the new heavens and a new earth—at least in an incipient sense, the pledge of the absolute truth which follows the judgment of the dead (Rev. 21). But what has all this to do with the comfortable condition of the church under the gospel, any more than with the returned remnant in Ezra's day or any other's of old? Jehovah coming in fire, and His chariots like the whirlwind, to render His anger with fury and His rebuke with flames of fire, is as different as can be from the Holy Spirit coining in power from on high, and tongues parting asunder as of fire sitting upon each. So differs the future gathering of all nations and tongues to see His glory, from the work of grace in now gathering out of them a people for His name wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all.

The second paradox is a mistake. The future kingdom of Christ does not exclude kings as scripture shows.

The third is due to confusion on all sides from lack of subjection to the truth that the believer does not come into judgment, *i.e.*, the eternal judgment at the end. There accordingly in Rev. 20: 11-15, we find none but the dead; and these dead, as the context proves, are exclusively the wicked. The blessed and holy had been raised long before. Even in O.T. times this truth ought to have been and was known. See Ps. 143: 2: 11 Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." If even a saint, God's servant, came into His judgment, he could not be cleared: it would annul the force of judgment or deny the manifold faults of a saint. God will do neither. His judgment will take full effect on all that enter there. How then are any saved? "By grace have ye been saved through faith," because Christ bore their judgment, which therefore they shall not enter. If they did, they could not be justified; whereas they are already in this life justified by faith. All teaching is false which supposes that "both saints and sinners shall be judged." Our Lord Himself in John 5 expressly lays down on the contrary that the believer, the saint, does not come into judgment, but has even now eternal life, which is incompatible with it, and has passed from death into life. Such is the way of divine grace with all believers. They already honour God's Son by believing God's testimony to Him. Those who now dishonour His word and His Son by their unbelief cannot escape the judgment by-and-by and must honour the Son of man Who judges them. For in this capacity it will be. They disputed His divine glory. They denied His Sonship in the supreme sense. They despised or derided eternal life, His giving it or their need of it. As they dishonoured Him now, in contrast with all who bowed to His name in faith, He will raise and judge them at the end. For all must honour the Son. Happy they that do so by now believing in Him, receiving life, and doing the good that follows that divine nature; most miserable those that reject God's word and Son, and so have not life but only worthless ways, and therefore must be judged and thus honour Him perforce in that day.

It is true however that Matt. 25: 31-46 describes a scene wholly distinct from the close of Rev. 20. For what can differ more than the time, and the persons concerned? In that Gospel it is expressly the Son of man when He shall come in His glory to the earth whence He went to heaven. Rev. 20 on

the contrary is when His coming cannot be, because heaven and earth are fled and passed as they now are. And those gathered before Him in the Gospel are all the nations, the quick and none but the quick; and not all of them, for the Jews are shown already dealt with in Matt. 24: 1-31, with the comparisons to 41; after which the judgment of Christendom in the three great intervening parables of the household servants, the ten virgins, and the servants trading with the Lord's goods, down to Matt. 25: 30. It is therefore strictly the King's dealing with all the living nations or the Gentiles of that day, according to the way they treated His brethren who will preach to them the gospel of the kingdom before He comes and takes the throne of His glory over the earth. The sheep are the believing Gentiles in that day who did good to the preachers; as the goats are the Gentiles then who were utterly careless or cruel to His brethren through unbelief of the coming King. In Rev. 20: 11 to the end, it is expressly the dead who are judged for their works, with not one living man among them.

Accordingly scripture never speaks of "a general judgment," and still less of an indiscriminate resurrection. 2 Cor. 5: 10 does speak of manifestation before Christ's Bema (judgment-seat) for all without exception; but in no way is it insinuated that it will be at one time, still less all together. Hence the care of the Holy Spirit to say that we, the whole of us, are to be *manifested*. So saints will be every one before Him, and their fidelity or failure owned. We shall know as we are known. A great loss it would be, if there were no such manifestation for them; and position in the kingdom will be ruled accordingly. But it is not "judgment," for into this no believer comes, as the Lord declares and other scriptures confirm, if this were needed, which God forbid. But for the wicked, it will be judgment when they are manifested in their season before Him; for they have nothing but bad works without the Saviour and without life. And therefore we hear of a resurrection of judgment: two resurrections, not merely distinct, but in the strongest possible contrast of character. How profound the error that ignores their opposition and lumps them in one!

The fourth paradox rightly objects to a threefold coming of Christ. Scripture speaks of but two: the first, as to which all Christians agree; the second, when He comes in His kingdom, having received the saints to Himself as His prefatory act, that they may reign with Him. The notion that He will come to judge all at the end is a mere blunder of humanised theology, refuted by scripture. He will assuredly judge the dead at the end, the righteous having long previously been changed to reign with Him and judge the world in a kingly but glorious way, as well as evermore reigning in life by Him, when the kingdom is given up. But the dead stand before the throne, wherever it be, for their judgment, and therefore go to Him for this, instead of His coming when heaven and earth are no more, which scripture does not say but excludes. There is no double resurrection therefore, as in the fifth paradox, but as the apostle testified, and even orthodox Jews allowed, a resurrection of dead persons, both of just and unjust. These, we have seen from scripture are contrasted not more in time than in character. Judgment is given to the risen saints; the raised unjust are to be judged by the Lord Jesus. Nor is there the least ground for limiting the first resurrection to martyrs. Such martyrs as might have been thought too late are raised to join the mass of saints already raised at Christ's coming, so that all may share the reign for the thousand years.

Scripture gives no countenance to the sixth paradox of a threefold ascension to heaven.