

The Bride, the Lamb's Wife

Rev. 19 - 22.

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In the O.T. the literal Babylon on the plain of Shinar appears in contrast with Jerusalem. In the N.T. we hear of a still more portentous Babylon on seven mountains, the great Harlot on whose forehead was written "mystery," which is in no way said or true of the Chaldeans' pride. No principle is more unintelligent and unfounded than to assume that the Revelation, in borrowing names of persons, places, or other objects from the ancient oracles, is bound to the letter and takes no larger views. To confound the new things with the old in that twofold treasure is to prove oneself a scribe *un-instructed* to the kingdom of the heavens. For in the new things, whatever the allusion to the old, the sphere is indefinitely widened, and the character deepened, as much as heavenly associations rise above earthly. To identify them, as do the pseudo-literalists, is to lose the special light of the N.T., the gravest, the highest, the most precious communications from God, whatever the subject-matter. It is to surrender the mind of Christ; and, what is more, out of the vain conceit of an unreal originality, in rejection of a testimony which men have not the spirituality to appreciate. Is it not sad when saints decline to opposing the word and the Spirit of God?

What can be more certain in its kind than that the glorified church is the Lamb's wife? Not less so is the World-church that sits on (or, by) many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed fornication, and she intoxicated the dwellers on the earth with the wine of her fornication. She was seen sitting on the scarlet Beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns, the peculiar and unmistakable symbol of the Roman Empire. How absurd to fancy an ephemeral revival of the city of Bel in the east, even if God had not said of it while yet the golden city, It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation! In the fullest sense Rome alone has written on her brow, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS (idols) OF THE EARTH. She indeed rode the Western Beast, she as none other was drunk with the blood of the saints, and, to make it quite plain, with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: an object of great marvel to the prophet, considering her pretensions, which are preposterously impossible of a future Chaldean city. "Mystery" can readily apply to a corrupt Christian system, which would be a hard saying of a city in the east revived through commerce.

To suppose such a revival of Babylon on the plain of Shinar is indeed a heedless misreading of the Revelation. The relation of the Apocalyptic Babylon to the scarlet Beast ought itself to have preserved every believing reader from such a mistake. For that Beast can be no other than the Western Empire, which the guilty Woman of Rome rides for an indefinite term, haughty and cruel beyond example, and idolatrous. But at the end the Beast and his satellite horns shall hate the Harlot and desolate her, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. This is the doom of Rome only: strong is the Lord God that judges her. The East will according to scripture have a wholly different lot, ranged under the king of the north of Daniel (or the Assyrian of the older prophets), and finally under Gog when Israel shall be dwelling peacefully in the land. It is absurd, for anyone familiar with the prophets, to confound the Western powers with those of the East, being wholly opposed in policy. The AntiChrist in the land, who will then be in alliance with the Beast, brings all into collision, when the Lord judges each in power and supersedes all by His everlasting kingdom, long promised by the prophets.

The introduction of the Harlot-church in Rev. 17: 1 expressly and instructively answers to that of

the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in Rev, 21: 9, who is identified with the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. How any sober man, I say not spiritual, could conceive this applicable to the earthly Jerusalem, no matter how beautiful or blessed in the Millennium, passes comprehension. Does it not simply show the blinding power of an idea in contempt of the clearest scripture? The just and true inference from God's word is, that it is essentially neither of man nor of the earth like the Palestinian Jerusalem, but heavenly and divine and so having the glory of God, and described in figures altogether and purposely beyond the first creation, which will be ransacked to clothe the earthly metropolis with riches and beauty. Think of jasper clear as crystal, gold transparent as glass, and each gate of "one pearl!" It is all above nature; whereas earthly Jerusalem will be founded and built up with the best things of the earth. We must not think of material beauty in the heavenly city; it is a symbolic description.

This is confirmed in a simple yet important way by the opening scene of Rev. 19 where heaven rejoices over God's judgment of the great Harlot. It is immediately followed by a yet mightier outburst of joyful praise. The time came for the marriage of the Lamb, and His wife made herself ready; while others share the feast in heaven as the blessed guests at that scene of divine love and glory, which even John left undescribed, as Paul did that of our translation at Christ's coming in 1 Thess. 4: 17. Can there be a notion more incongruous and inept than to lower this wondrous heavenly vision to earthly Jerusalem? Yet so it must be if such is the meaning of the city in Rev. 21: 3, and 9.

But we are told that there are just "seven signs" that this is not the church. Let us hear, though seven thousand "signs" could not set aside the irresistible force of chaps. 19, 21, and 22.

(1) Christ is described as "the Lamb;" and this is called an essentially Jewish title, referring to the passover, and the daily sacrifice. The fact is that John's Gospel 1: 20, 36 and 1 Peter 1: 19 use the different word ἄμνός, the Revelation ἄρνιον in pointed contrast with θηρίον. But in no case is there a limited or Jewish horizon. What can refute this contracted view more flatly than the Baptist's words, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of *the world*?" So Peter lifts the believing remnant he addresses wholly above the nation and the earth and time itself, by pointing to Christ foreknown before the world's foundation. So does the earth-rejected "Lamb" of the Apocalypse (glorified on high while the Jews have lost their place and their nation) point to dealings of judgment far wider than the Jews, and to heavenly and earthly glories far transcending those secured to Israel according to O.T. prophecy. The true deduction is therefore quite adverse.

(2) The company is described as the Bride, the Lamb's wife. This sign again is no less invalid. For, though a wife is an O.T. figure, not so is the wife "of the Lamb," which the context *states* to be "of heaven," in the most evident distinction from the earthly Jerusalem, "the beloved city" of Rev. 20: 9. Jerusalem is authoritatively declared to be "the city of the great King"; it is a great honour that He will reign over it as nowhere else here below. But the church is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, who, suffering with Him on earth, shall be glorified with Him on high. To confound these relationships is to lose the key to their distinctive force as revealed in scripture.

(3) It is "a city," a holy city, which John is shown. This is thought to exclude the church, Christ's body. But God declares *it* to be the Bride, the Lamb's wife, which we have learnt to be the church, and nothing else. It is not even the city wherein the Bride dwells. The holy city is declared authoritatively *to be* the Bride; and scripture cannot be broken. It is vain to fly to Heb. 12: 22. The misquotation and the perversion are only fresh proofs of error, not without prejudice. "We are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," is a daring change from God's word to man's will. "And" is left out after "Zion," and before "the city." But it is essential for marking each new object.

Zion is the highest point, as it were, on earth; then follows what is above it, "a living God's city, heavenly Jerusalem." *This was Abraham's hope, the seat on high of the saints who shared his faith* (cf. Heb. 11: 13-16).

But it was *not* the "church of first-born ones, enrolled in heaven," which is another object designated by the "and," though the A. and R. Vv. are here as dull as the commentators, swayed by tradition against the only sure word of God. The bride is neither Israel nor Jerusalem, but "new Jerusalem," which a tyro ought to distinguish. And how strange not to see that the heavenly city in Rev. 21 has "no temple!" whereas earthly Jerusalem will have the temple so minutely predicted in Ezek. 40-48. Can nothing clear such dim eyes? It may be added that "mother of us *all*" is a known bad reading, itself the parent of a great deal of bad theology ancient and modern.

(4) The city comes down out of heaven from God. How does this sign identify it with the earthly city? How does it clash with its heavenly character and glory? It is a necessary part of God's counsel for heading up all things heavenly and earthly in Christ (Eph. 1: 10) in Whom we also are allotted inheritance. We reign with Him, as He is Head to the church over all things. It is only when the new heaven comes that the new Jerusalem lights on the new earth in the eternal state, when the kingdom is given up to Him Who is God and Father. Earthly land, people, and city are no more then: God's tabernacle is with *men*.

(5) The city had "a wall great and high" (12), the figure of its perfect security. Think what the mind must be that confounds this with Eph. 2: 14, though, even so, obliged to blow hot and cold on it!

(6) The gates with the names of Israel's twelve tribes are next alleged. But the twelve angels might have guarded from such a blunder, and also (7) the twelve apostles of the Lamb. For God evidently in one way or another connects with the holy city associations of government, whether angelic, Jewish, or apostolic. It is the heavenly seat of the kingdom; and it will display in that day, what is even now ours to say in faith, that "all things are ours." Paul was not given to so describe the church's glory, but speaks of her as the heavenly Eve of the heavenly and last Adam. John, while expressly identifying the Bride, the Lamb's wife, with the new Jerusalem, develops here only the city side. It was needless for him to dwell on what O.T. prophecy so fully reveals, the blessedness of Israel in that day. It was of interest to mark, that the kings and the nations pay the most distinct homage to the glorified church, as they will also to the earthly city and people of God. The context requires "*unto*," not "*into*," for which the Greek had but one and the same word. But it ought to be familiar to all that the true reading is "the nations," omitting "of them that are saved," which is spurious and almost nonsensical.

Having dismissed the seven "signs" which are no signs, let me add that Rev. 22 is as clearly opposed, as we have seen its predecessors to be against the earthly view of the Bride, the Lamb's wife. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." Such is the constant aspiration and cry of the church as led by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in her. But it will never be the case with the earthly bride. For she will receive that great gift of the outpoured Spirit when the Lord will have appeared to her everlasting joy; and after that it will be too late to say, Come. It is ours in the power of the present Spirit to say, Come, while He is absent on high.

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