

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

**A book of comfort
for the Lord's faithfull**

By
INGVAR JONSSON

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book contains a number of expositions over the book of Revelation held in 1985 and 1986. The Lord gave the apostle John these revelations and told him to write down what he had heard and seen, so that the Lord's faithful of all times should recognize the events of their own time. They need this so that they should not be led astray, but should see what comes from God and what comes from the devil, the old serpent.

The revelations are presented in a symbolic language, but in a way that reveals the meaning to those who through faith have seen the meaning of Christ's suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

The book of Revelation should be read in the light of God's promise after the fall of man, of the offspring of the woman who should crush the head of the serpent and the fulfilment of this promise in Jesus Christ. Only then will its message be revealed. Then this book becomes what it was meant to be: A book of comfort for the Lord's faithful in every time and especially in the time of the great apostasy that at present is taking place within Christianity. "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book," Rev 22:7.

Ingvar Jonsson

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This good little book has been chosen by the SCRIPTURA Evangelical Literature Mission for translation into English in order to be offered to the Lutheran churches in Africa, whom SCRIPTURA supports. I have used the New International Version (N.I.V.) Bible, First South African Edition, for the quotations made. This translation is commonly used in the churches in Africa and often found preferable to e.g. the New King James Version (N.K.J.V.) because of its simpler English. This is the reason, why I have chosen the N.I.V. instead of the N.K.J.V., which from other points of view could be regarded as preferable.

I was asked to translate this book for distribution to churches in Africa in particular. I was also asked to revise the text where this would benefit the readers in Africa or where I found other reasons to do so. I have therefore presented a translation that in places is fairly free and still in general is as close as possible to the original text.

In spite of the changes I have made to the original, I hope that nothing essential has been lost of the original content of this book. It is my hope that this book will be of help to many readers of the Bible for the understanding of the book of Revelation.

Ingvar Hermansson

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1:1-8

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John...”

Thus begins the book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible points to the future. Here Christ reveals what is to happen to his Church here on earth, before he comes back in glory to judge the world. He tells his servant things that are to come soon. Thus it is to his faithful the Lord here speaks, in order that they should recognise and understand the things that happen in their own time. He does this so that they should not let themselves become confused or lose hope. They should understand that the truth of the Word of God and the saving power of Christ are revealed even at times, when it looks as if victory was on the side of the enemy.

It is said that God gave John this revelation to show his servants “what must soon take place.” The struggle between Christ and his adversary - the anti-christ - had already begun when John received this revelation. The same apostle, John, writes in his first

letter, 1 John 2:18: "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." The last hour began with the completion of the redemptive works of Christ. This work will continue unto the end of time. Christ says in Matt. 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The devil, who in the beginning led man astray, away from God and thereby threw him into destruction, is trying to hinder fallen man from receiving the salvation through Christ. Therefore the struggle on earth will continue until the end of time between Christ and his faithful on the one side and antichrist and those who follow him on the other. God has not revealed to anyone, when the last day will come, but he has revealed to us some of the things that are to happen before that day.

It was the apostle John who received this revelation, but it was given for the sake of the Lord's faithful of all times. Therefore it is also said: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near,"(1:3). He is blessed because he will be guided and kept safe. Jesus also says: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved," Matt. 24:13. This word stands firm, whatever

happens, because Christ is the one who has the power in heaven and on earth.

John was only an instrument for the revelation. We are told in v. 4 that the book was addressed to the seven churches in the province of Asia. These are mentioned separately in ch. 2 and 3. That they are seven in number is a symbol for totality, which we find many times in the book of Revelation.

The message to the seven Churches in Asia is directed to the whole Church of Christ in all ages. The one who speaks is the Triune God, "he who is and was and shall come, the Almighty." It is also the seven spirits, the fullness of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit; and it is Jesus Christ, who has delivered us from our sins by his blood. He has thereby made us to be a kingdom and a priesthood of his God and Father. This is the true Church of Christ, which on earth is the carrier of the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to all nations until the end of time. All shall then see him and shall have to accept that his Word is true and accept the justice in his judgment, even those who in this life denied his redemption and rejected his mercy.

THE TASK JOHN WAS GIVEN

1:9-11

John had himself experienced what it meant to be faithful to the Word of God and to confess Jesus Christ in the world. He was made to share in the suffering and in the kingdom and in the patient endurance in Jesus.

Now he was on the island of Patmos, a small rock island near the west coast of Asia Minor. He had been exiled to this island because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I.e. he had been exiled because he had been preaching the Gospel about Jesus Christ. It was the practise of Caesar Domitian in Rome to exile people whom he disliked to such small islands.

According to early Christian tradition John was the only one of the apostles who was not executed. Instead he was exiled. John also tells us on which day he received this revelation - it was on the Lord's Day. That is how the early Christians called the Sunday, because Christ had risen from the dead on that day, and thereby proved himself to be the Lord. It was he who had been speaking through the prophets of the Old Testament and who now had fulfilled what he there had promised. And it is he who now speaks

through his apostle John: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven Churches.

THE SON OF MAN REVEALED

1:12-20

When John turned around to see who spoke to him, he first saw seven golden lamp stands. They symbolise the Church of Christ. Among the lamp stands someone was standing who was like a son of man. Yes, it was the Son of Man, with whom John had been walking when he was moving around in the land of Judea. John had been standing at his cross and had been at his open tomb on Easter Day morning. He had met him several times after his resurrection and at last he and the other apostles had seen him ascending into heaven. It was the Lord, who during his time on earth often called himself the Son of Man. Now John could hear him speak and see his glorified Lord and Master. According to his promises he is with his disciples here on earth in his Word and his Sacraments. Here John could see him visibly in person in the middle of his Churches.

He was dressed in a long robe, which reached down to his feet, and he had a golden sash around his chest. This was the garment of the high priest in the Old Testament times. He was the one to enter into the Most Holy of the Temple once a year on the Day of Atonement to bring the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of his people and himself. Christ fulfilled this sacrifice once for all, when he suffered and died on the cross. He did this as atonement for the sins of all mankind; but he himself had no sin. "He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption," Heb. 9:12. He is our true High Priest. His white hair is a sign of his righteousness and the blazing fire in his eyes signify his omniscience (that he knows everything). His glowing feet, like bronze in a furnace, symbolise his purity. His voice, sounding like rushing water, cannot be drowned by any noise.

The seven stars in the right hand of the Son of Man stand for the angels or messengers of the Church, mentioned in the chapters that follow. These are the ones he has sent to proclaim his Word and shepherd his flock, the Church. He holds them in his hand and they are responsible to him. His Word is described as a sharp, double-edged sword, which comes out of his mouth. His face was like the sun in all its brilliance. From the sun comes the light that reveals the truth; the light also gives life.

Then John was so overwhelmed by the revelation of the Son of Man in his glory that he fell down before him as if he were dead. But He, the Son of Man, put his right hand on John and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of Death and Hades."

Christ has by his redemptive work opened the way for man, who had fallen into sin and thereby was imprisoned by death, a way to life with God. When his Word is proclaimed, every one who receives it in faith will be set free from the power of sin and death. Christ says in John 5:24: "Whoever hears my Word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

But he, who rejects the Word of God, when it in this life calls him to salvation, remains bound by the power of sin and death. This will be revealed at the time of judgment: In John 12:48 Jesus says: "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

The way the Son of Man is presented in chapter one is being followed also in the seven messages to the Churches, dictated to John in the following two chapters.

In the two last verses of chapter one John is again told to write what he has seen, what now is and what is to come. Here the Son of Man also says that the seven stars in his right hand are the angels or messengers of the seven churches. The word "angel" means "messenger", and can refer to both spiritual beings and to men sent by God. It is obvious that the word here refers to human messengers.

Chapter 2

CONSIDER THE HEIGHT FROM WHICH YOU HAVE FALLEN

2:1-7

"I know your deeds." With these words the Son of Man begins his message in five of his letters. The other two he begins with the words: "I know your afflictions" and "I know where you live." Christ knows the situation in his Church here on earth and he knows the state of each individual Christian. In John 10:14 Jesus says: "I know my sheep." On the basis of this knowledge he warns, admonishes, guides and comforts us. All this he does out of love and care for his people. Therefore these letters have an urgent errand to every one in Christ's Church and especially to those who are entrusted to be his messengers.

These letters were given to us, not only in order to tell us what the situation was like in these seven churches at that time and what ought to have been done about it. They were also given in order to show the prevailing situation from time to time in the churches of today and what ought to be done now. External conditions may differ from one time to the other, and so also can the situation differ from congregation to congregation, but the struggle is the same.

The Lord has a lot of good things to say about his messenger in Ephesus: "I know your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tasted those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary." These are all the things that the Lord expects from those whom he sends to preach the Word in his Church: steadfastness and watchfulness against false teachers and preachers and perseverance in times of trial.

Still, the Lord points out what is missing, the first love. Love should be the driving force and lighthouse at all times. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal," the apostle says in 1 Cor. 13:1. If the love of Christ is not the driving force, then selfishness and prestige will enter even into those deeds that are in themselves good and important. This we do not easily discover ourselves.

Therefore the Lord says: "Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place." These words are a serious admonition to those who want to be faithful to Christ and his Word and who want to live in daily repentance. To live in daily repentance means that one should make proper

and truthful use of the Word of God, applying it to oneself. This new life will then bear fruit, a fruit visible in deeds.

We should not understand this explanation so as to mean that a Christian in the name of love may or can abstain from being faithful to God's Word or from being obedient to it. Verse 6 stresses this very much: "But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." The Nicolaitans were according to the Church Fathers a sect, which sought to compromise with the heathens. Such compromise led to adultery and fornication both in physical and spiritual sense. This is a tendency that appears again and again, even in our time, when many attempts are made to compromise between Christianity and new heathenism.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SUFFER

2:8-11

"I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich!" This is how the Lord begins his letter to the church in Smyrna. The church in Smyrna had remained faithful to the Word of God in confessing Jesus Christ. For this reason it had suffered afflictions from those who called themselves Jews but were not.

In the same way the representatives of false spirituality are the foremost enemies of true Christian faith even in our time. They adjust themselves and their message to the powers of this world. The Lord does not promise his people that they shall be spared such animosity and suffering from those who hate their faith. Instead he says that the devil shall throw some of them into prison, and they shall be exposed to tribulations during ten days.

In this way their faith will be put to the test. But he also says: "Do not fear what you are to suffer." He who suffers for Christ's sake, does not need to fear suffering, since it can not harm him, although the devil tries to make him think so. But he should be on his guard against such attempt to frighten him away from Christ. If he does he will perish.

This is something we always need to be reminded of. The devil has an ally in our own nature, which fears suffering more than anything else. Therefore we need to be reminded of Christ's promise and admonition: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." He does not speak of any heroic deeds, that we should achieve, but tells us to remain faithful to him.

It is Christ who keeps and preserves those who remain faithful to him. This power he reveals to them in their weakness. He does not give them the crown of life on account of merit, but because of grace. He

has himself gained this crown for us by his suffering and death on the cross. The cross is thus the sign of victory over the destructive powers of sin, death and devil. Those who receive this crown will not suffer any harm from the second death. They will not be separated from God at the judgement.

REPENT

2:12-17

Pergamum was a centre for the heathen culture. It had many impressive temples that had been built to the honour of the idol gods of the time. Therefore the Lord says in the letter to that church: "I know where you live; there where Satan has his throne." There faithfulness was put to the test. The messenger of Christ in Pergamum had stood up to the test and had not denied his faith in Christ, not even when Antipas was killed there because of his faith and faithfulness.

But in relation to the movement that sought compromise between heathenism and Christianity, the church in Pergamum had not shown the same firmness and faithfulness to the Christian faith. Therefore Christ says: "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The firmness in these words shows how dangerous such compromising is as the kind that the followers of Balak and the Nicolaitans practised in Pergamum. The same can be said about similar tendencies to compromise with the world, with false doctrine and with the enemy, that are found in Christianity today. It is not possible to compromise between God and Satan or between truth and lie. The one who does not remain in the truth will be ensnared in lies.

Such compromising is even more deceitful, as it often is presented as an expression of tolerance, broadmindedness and love. Therefore it is important for every one who wants to remain faithful to Christ to be watchful even in this. "Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast," 1 Cor. 5:6-7.

In this letter too, Christ points at the victory which he will give the one who remains faithful to him. Here he says that he will give of “the hidden manna” to the one who overcomes. This is the bread of eternal life. It is hidden for unbelief in all its forms, but gives eternal life in God to the one who receives it in faith and let’s himself be nourished by it. To him Christ will also give a white stone and a new name, which no one knows, except the one who receives it. The white stone is analogous to the white dress and signifies the righteousness given by Christ in the new birth. To him Christ gives a new name, which is written in the book of life, a name known only to Christ and to the one who receives it.

YOU ARE SO TOLERANT

2:18-29

The letter to the church in Thyatira has some likeness to the letter to Pergamum. In Thyatira too the Lord found much that was good. But also here he found a serious shortcoming in regard to watchfulness and deeds. "I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols."

This woman claimed to be something she was not. She claimed access to an office she had not been given but had taken upon herself, and she proclaimed the same teaching which Balak and the Nicolaitans proclaimed in Pergamum. In doing this she and her followers relied on unbiblical thoughts and ideas, which the Lord here calls "the deep secrets of Satan". Such they are, since they are of the same kind as the thoughts Satan induced the first woman, Eve, to convey to her husband, Adam. Such thoughts and ideas lead man to claim for himself the right to decide what is good or evil, right or wrong. This has to do with acts of unfaithfulness to the Word of God and thereby against Jesus Christ. They are deeds done under false pretence of godliness, and so they are even more deceptive.

It is not difficult to recognize the same pattern in our own church of today. Such unfaithfulness and mixing with false teachings are in the Bible called adultery in a spiritual sense. Often adultery in this sense is mixed with adultery in literal, carnal sense. The latter too is the result, when the Word of God is being abandoned as a guide for life.

What the Lord here specially points out and rebukes is the reluctance in the church and by its priests to stand up against such adultery and unfaithfulness as has been mentioned. He has given Jezebel time to repent from her immorality, but she was unwilling to do so. However, when his time comes, he will take action against the woman and against those who are together with her, unless they repent of their ways. To the others, those who do not involve themselves with such false teachings and its representatives, the Lord says, that he will not impose any new burden on them. There is nothing special they have to do. Only they should hold on to what they have, until the Lord comes. They should hold on to the Word of God, as it was given to them by the prophets, the evangelists and the apostles. Only by doing so can they be protected and safe - not by taking any active steps of their own, or by seeking judgment from God before time. Unbelief and heathenism of any kind can not be overcome by compromise but only through faithfulness to Christ. Christ says: "To

him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations." Only to him who remains faithful to Christ, will the power of Christ to save be revealed. Only so can the world be overcome.

Christ did not come to get worldly power here on earth - as he was offered by Satan at the time of his temptation - but to overcome the world and to save man from the judgment that is in store for the world. It is not in order to get power in the world, that he lets his Word be proclaimed, but so that people should believe in him and so overcome the world: "For everyone born of God has overcome the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that has overcome the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

1 John 5:4-5.

Chapter 3

STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS AND IS ABOUT TO DIE

3:1-6

Even in the letter to the church in Sardes the Lord says: "I know your deeds". Obviously action in an outward sense was not lacking, because the Lord says: "You have the name that you are alive, but you are dead".

This is an admonition to every Christian to examine himself, and especially so to every preacher of the Word of God in the Church. Self-examination in this way is important because of the danger for the preacher to be content with such things that are visible to others and give an illusion of life. That temptation is especially great in our time, since almost everything is valued according to visible results even in the churches. But the Lord is not satisfied with such results. He looks to reality and truth. He finds spiritual sleep and death prevailing, where man trusts in visible activities and innovations, and thinks, that as long as one keeps things moving, everything is well.

Here we see the way of the enemy to cheat people who mean that they are serving God, but do not accept the Word of God for themselves, so that the Holy Spirit could lead them to true repentance and

revival. They pretend to serve God, but their deeds are not of God, but from Satan, as Jesus says in John 8:44-45: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his own language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." Thus things that in themselves are not evil can cause spiritual death. They do so when they draw people's attention away from the proper preaching of the Word of God and the use of it and keep people in spiritual sleep and security instead of awakening them from their sleep. This serves the enemy, as he in the beginning led men astray when he misled them to do what the Lord had forbidden them to do, because it would lead to death.

How then can there be life, where spiritual sleep and death reign? The Lord answers this question by saying: "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." He does not say: "Now you have to appoint a committee to scrutinise the activities and to propose new methods and new kinds of activities." No, it is the one who has been entrusted with the task of preaching the Word of God in the Church, who must wake up from his spiritual sleep, a sleep to death. It is not in order that he should start new activities that he should wake up. He needs to wake up in order to keep awake and give proper nourishment and care to the spiritual life that still remains in a few. That life was near to die because of all the activities that gave an illusion of life. The source of nourishment still remains in the Church: "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it and repent." This is what is required, if there is to be spiritual life where death reigns, and if the spiritual life that still remains shall be renewed and strengthened. There must be a true return to the sources, from which the eternal life flows, and which the Lord has given his Church. These sources are the Word of God and the Sacraments. If there is no such return, only judgment remains: "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a

thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."

Still, the Lord found some even in Sardes, who had not soiled their clothes. I. e. they had remained faithful to their baptism through obedience to his Word, in spite of the decay that existed in the church. They did not occupy important positions in the church or perform any special activities. But the Lord knew them: "They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels," (v. 4-5).

YOU HAVE KEPT MY WORD

3:7-13

In the letter to the church in Philadelphia nothing that looks important is mentioned. On the contrary, it is said about this church that it has little strength; still in its weakness it has kept the Lord's Word and has not denied Christ's name. Therefore he has opened a door, which no one can shut. This illustrates further what was said to the church in Sardes. It is Christ who has the power to open people's hearts, not human artfulness. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ," Rom. 10:17.

When the Lord opens, no one can shut. This is true at the time of grace, but also on the day of judgment. The opposite is also true, as he says: He shuts and no one can open. When people try or proclaim ways of salvation and life, other than the one he has opened through his redemptive work, these will not help. Heaven will not be opened for them through these other roads. It does not help how many they are or how powerful or how sure of themselves they seem to be.

Only where Christ's Word is being preached clearly and properly, and his name is being confessed in truth, there people's hearts can be opened. Then even the hearts of some, who belonged to the "synagogue of Satan" - those who had been ensnared by heresy - can also be opened. This does not come about through compromise or even "dialogue", but only through true testimony to Christ and his Word. It is the adherence to the Word of God and nothing else that gives the Church victory over its spiritual enemies: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth".

These words are true for the Church as a whole as well as for every individual Christian. This is Christ's own promise, which he in fact repeats several times in the Gospels as well as here in the book of Revelation. The promise is connected to faithfulness on behalf of man: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently." "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." "Him who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God," he says in v. 10. The whole of this verse is an assurance by Christ. He assures us that the one who is united with him in this world through faith, and endures patiently unto the end, he will be united with Christ in his glory for ever in the life to come.

YOU ARE NEITHER COLD NOR WARM

3:14-22

In the letter to the church in Laodicea, Christ calls himself “Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” He hereby stresses, that he knows all things as they truly are and that he reveals the truth. That he is “the ruler of God’s creation”, means that he took part in the creation. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” John 1:1-3.

The deeds of the church in Laodicea witness before Christ about something it did not see by itself. “You say: I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” This self-sufficient trust in material wealth made the Christians lukewarm and indifferent to their need of an eternal salvation of the soul. We can find the same indifference to the need of salvation in the church today. In the name of tolerance many today even command themselves of such indifference, but Christ, the true witness, says about this: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold, nor hot. I wish you were either one

or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

To be lukewarm means to try to serve both God and mammon. Jesus says in Matt. 6:24: "You can not serve both God and mammon." Man can not at the same time follow Christ and follow the world that is turned away from him, or even against him. He will have to choose between the two, one or the other, otherwise he will fail. However, as long as the time of grace remains the Lord tries to bring men to revival and repentance: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."

Laodicea was known for its well developed banking system, its wool industry and its school of medicine. Its wealth and self-reliance were founded on these, in the same way as it is often done in modern society. But the people's trust in these things was as deceptive as it was for the rich fool, whom Jesus tells us about in Luke 12:16-21, to trust in his full barns.

What Jesus has come to give mankind is something totally different from the things that the people in Laodicea, like many others, trusted in. Here he defines what these things are, that he has to offer mankind. "Gold, refined in fire," stands for the sav-

ing faith that withstands even the hardest test. White clothes we are told about in many places in the Bible. These are the righteousness of Christ, which he has attained for us through his redemptive works, and which is bestowed upon those who truly believe in him. The salve for the eyes is the work of the Holy Spirit in those who use the Word of God and receive it in faith. This leads to revival and enlightenment by the Law and the Gospel.

The false trust in outward things and the self-confidence of the past are being revealed. Here we can see how wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked man really was, when he thought he was rich and lacked nothing, especially not the grace and forgiveness of Christ.

Christ says that he counsels the one, who thinks he does not need anything, but who in fact is in great need, to come and buy from him. We do not own anything by which we can acquire what we need from him. He points out to us that instead we are poor and naked. We have nothing to pay with. But he has paid, what we could not pay. He did not pay with silver and gold, but with his own holy and precious blood.

“To buy” here means that we have to abstain from those things that we wrongly trusted in, in order to get what he has to offer us. That was the alternative, when Jesus told the rich youth, Matt. 19:21, to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, and then to

come and follow him. This was a test for the young man. Jesus told him to choose between his earthly possessions and eternal life. He chose his possessions and went away. In this way he revealed where his heart was. He who abstains from those things that would have hindered him in order to follow Jesus, will never need to regret that he did so. He can say with the apostle Paul: "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things," Phil. 3:7.

Christ does not want to leave any one to be cheated and perish in his lukewarmness. It is therefore an expression of his love for us, when he tests our faith through admonition and discipline. He does this in order that we should wake up and repent. He stands at the door of our heart and knocks so that we should open for him. He wants to enter into our heart in order to give us of the bread of eternal life, while there is still time. He wants us to share in the victory that he has won over our spiritual enemies. It is our risen and living Saviour, who speaks to us in these letters. What he says, the Holy Spirit takes and gives it life for those who receive it with open hearts and ears. Therefore he says in each of his letters: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Chapter 4

JOHN SAW HEAVEN OPEN

4:1-3

It is mentioned several times in the Bible, that the Lord lets human beings see into heaven. Something of the heavenly glory is revealed to them. The prophet Ezekiel tells us in the first chapter of his book about such a vision. In Acts 7:55-56 we are told of another such vision, when Stephen saw heaven open and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Here we are told that John saw an open door in heaven and a voice said to him: "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

John was to be a messenger to tell mankind what was to happen to the Church of Christ on earth before his return at the end of time. This is a parallel to Ezek. 1:26-28 in the Old Testament, when the prophet was called to proclaim the Word of God to his people. He was called to tell them things that were to happen during the time of the Old Covenant until the coming of Christ in the flesh. In the same manner John is to tell the people of the New Covenant about the things that will happen towards the end of time before the second coming of Christ.

The description of the one whom John saw sitting on the throne in heaven is done by the help of symbols. Human language is not sufficient to describe God. No human being can after the fall of man see God and live. But God has revealed his will and his being (his nature) by speaking to men, whom he has chosen as his servants. And in Jesus Christ he has become flesh and lived among us. Therefore John can write in his Gospel: "No one has ever seen God, but God the only begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known," John 1:18. Jesus himself says: "If you knew me, you would know my Father also," John 8:19.

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS AND THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

4:4-11

John saw twenty-four elders sitting on thrones around the throne of God. They were dressed in white, the dress of righteousness, and they had golden crowns on their heads. This dress is the righteousness of Christ, in which those are dressed, who receive Christ as their Saviour and live by faith in him. The righteousness of Christ is bestowed upon them. The golden crowns they carry on their heads are signs of victory. Christ gives them to share in his

victory over the powers of destruction (sin, death and devil).

That they are twenty-four symbolises their fullness in number. They represent: 1) all those who have lived by faith in the promises of God during the time of the Old Covenant. These promises began with the promise to Eve, that the seed of the woman should crush the head of the serpent, Satan, Gen 3:15. The tribes of Israel were twelve by number. 2) They also represent those who live and have lived by faith in the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus Christ in the time of the New Covenant. This fulfilment is proclaimed by his twelve apostles to all nations until the end. Twelve is the symbol of totality in both the Old and the New Covenant. This is symbolised by the twenty-four thrones and the twenty-four elders sitting on these thrones.

John also saw four living creatures in the centre, around the throne of God. From early Christian times these have been taken to symbolise the four Gospels.

The lion is the symbol of the Gospel according to St Mark, who in his first chapter tells us about John the Baptist as the voice crying in the wilderness. The ox is a symbol of the Gospel according to St Luke, who begins by telling us about the priest Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of the Old Testament. He had to perform priestly duties in the temple of Jerusalem, where he offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. This he did as an anticipation of Christ's offering, when he gave himself as redemption for all the sins of the world.

The third living creature had a face like a man. It is a symbol of the Gospel according to St Matthew, which begins with a list of the human ancestors of Jesus, the Son of God. The fourth living creature is an eagle, which is a symbol of the Gospel according to St John, which begins by telling us about the Word of God, who came down from heaven.

It is said about all these living creatures, that they were covered with eyes in front and in back. They carry the Word of God to mankind. Each of them had six wings. They are continuously to be moving forwards. Their message shall always be preached for new generations and nations until the end of time. Wherever this is done, it is to the glory of God, because his power to save is being revealed in those who receive the Gospel in faith. Therefore they never

stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

And whenever the four living creatures bring forth praise and glory and honour to him, who sits on the throne, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him. They do this saying: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by you they were created and have their being." The twenty-four elders represent all those who are being saved.

That they lay down their crowns, means that they give him honour for the victory they have won. They also confess that he is the one who created all things through his Word, which has opened the way of salvation for the fallen mankind. This he did when the Word became flesh and lived among us. "Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," John 1:10-12.

Chapter 5

THE SEALED SCROLL

5:1-4

He who sat on the throne had a scroll in his hand. It had writings on both sides. This expresses the fullness of its content. It was sealed with seven seals. This means that its content had the nature of a last will, the proclamation of a Will. It contained what God has ordained regarding the salvation of man from sin and death and the power of the devil and to eternal life and bliss.

John heard another angel asking: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seal?" It was found that nobody in heaven and on earth and under the earth could do this. John wept into tears. If nobody could open the scroll, this last Will, in order that man should know its content, then nobody could be saved. Then we all would have been without hope.

THE LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH - THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN

5:5-14

One of the elders said to John: "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is also to open the scroll and its seven seals." In Gen. 49:9 we are told that when the patriarch Jacob blessed his twelve sons he called the tribe of Judah "a lion's cub". And he also says that "the sceptre will not depart from Judah." Out of the tribe of Judah came king David, the son of Jesse. And through the prophet Isaiah it is said in Is. 11:1: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Through the tribe of Judah Jesus Christ was born by the virgin Mary. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. He is also the offspring of the woman, who was to crush the serpent's head, Gen. 3:15.

John also saw another symbol for Christ, as he tells us in the next verse: "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain". This symbol is also found in the prophecy of the Old Testament, Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to be slaughtered." He offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world for the redemption of mankind he gained an eternal

victory over our spiritual enemies: Sin, death and Satan.

The seven horns that are mentioned are signs of his divine power (omnipotence). All power in heaven and on earth has been given to him. The seven eyes, the seven spirits of God, which were sent in the world, symbolise the Holy Spirit. He is working through the Word so that it shall be preached for all nations, creating faith in those who accept it. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ," Rom 10:17.

When he who is the Lamb took the scroll, the twenty-four elders fell down before him. And they sang "a new song": "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

This is a song of praise to Christ. He has fulfilled Gods plan for the salvation of man. He is worthy to open the seal of the scroll, in order that its content should be made known for all nations and in all languages. This task he has given to his Church on earth: "You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

They will reign, not by worldly power, but by the power of Christ's victory over the world. The world is under the power of the devil, Satan. Christ has in this world, where Satan rules, established his kingdom, the kingdom of grace. In this kingdom he is present and is working through the means of grace: the Word and the Sacraments. Through these his power to save is revealed to mankind.

Therefore the whole multitude of angels encircles the throne in heaven, singing in joy over every soul that is being saved: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!" And every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea sing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!" To this the four living creatures then say "Amen", and the elders fall down and worship.

Chapter 6

THE SEALS. THE FOUR HORSES

6:1-8

John then saw the Lamb opening the seven seals. For each of the four first seals of the scroll, which were opened by the Lamb, John saw a horse and its rider.

The first rider sat on a white horse. He held a bow and was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. This is the Word of God, which is to spread like a conqueror over the world, in spite of the anger of the devil and a hostile world. Jesus has said in Matt 24:14: "This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations." The bow is a reminder both of the struggle which true preachers of the Gospel always are involved in and of the fact that the Gospel hurts before it heals. The prophet Isaiah, who was called to proclaim the prophecy of the coming Christ, says: "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, he made me into a polished arrow," Is 49:2. And when the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost preached about the crucified and risen Christ, those who heard him felt a cut to their hearts, Acts 2:37.

When the second seal was opened, a rider on a fiery red horse came forward. To him was given to

take peace from the earth, and to make men kill each other. A large sword was given to him. Ever since Cain killed his brother Abel war has been the scourge of men, and it will continue to be so until the end of the world. When Jesus in Matt. 24 speaks about the distress and sufferings that will befall the world in the last times, he also speaks of war and rumours of war.

The worldly and secularised Christianity has always dreamt of being able to cast off this scourge. Yet they reject the Gospel of Christ, the only one who can bring true peace, which is peace with God through salvation from sin. As long as the world rejects the Gospel, the rider on the red horse will continue to come forward with increased force and destruction accompanying him. The history of our own century shows us this, as much as does any other time.

The rider on the black horse, whom John saw when the Lamb opened the third seal, had a pair of scales in his hand. Then John heard a voice talking about strict rationing of food, of high prices and of famine. This is familiar to those of us, who in our time have experienced the same thing in their own country. Most others have in any case heard of it through reports from countries where these hardships are part of people's daily life. And the pollution of the environment that is taking place all over the world points to a future universal starvation of a magnitude that has never been seen before.

The forth horse, that John saw, had the pale colour of a corpse, and its rider's name was Death, "and Hades was following close behind him". He was given power to kill a quarter of the population on earth by sword, famine, plague and by wild beasts.

Here also the events of our own century have something to tell us. War, famine, plagues, including HIV/aids, and other infectious and destructive scourges are threatening mankind. These fall well within the description that John gives of the powers given to the rider on the pale horse. Even wild animals and insects can become a scourge for men. These scourges are all results of man's unfaithfulness to God, when his commandments are rejected. In his blindness and unbelief, man either accuses God for allowing such things to happen, or thinks that God lacks power to hinder them, if he exists. They do not see, that they themselves lack power to withstand the powers of destruction, when they turn away from God.

THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SLAIN BE- CAUSE OF THE WORD OF GOD

6:9-11

When the fifth seal was opened, John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They cried out in a loud voice: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" This is not a call for revenge. One who has suffered and died for the sake of the Word of God does not call for revenge. That would be totally impossible. But it is a prayer that the truth of the Word of God may be revealed even for those who have denied its truth and persecuted its followers on earth. The Word will then judge them, since truth is a judge over lie and over those who spread it. Otherwise truth would be powerless against lie. God's righteousness judges the unjust, otherwise unrighteousness would prevail. Jesus says in Matt. 23:35: "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berakiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." St Paul says in Gal. 6:7: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked". The saints' prayers are that the truth of the

Word of God and his righteousness may be revealed. However, the time for judgement set by God had not yet come. The saints were told to be patient a little longer. First the number of those who were to become martyrs, i.e. be killed because of their faith in Christ, was to become complete. Such testimonies will be found until the end of time. On the other hand it is not only the multitude of such witnesses, martyrs, that has to be complete before the end comes. Also the number of others who accept the Gospel of salvation is to be complete before the end can come. The apostle Peter writes: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand his slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance," 2 Pet. 3:9.

THE ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF THE MARTYRS

6:12-17

When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, it was revealed what will happen, when time has come for the last judgement, when heaven and earth shall perish.

Then those who are great and powerful in the world shall tremble together with all who have put their trust in them. They will then try to do what fallen man since the time of Adam has attempted to do. They will try to hide themselves for God instead of repenting before him. They will try to hide in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They will say to the mountains and to the rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Here we can remember, what the apostle Paul writes in Rom. 2:4-5: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance? Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed."

Chapter 7

THE DAY OF THE JUDGMENT IS AT HAND

7:1-3

At this stage one could have expected that the seventh seal of the scroll would be opened by the Lamb. But that does not yet happen. Instead John sees four angels, holding back the four winds of the earth. These winds signify the sufferings which God, when his time comes, shall allow to strike the earth. But before that those who have been faithful to the Lord will be sealed with his seal on their foreheads. This means that the Gospel will be preached to all nations, and that those who accept it by faith in Jesus Christ, to their salvation, receive this seal of God. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Tim. 2:19: "God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his', and 'everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'."

Those who are sealed with God's seal are the ones who do not hide themselves when God talks to them in his Word. They are those who accept it so that the Holy Spirit can do his work in them to their salvation. They will not hide themselves, even when judgment is at hand. They have put themselves under

judgment and have been set free for Christ's sake. They have been dressed in the dress of Christ's righteousness and have been sealed with his seal. They experience the Lord's power to help and protect them already here, during their sufferings in this world. The word of the prophet in Is. 63:9 can truly be applied to them: "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO WERE SEALED

7:4-8

John then heard, that the number of those who had been sealed was 144,000. This number is arrived at by multiplying 12,000 by 12. As has been said before, 12 is a number that appears both as the number of the tribes of Israel and as the number of Christ's apostles in the New Testament. The number 144,000 signifies the fullness of the number of those who believe in Christ, the true Israel. The number is thus symbolic.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO ONE COULD COUNT

7:9-17

When John saw the multitude of all those that are saved, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, he found that they were uncountable. They had come from every nation, tribe, people and language. They are those who have received the Gospel, which is to be proclaimed before all nations before the end comes.

They have been dressed in the white robe of the righteousness of the Lamb, slain as a sacrifice for their sins and for the sins of the world. Only the Lamb can bestow it, and it is given to everyone who is faithful to God's call through the Gospel of grace. "Those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified," Rom 8:30. They were holding palm branches in their hands, a sign of victory. They have conquered their spiritual enemies, not by their own power, but through the power of the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they all say simultaneously: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

All of them also have this in common, that they have come out of the great tribulation. Whatever nation they have belonged to or at whatever time they have lived on earth they have known this tribulation. In what did this tribulation consist? Above all it was the sorrow they have felt over their own sins; their sorrow for all those who rejected the salvation offered to them; the suffering and distress which their spiritual enemies and unbelievers have caused them.

They have all washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This means that they have kept clean the robe of righteousness which they had received through the use of the means of grace. Therefore the Holy Spirit could continue his work in them, through their daily repentance and the forgiveness of sins. On the other hand nothing is said about any efforts or works of their own. The saved and blessed saints know nothing about such things. They know that their salvation is wholly an act of God. Therefore they give him honour and glory for all. They say: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Now all that belongs to this world, marked by sin and death, has passed away. The Lamb, who bought them free by his blood, and in whom they believed during their time on earth, will be their shepherd. Nothing shall hereafter be able to conceal him from them or separate them from him. They shall now always be able to serve God in perfection. The Lamb, who gave them eternal life, will lead them to springs of living water and will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

These are words of comfort from the Lord to his faithful servants of all times and especially during the tribulations and apostasy within Christianity towards the end of time. Those on whose forehead the Lord has put his seal, he will also keep and protect, if they remain faithful to him. He says: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28.

Chapter 8

A GREAT SILENCE IN HEAVEN

8:1

When John had received these words of comfort in order to write them down, the Lamb opened the seventh and last seal. Then “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” It was as if heaven itself held its breath, waiting for what now was to be revealed.

THE SEVEN ANGELS STANDING BEFORE GOD

8:2-5

The angels whom John saw standing before God are also called archangels. One of them, Gabriel, is mentioned in Luke 1, where he said to Zechariah: “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.” He is also the angel who came to the virgin Mary and told her about the birth of Jesus.

The seven angels were then each given a trumpet. But before any one of them could sound his trumpet another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, (cf. 5:8). He then filled the censer with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth. This was an answer to the prayers that had been offered before the throne, a warning to those who had not listened to the Word of God. Fire is in the Bible often used as an expression for the presence of God and of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Fire also stands for the wrath of God and the judgement of God, (Matt. 3:12; Rev. 20:10). The context in which the word is used tells us how the meaning is to be understood. Being an answer to the prayers of the saints, the meaning of the fire is best understood as a warning to the world to repent while there is still time.

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

8:6-13

When the first angel sounded his trumpet, there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. Then a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. This means that there was an increase in comparison with the previous tribulations, where it was said that one forth was destroyed. When the second trumpet was sounded, the destruction hit the sea, as one third of all living creatures in the sea died. Even a third of all ships on the sea were destroyed.

When the third trumpet was sounded one third of all water in the rivers and in the springs of water was turned bitter and unsuitable for consumption. Many people died from the waters that had become bitter. We are reminded of the words of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah, Jer. 9:15: "See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water". He also says that this will happen because they have followed the stubbornness of their own hearts and have followed the Baals, i.e. the idols of their time. This shows us that it is also a question of spiritual poisoning, since they did not want to listen to the sound

doctrine, which we have been given in the Word of God. We can think of the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Thess. 2:11-12: "For this reason God sends them powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

Seen in this context the darkness that came, when the fourth angel sounded his trumpet, refers to spiritual darkness. This corresponds to what the Lord says through his prophet in Micah 3:6. After rebuking the false prophets for leading the people astray, he says: "Therefore night will come over you, without vision, and darkness without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them." This means that those who reject the Word of God will be left to the light they trusted in, which is darkness.

Then, in view of what is to come, when the remaining trumpets sound, the connection with the three "Woe" in v. 13, will be clear.

Chapter 9

THE SOUNDING OF THE FIFTH TRUMPET

9:1-12

When the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, a star fell from the sky down on the earth. The events that follow show that this is a personification of a spiritual being. This star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss, which he opened. Then smoke rose from the Abyss, like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke. Out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth. These were not locusts in the real sense, but people, who let themselves be blinded and poisoned by the smoke from the Abyss. Note that they did not come from the Abyss, but from the smoke that rose from the Abyss. They were told not to harm the vegetation on the earth, but were to harm only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for a limited period of time. The pain they were causing was like that of a sting of a scorpion. Only those who did not have God's seal on their foreheads, i.e. those who rejected salvation through Christ, could be harmed by the locusts.

In this way those who are the servants of unbelief and evil become a scourge of those, who had trusted in them. The history of mankind gives us many examples of this. It is the result of the nature of evil that one evildoer becomes a scourge of the other. And they have nobody to go to for help, because they have rejected Christ. The one who has hardened his heart against Christ, is not able to receive help from him, who alone can save us from the powers of evil.

In v. 7-10 we find a more detailed description of those who came out of the smoke of the Abyss. Their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron and their tails had stings like scorpions.

Such is man, when he hardens himself against the true Word of salvation from God, inhales the smoke from the Abyss and enters into the service of the prince of the Abyss. He then becomes like a demon. We have many examples of this from our own century. But their days have been numbered and limited. Five months is the time that has been set for them. The number 5 is a symbolic number. However this tells us that the time set for the rule of evil is definite. When that limit has been met their power will cease, no matter how great and powerful they seemed to be in this world.

The same applies to their prince also, the angel of the Abyss, as we can see from v. 11. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon. Both these words mean "Destroyer."

The first woe (8:13) had now passed. Two more woes will follow.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET

9:13-21

The sixth angel blew his trumpet. Then John heard a voice coming from the altar, where the prayers of the saints had been offered. The voice told the angel to release the four angels that had been kept bound at the great river Euphrates.

This river is the river of Babylon. From Babylon the great powers in ancient time had begun their wars of conquest towards the people of the Old Testament. There were four angels who were to be released. This is an indication that the affliction that now was to come was to affect the whole earth. We can compare this with ch. 7:1, where four angels are mentioned, who for some time were holding back the four winds of the earth, i.e. four torments. Here four angels are released, i.e. God lets the plague come over the whole world, a plague that has to come over a mankind that has hardened itself against God's Gospel. These plagues come as an answer to the

prayers of the saints, like God sent plagues over Pharaoh and his people in Egypt as an answer to the prayers of the children of Israel, Exod. 2:23; 8:16-19.

When we here are told about angels, we must remember that this word means "messenger." In this context it means that God allows these powers to carry out his punishment. The exact time, which we are told in v. 15 that it was set for their release, tells us that nothing happens except or differently from what God has decided that it may happen. This also is true about the work of evil powers. When it looks as if they are free to do as they please, it is all part of God's work for the salvation of the faithful from the power of evil.

Again the plagues of Egypt may serve as an example in helping us to understand God's ways. God's aim for Israel was to free them from their oppression in Egypt and to lead them into the promised land. God has given his people in the New Covenant these revelations through the apostle John for a similar reason. He wants them to recognise the things that take place in time so that they do not go astray. Instead they should see how God's Word becomes true, even when unbelief seems to triumph in this world, as it was when Christ died on the cross.

Thus the (book of) Revelation is not a book of terror for the faithful, but a **book of comfort**. Jesus says, when talking to his disciples about the plagues

that shall come over the world in the last days: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near," Luke 21:28.

The torment, that was to come, when the seventh trumpet sounded, is described in v. 16-19. It has the mark of modern warfare. An enormous number of mounted troops are mentioned: two hundred millions. And the riders had fiery red, dark blue and sulphur-yellow breastplates. From the horses' mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur. Their tails were like snakes that spewed out their deadly poison. This description suits remarkably well to modern war machines, which nobody could even dream of at the time when John wrote this book. In fact, not even a hundred years ago could people imagine the war machines, that are now being used. One third of mankind shall be killed through this plague.

A war of that size has so far never taken place on earth and has until now been technically impossible to carry out. But now, in our own time such a universal and destructive war has become possible. The fact that it is still being kept back, is not the result of any action of man, but by the restraining power of God. Man thinks that he has this power in his hands, because the hour, the day, the month and the year, which have been set by God have not yet come. God still gives man time, a time of grace for mankind. However, most people openly despise this grace and stay secure in their sin and unbelief. This also is a sign of the last times which the Word of God often reminds us of. (Read e.g. 2 Tim. 3:1-8.)

During all these scourges the unbelievers will stubbornly persevere in their unbelief. Those who survive will not repent from their worship of idols. They do not abandon their evil deeds of murder, sorcery, fornication and stealing. We have seen such hardness of heart in Christianity both during and after the two world wars, that have tormented the world during the last century. These wars were a foreboding of the things that we have been told about here.

Jesus says in Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Chapter 10

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET IS BEING ANNOUNCED

10:1-7

John saw an angel standing with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. This means that his message concerned the whole world. He had the rainbow, the Lord's sign of his first covenant with man, over his head. In his right hand he held a small scroll that was open. His voice was that of a roaring lion. It penetrated all and every one.

After the angel's voice came the voices of the seven thunders. John was not then to write down, what they were saying, but later it was to be revealed. The angel then raised his hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens, the earth and the sea and all that is in them. He said: "There will be no more delay!" In the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

This is in accordance with the Gospel of salvation. The judgment over a world that has rejected this Gospel and has been an enemy to the Gospel, means victory for the kingdom of God. It means the final fulfilment of the Gospel through the salvation of the faithful. It was said through the prophet Joel: "The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill", Joel 3:16-17.

The Lord's people are all those who believed in God's promise of salvation. In the Old Testament times it was those who believed God's promise in Gen. 3:15 about the offspring of the woman that was to crush the head of the serpent. In the New Testament times it is those who believed in the fulfilment of this promise in Jesus Christ.

THE SMALL SCROLL

10:8-11

The voice from heaven, which earlier had told John to seal up what the seven thunders had said, now told him to take the scroll from the angel's hand. When he asked the angel to give it to him, the angel said: "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stom-

ach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." The words of the angel meant that John was to take its content to himself, to digest or grasp it. We can compare other similar expressions in the Bible, e.g. Jer. 15:16: "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." Also Ezek. 2:8: "But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you---; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

We are told that when John ate the scroll as he had been told, it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth, but when he had eaten it, his stomach turned sour. The meaning of this is that it contained a double message: the message of the fulfilment of salvation for the faithful; and the inescapable condemnation for those who have rejected salvation through Jesus Christ. The Word of God always is like that, when it is preached and taught in its purity. It proclaims the sweetness of the grace of God, but at the same time it becomes sour for the old man in his selfishness. For those who have been given the task to preach the Word of God the same two aspects are applicable. It is "as sweet as honey" to preach the Gospel of God's saving grace for those who receive it; but "the stomach turns sour" by the knowledge that the same message leads to judgment over those who reject the grace in Christ.

Chapter 11

THE ALTAR AND THE OUTER COURT OF THE TEMPLE

11:1-2

The temple of God, which John here was told to measure, stands for the Christian Church on earth.

The altar is a symbol for the means of grace which Christ has given his Church. Through these he has promised that he will be present and working in his Church until the end of the world. Those who worship in the temple are those who through a proper use of the means of grace live by a true faith in Christ.

The outer court, which John was told to leave aside, and not to measure it, signifies the secularized church with its many, nominal only, members. For a time specified by the Lord it will be "given to the gentiles," i.e. left in the hands of those who openly denounce and deny the truth of the Word of God. However, even during this time, the faithful, those who worship the Lord at his altar, will be kept safe.

Here we can remember the Words of Jesus, when he told his disciples, that they are the salt of the earth, Matt. 5:13. He then added that, if the salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything, except

to be thrown out and trampled by men. This is what will happen to the secularized church. But those who remain faithful, worshipping at the altar, will be safe. There, at the altar, the Lord will protect them. The gentiles can not harm them there, even if they try to intimidate them.

THE TWO WITNESSES

11:3-12

Here it is Christ himself who speaks, and he speaks about his two witnesses. There are different opinions about who these witnesses are. But it is obvious that they are not human or personal beings. If we let "Scripture interpret Scripture", then it becomes clear that these two witnesses are the Old and the New Testament. Christ calls them his **two** witnesses. The Old Testament witnesses about him from the beginning through prophecy and promises, that he is coming to save the world. The New Testament witnesses about him that he is the fulfilment of the promises in the Old Testament. They witness, "being clothed in sackcloth". Those who receive their testimony will repent and believe. They are presented for us as two olive trees and as two lamp stands, that stand before the Lord of the earth. The olive tree is an oil producing tree from which oil for sacred use was taken. The Holy Spirit is likened to oil in the Scriptures. He is

the one who “carries” the Word and works through it, so that the truth can be revealed.

Fire comes from the mouth of these witnesses and devours their enemies. Since the time when the revolting angel fell and became Satan, the enemies of the Word of God have been many. With all their artful cunning they have tried to nullify the Word of God. But in this they have not succeeded. Jesus says in Matt. 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

In v. 7 it is said about these two witnesses: “When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.” And their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, where also their Lord was crucified. Figuratively speaking this city is called Sodom and Egypt. And it is said that men from every people, tribe, language and nation will see their bodies laying there.

“The great city” is probably the same as “the outer court” which had been given to the gentiles, (cf. comments to v. 2). This is the world, to which the witnesses proclaimed their message, but which together with all who adhered to a false spirituality rejected their message.

The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over the witnesses. They shall in their hatred towards Christ

find each other and become friends, as it happened, when Christ was crucified. As Christ raised hatred among his enemies by witnessing for the truth, so his Word causes enmity which is accompanied by open denial and false spirituality.

When God allows the beast of the Abyss to get the upper hand and, as it appears kills the witnesses, then man triumphs over his freedom to prove himself. He enjoys not having to pay any regard to God and what he says in his Word. Man then prefers to decide for himself, what he shall call good and evil. This is what Satan told Adam and Eve in paradise to do at the time of the fall. And this he continues to say. When man listens to Satan and rejects the Word of God, he does not allow himself to be enlightened by the Word. He is then dazzled so that he believes himself to be free. But instead he is a prisoner under the prince of lie, Satan, the destroyer of old. The Lord lets the two witnesses lay as dead before the people who rejected their testimony when they heard it. He also lets the heathens trample the outer yard of the temple, the Church of the Lord. This is a punishment for not being willing to listen. It is about this the apostle writes in his prophecy about "the great rebellion, that is to take place within Christianity before the day of judgment comes." He writes about "the man of lawlessness, the man doomed to destruction, who opposes and exalts himself over everything that

is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God," 2 Thess. 2:3-4. In accordance with the work of Satan he will appear "with all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved," 2 Thess. 2:9-12. These descriptions the Lord has given us, in order that his faithful, when that time comes, shall recognize what is happening, so that they are not deceived.

Then, when the unbelievers feel themselves more secure than ever in their rejection of the Lord's two witnesses, he will call these up to heaven. And now the truthfulness and validity of their testimony will be obvious for all on earth: for those who received their testimony in faith, and for those who rejected it. Jesus says in John 12:48: "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

THE END OF THE SECOND WOE

11:13-14

At that moment, when the two witnesses went up into heaven, there was a severe earthquake. One tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people

were killed. At the sight of all this the survivors were terrified and gave glory to God, it is said. This does not mean that they repented and believed in a true sense, but that they were forced to admit that God is righteous and that his Word is true, the same Word that they had previously denied and rejected. We can here think of the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. The second woe had now passed. The third woe was soon to come.

PREPARATION FOR THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

11:15-19

When the seventh trumpet sounded a voice was heard from heaven, saying: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." So it has always been, but here during the time of grace, his power has been hidden for the unbelievers. Just as it was when Christ had been nailed to the cross and people were passing by, insulting him. As he then proved his power by crushing the head of the serpent, so he now shows his power for all who have believed in him and are saved by him. The nations to whom his witnesses came with the Gospel, have rejected it, but the Lord has in his mercy given them time for repentance.

Now that time has come to an end. His power, truthfulness and righteousness will now be revealed as well as his wrath over the devil and all those who have chosen to remain under the devils rule. Those who are spiritually dead will now be judged.

Those who received his grace by faith during their life on earth and lived by it shall then receive what he had promised them in his Word. Therefore the twenty-four elders give thanks to God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." See also Psalm 2, where the same things are described, which have been pictured here.

Chapter 12

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

12:1-6

Some understand the woman, whom John saw in heaven, as being Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, such a thought is foreign to the Gospels. Mary is in the Bible never portrayed as queen of heaven. Instead the woman John saw is a personification of the Church of Christ, the true Israel. The people of Israel were during the Old Testament times entrusted with the task of being carriers of the prophecies and promises about the Messiah, who was to come, being born of a woman. He was the one who should crush the head of the serpent, Satan.

The people of Israel were constantly the object of the anger and enmity of the world around it, and of the prince of this world, the dragon, Satan. Many among the people of Israel fell away, but the people as a whole could not be destroyed. A remnant remained, who lived by faith in the promise God had given them. This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus was born, king Herode tried to kill him, but God saved him through the escape to Egypt. The old serpent could not hinder our Saviour Jesus Christ from his suffering and death for our sins as our Redeemer. By his suffering and death he redeemed all mankind from the power of the devil to condemn those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Christ has thus crushed his head. After his death and resurrection Jesus was taken up to heaven. His apostles and followers were then persecuted and driven out from among their own people by those who denounced him.

These faithful had to take refuge among the heathens in the neighbouring countries. There room had been prepared for them by God, as it was God's plan that Christ should be proclaimed and confessed even among the heathens until his coming again in glory. The New Covenant therefore embraces all nations, peoples and languages all those who believe in Jesus Christ. Christ's true Church is the carrier of the message about the fulfilment of God's promises to all nations. At the same time it proclaims his coming again in glory at the time of judgment. The Church is therefore the target of hatred and enmity in the world in the same way as Christ was and as Israel, the people of the Old Covenant, has been. It has to suffer the birth pains that Jesus speaks about in Matt. 24:8.

THE DRAGON IS HURLED DOWN FROM HEAVEN

12:7-12

Through the prophet Zechariah the Lord said to Satan: "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!" Zech. 3:2. It is Satan's tactics to entice men to sin, and then, when they have fallen into sin, he accuses them before God. He accuses them of sinfulness, which ought to be punished by God, who is righteous.

Through Christ's redemptive works, by which he redeemed for all the sins of all men, Satan has lost his right to speak before God against those, who believe and trust in Christ as their Saviour and live by this faith. The righteousness of Christ will be credited to them. Therefore Michael, the archangel, and his angels were able to throw the dragon and his angels out from heaven. There was no more any room for them.

And now there is joy in heaven: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." Thus this is said about

those who remain faithful to Christ in this world even in times of severe persecutions.

The dragon was deprived of his power to accuse those who live by faith in Christ and he was thrown down to earth. He and his angels are now even more eager to induce people to remain in unbelief, so that they should not be saved through faith. Still he tries in many ways to lure or frighten those who have found faith in Christ, in order that they should reject and deny Christ. Therefore, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

THE WOMAN IS SAVED FROM THE WRATH OF THE DRAGON

12:13-17

That the woman, Christ's true Church, had to seek refuge in the desert, has its prototype in God's actions with the people of Israel, when he brought them out of Egypt into the desert.

During their travelling through the desert many of the Israelites fell away from God and therefore never reached the promised land. So it is also among those who have received the Gospel about Jesus Christ and who through Baptism had been received into the New Covenant. But in the same way as the enemies of Israel were unable to destroy the people of Israel, so also shall the enemies of Christ be unable to destroy his Church here on earth. There will always be some who proclaim and confess Christ until he comes back for the final judgment. The woman, the true Church of Christ, is saved, but the dragon's anger is increasing more and more. He goes on to wage war against her children and persecutes all who keep God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus.

Chapter 13

THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA

(12:18), 13:1-10

The dragon stood on the shore of the sea, it is said. The sea here stands for the unruly multitudes of people. John saw a beast coming out of this sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns. These are symbols of the world powers. On each head it had a blasphemous name. In the following verse its attributes are described as those of a wild beast. It receives its power and authority from the dragon. We can remember the words of the devil when he tempted Jesus in the desert. The devil showed Jesus in an instant all the kingdoms in the world and said to him: "I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So, if you worship me, it will all be yours," Luke 4:5-8.

The beast, who is the antichrist, will accept this offer. He will thus become ruler over all the nations on earth and he will rule with all the power and authority given to him by the devil, the father of lies from the beginning, the prince of this world. This world ruler will appear towards the end of time, but is clearly emerging through the appearance of the totalitarian state. The world communism, which has

been ruling in many countries during the last century is an example of this. But also in countries with democratic rule, the tendency is clear. The state demands the right to decide over the individual from the moment of his conception until his burial. The technical evolution in our time also provides the external means for such a world rule for the first time in the history of mankind.

The antichrist is the adversary to Christ and opposed to Christ. At the same time he tries to make himself look like Christ. He claims to be the saviour of the world, but the salvation he promises is the opposite to the salvation Christ has gained for us. Christ has through his suffering gained salvation from sin for us. The antichrist, the beast, promises peace and harmony in a sinful way of life. This is what unrepentant man always has dreamt of, ever since sin came into the world. And as long as man continues to search for this false peace he remains under the power of the beast.

The beast will have a great influence over a mankind that has rejected salvation through Christ. The whole world looks in astonishment at the beast and men worships the beast. And men worship the dragon because he has given the beast such authority. The beast shall be given a mouth, by which he shall utter proud words and blasphemies against God and against all that is holy. Here we can think of the various ether media of our time. For the first time in human history a world ruler will have the means to reach all nations and languages with his propaganda; even into the homes of people all over the world.

He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them for a time. Time has been set even for the beast. It has been set to forty-two months, a symbolic number. This indicates that it is God who has set the time for the beast. We can think of the two witnesses in ch. 11:7-10, who seemed to be dead, but whom the Lord called up to heaven when his time had came. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Thess. 2:8 about "the lawless one", who will be revealed towards the end of time, "whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. Read also 2 Thess. 2:9-12.

A limit has been set for the power of the beast even in regard to those people who live in the time

when he rules on earth. In v. 8 it is said that all the inhabitants on earth shall worship the beast, "all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." In other words: none of those whose names have been written in that book will worship him. The beast shall not have any power over those of whom it is said in ch. 7, that "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." In ch. 11 it is said about them, that they worship at the altar in the temple, and they will be spared when the outer court is being destroyed and trampled by the gentiles. They do not let themselves be drawn or frightened away from Christ and his Word, but live faithfully by his mercy. That they "from the beginning have their names written in the book of life", means that it is in accordance with the counsel of God from the beginning that those who remain faithful shall be saved. Jesus also says, when talking about the tribulations of the last times: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved," Matt. 24:13.

In ch. 13:9 there is a call for attention: "He who has an ear, let him hear!" Thereafter follows a warning to the saints in v. 10: "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithful-

ness on the part of the saints." The meaning of the first sentence in v. 10 should be understood in the light of the sentence that follows. Patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints is a necessity. There is no other way to meet the powers that try to destroy the saints. This is a warning against all kinds of compromise with the enemy, either out of fear for prosecution or in order to please the authorities, whatever the reason is. This is also a reminder that Christians in this situation should resist the temptation to oppose their enemies by force (using the sword; cf. Matt. 26:52), although this may not be the primary meaning of this passage. During the tribulations that will come the situation for the saints will be extremely severe. The only two alternatives for them will be to compromise with the world and the enemies of Christ or to be ready for persecution. The main danger for a Christian is even now the temptation to compromise with the enemies of Christ and their followers, when they try to destroy his faith through deception and by other means. But salvation is possible only through Christ. Hence true Christians need to hold on firmly to this faith. Patient endurance and faithfulness are therefore necessary for them.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH

13:11-18

Then John “saw another beast, coming out of the earth.” Here the earth stands as opposite to heaven. This beast had two horns, like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. This is a personification of the false prophet. Jesus says about the false prophets, that “they come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves,” Matt. 7:15. This second beast will make the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast. People will believe in and worship the antichrist instead of Christ as their Saviour.

The beast will reach this influence over people through his fluency of speech and the signs and miracles which he performs. He will proclaim a materialistic religion of this world only, and will make all worship an image of the first beast, an image that also will be able to talk. It is the deification of man that we are told about, when man sets himself up against God and pretends to be God.

We can here also see a kind of trinity: **the dragon**, who gives power to **the beast out of the sea**, and **the beast out of the earth**, who deceives people to believe in the first beast. **This is a satanic trinity.**

The beast shall force everyone to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, where it shall be easily seen. This mark will be a name or symbol for the beast. Nobody will be allowed to buy or sell anything unless he carries this mark. Here we again meet a sign of the totalitarian state. To be excluded from it is to be left without means for survival in the world.

Regarding this number, which stands for the name of the beast, there is a call for wisdom. The number 666 is a man's number. The divine number is 7, which is the number for completeness and perfection. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve to believe that they should reach this state of perfection, if they obeyed him, Satan, instead of God. That was a lie. They achieved the opposite. They became sinful and lost their holiness and likeness to God. Fallen man can never reach the perfection of God, except by true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. When he washes his clothes and makes them white in the blood of the Lamb, he receives the seal of the Lamb and the righteousness of Christ is credited to him. He does not accept the mark or the number of the beast. Instead he has received the divine number of perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect," Jesus says in Matt. 5:48.

Chapter 14

THE LAMB AND THOSE SIGNED WITH HIS NAME

14:1-5

Again we are told about the 144,000 who have the name of the Lamb and his Father's name written on their foreheads. They are those who have washed their clothes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he who redeemed them. Therefore they are without reproach. Together with the four living creatures and the elders they sang a new song, which no one could learn except those who had been redeemed from the earth. This is the song that is mentioned in 7:10-12. Only those who themselves have received and remained in the grace and salvation through Christ can learn the contents of that song.

ADMONITION AND EXHORTATION FOR THE FAITHFUL

14:6-13

John saw an angel in midair with an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. This is the message about salvation through Jesus Christ. It is of

eternity according to God's counsel and shall remain for ever.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away," Jesus says in Matt. 24:35. This is a word of comfort for the faithful in Christ, whatever will come. Therefore the apostle can say: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. 8:38-39. Thus the glory belongs to him alone: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

To worship and give glory to created things, man included, is idolatry. This can also be described as unfaithfulness, adultery, against the true God and the one whom he sent, Jesus Christ. This has happened and is happening in mankind again and again ever since the fall of man. Man rejects the true Word of God, which he has been given for salvation and life. Instead he trusts in his own works and seeks his own glory. It is this idolatry that finds its personification in the beast, the antichrist, who comes out of the sea, the masses of a mankind, that has rejected the Gospel. "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which

made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it," Jer. 25:15. The prophet was to proclaim, what the consequences would be of the people's unfaithfulness to the Lord. But the prophet Isaiah was sent to proclaim the promise of the Lamb, God's own Son, who was to give his body and shed his blood as atonement for the sins of the world. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed," Is. 53:5. Before Jesus began his suffering, he prayed to his Father: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will," Matt. 26:39.

It was the wine of God's fury, which man had brought down upon himself through his unfaithfulness to God, that Jesus, being faithful to the will of God, went to drink on their behalf. He emptied it to the bottom, when he cried on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matt. 27:46. Being forsaken by God is the wine of fury which is the punishment and payment for sin and infidelity. Jesus drank this wine so that he instead could give us

the wine of the New Covenant, the cup of grace with his blood, which he shed for us.

Those who reject what Christ has done for them and harden themselves in unfaithfulness to God, worship the image of the beast and receive its mark, shall have to drink the wine of God's fury, as we are told in v. 9-11. They will do this in the presence of holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. Neither the angels, nor Christ can save or help those who have rejected his salvation, because there is no other way of salvation. This is why Jesus cried, when he saw how people were hardening their hearts, and he said: "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes," Luke 19:42. The condition that applies to the prophecy is valid also for the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Gospel of the grace of God and the salvation through Jesus Christ can not be proclaimed, unless God's holy wrath and judgment upon infidelity and unrighteousness are also proclaimed. If one of them is ignored, the message becomes false. The preaching is then not done in faithfulness to God but in unfaithfulness.

In this context the admonition in v. 12 finds its proper meaning: "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." Those who re-

main steadfast receive comfort and strength through the words that follow: "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes"; says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them," v. 13. Those who die having faith in Christ, before he returns for his judgment, shall, while they are waiting for the resurrection, enter into "the Sabbath-rest for the people of God," Heb. 4:9.

That their deeds will follow them, does not mean that they are saved because of them. He, who lives and dies trusting in God's grace and has faith in Jesus Christ, does not know of any other merit before God, than the merits of Christ. He does not have any works or merits of his own to refer to before God, but only what Christ had done for him and with him. And because of this Christ can do those things through him, which he wanted. Therefore his deeds will be blessed, where they were done, even when he himself has passed away. This is in accordance with the words in Psalm 84:6: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools (of blessings)."

THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH

14:14-20

John saw one who was “like a son of man” coming on a white cloud. On his head he had a golden crown. That is the crown of thorn that Christ through his death and resurrection exchanged for a crown of victory. In his hand he had a sharp sickle, and an angel, who came out of the temple, called to him in a loud voice: “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” And he, who looked like a son of man, swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. The harvest, which we here hear about, is the people who have lived by grace, having faith in Christ. They have ripened for God’s kingdom of glory in heaven. Jesus says in Matt. 25:31: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from the another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’” These do not know of anything

good they have done, but He has acted with them and through them.

In the remaining verses of this chapter, we are told about another harvest, which had ripened, but which had not ripened for the kingdom of God. It was said to another angel: "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." Then the angel did as he had been told, and he threw the grapes that had been gathered into the great winepress of God's wrath.

In Is. 5:1 ff the Lord speaks of his people Israel as his vineyard, which he had planted with the choicest vines. But when he looked for a crop of good grapes, it had yielded only bad fruit. What the Lord here says about Israel, God's own people, with whom he had once made his Covenant, and who had received his promises, is true also of the people of the New Covenant. We have got the Gospel of Christ, who is the fulfilment of the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. Those who reject the grace of God in Christ, will not ripen for his kingdom, but for the winepress of his wrath.

It is said in v. 20, that when the grapes were trampled outside the city, blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. This number is symbolic; to try to find the secret meaning of this number seems futile. Perhaps it will one day be revealed to us. Until then we should let it stand as a symbol for all the immeasurable quantities of human blood that has been shed on earth through the ages. When Jesus speaks about the danger of rejecting God's grace and mercy, which he has offered to us through his Word, he refers to the blood that has been shed on earth because of his Word. He then says: "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of the righteous Abel," Matt. 23:35.

In order to atone for our unrighteousness Christ, the Righteous, has shed his blood, but over those that reject his atonement, his blood will bring judgment. It was this judgment the Jews and their leaders brought down over themselves, when they said: "Let his blood be on us and on our children," Matt. 27:25. The same do all who reject the redemption of Christ. For them his precious blood is shed in vain, and by their unbelief and sin they thus caused this upon themselves.

Chapter 15

THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB

15:1-4

"And I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed." Thus John begins the fifteenth chapter of his book. The great and marvellous in this vision is, that with this God's wrath is completed. Thereafter he saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. This is a picture of the glory in heaven. We have met this picture already in ch. 4:6.

Standing by the sea John saw those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They were singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. In Exod. 15:1 ff we find the song of praise to the Lord, which Moses and the children of Israel were singing, when they had passed through the Red Sea. They sang it after having been saved by God in such a marvellous way from their slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh. This has a symbolic meaning and points forward to our salvation from slavery under our spiritual enemies, which God has prepared for us through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Those who have accepted this salva-

tion praise him and give him glory, as we have seen several times before in this book of Revelation.

THE SEVEN GOLDEN BOWLS WITH GOD'S WRATH

15:5-8

Then the temple in heaven, the tabernacle of Testimony, was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. The angels were dressed in clean, shining linen. This is the gown of God's righteousness. The wrath of God over the unrighteousness of man was to be revealed through the plagues that were to come over the unfaithful. This was now to happen, when the seven angels were to pour out over the earth the bowls of God's wrath, that one of the four living creatures gave them.

The judgment over unrighteousness and thereby over all who have rejected the Gospel, which offers the righteousness of Christ, was now to be completed. God lives and is the same for ever and ever. His just judgment can not be made null and void. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, nobody could enter into the temple until the seven plagues were completed. Now God revealed his power, not through grace, but through his wrath.

Chapter 16

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH ARE POURED OUT

16:1-21

These bowls of wrath are the third series of seven plagues each, which the Lord lets fall on those who rejected his truth and grace. There is an increase in austerity each time a new plague starts. When the seven seals were opened, one quarter of the earth was devastated. When the seven trumpets were sounded, one third of the earth was stricken. Now all was to be destroyed. The whole sea was to be turned into blood, as well as the rivers and springs. Ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.

Then John heard the angel in charge of the water explain why the Lord let these plagues come: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." Here we can think of what was said in our comments to 14:20.

Those who have hardened themselves against the grace of God and against the truth, and who have put themselves under the power of the beast, they will harden themselves even further, when God's wrath is revealed. When the sun was given power to scorch people with fire, they cursed the name of God. "They refused to repent and glorify him". To glorify God means to admit that he is just and righteous in his judgment, when it falls on oneself. The one who admits this, so that he turns his heart to God and truly acknowledges Christ as his Saviour, he glorifies God. But this is what those who had received the mark of the beast did not do.

When the fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, so that his kingdom plunged into darkness, those people gnawed their tongues in agony. "But they refused to repent of what they had done." Instead they cursed God because of their pain and their sores. This is how hardening of the heart shows itself.

The sixth angle poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates so that its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East. Then three evil spirits came out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They looked like frogs. These are the propagandists of lie. They go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. The mighty leaders of this world, who have received the mark of the beast, serve him. Until the end they remain dazzled by the lie that comes from the dragon, the old serpent, and harden themselves against the truth that comes from God. And so they believe that they together shall be able to defeat Almighty God and make his judgments fail.

Here a reminder is being pronounced (v. 15) for those who want to remain faithful to the Lord. They are reminded of the need to be watchful and to keep their clothes of righteousness, given to them in baptism, in order that they should not loose it and be found without it when the time for judgment comes. The content of this verse corresponds to what Jesus says in Matt. 24:42-44.

The evil spirits gathered the kings of the whole world together to a place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (v. 16). In Judges 5:19-20 we are told that the kings of Canaan fought against the Israelites by the waters of Megiddo. Megiddo itself is situated on a hill and it is this hill that is called Har Megiddo, the hill of Megiddo. In Judges we read: "From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera." It was God who according to his promise gave his people the victory over their enemies, who tried to hinder them from taking possession of the country he had promised them.

God shall in the same manner on the day of judgment reveal his power to give his faithful the victory over their enemies; those who tried to hinder them from reaching the kingdom of heaven, which has been prepared for them.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, which all created beings depend on for their lives. Now a voice from the throne said: "It is done!" Thus the last of the plagues, that were to occur upon the earth before judgment, were set free. These are described in the remaining verses of this chapter, v. 18-21.

Chapter 17

THE WOMAN ON THE BEAST

The great prostitute

17:1-6

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls said to John: "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters." When it is said about this woman, that she sits on many waters, this, as we have seen before, signifies great multitudes of people. It is further said that the rulers of the earth committed adultery with her and that the inhabitants of the earth have been intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. She was sitting on a scarlet beast, which we recognise from ch.13:1. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. On her forehead a name was written: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." She was drunk with the blood of the saints.

Different opinions have been put forward as to what this woman symbolises. Some think that she signifies the great city of the world with its ungodli-

ness. She even had the name "The Great Babylon" written on her forehead. During the Old Testament times Babylon was often signifying the great gentile city. And in the Bible a woman often stands as a symbol for the People of God or the Church. In this way we have met the word in ch. 12, signifying the true Church of Christ. But even the fallen people of the Old Covenant are presented under the picture of a woman. In Jer. 18:13 the Lord says: "A most horrible thing has been done by Virgin Israel." And in Ezek. 16, where the Lord rebukes his people for involving themselves in the idol worship of their heathen neighbours, he says in v. 15: "You trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute."

Prostitution or fornication signify in the Bible unfaithfulness against God by those who have known him. That is to say it does not refer to the gentiles, who do not know God. This shows that the great prostitute signifies the secularised christianity, which instead of keeping firmly to the Word of God and remaining faithful to him, accommodates itself to this world, seeking its support and approval. In this way christianity becomes a seducer of people instead of leading them to Christ. She is "the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth."

John says, that he was greatly astonished, when he saw the woman. Yes, he had reason to be astonished.

How could those who had received the true Word of God, which reveals the salvation through Jesus Christ, be so unfaithful as to join company with those who reject both God and his Word and let themselves at the end of time be carried by the beast, the antichrist. But this has become true even before our eyes.

FURTHER EXPLANATION ABOUT THE PROSTITUTE AND THE BEAST

17:7-14

The angel said to John: "I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides." Then it is said, that all who do not have their names written in the book of life, i.e. even those who are Christian by name but who's hearts are unrepentant, will be astonished, when they see the beast, "because he once was, now is not, and yet will come." The antichrist appeared in open persecution of Christ's followers in the early Church, until Christianity began to be recognized by nations and states. Thereafter followed a time, when it seemed as if he was no more, although his spirit was always there working among people. Towards the end of time he shall again appear out of the sea, as it is said in ch. 13:1, i.e. out of the multitudes of people. Here in v. 8 it is said

that he will come “out of the Abyss.” It is from the Abyss he receives his power.

The beast will be represented by rulers, who here are called kings, and their kingdoms, which are called horns. They will be of the same mind as the beast and give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb and his called, chosen and faithful followers will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Lord Christ has crushed the head of the serpent. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Thess. 2:8 about “the lawless one”, who will be revealed and “whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming.”

THE GREAT PROSTITUTE IS BEING DESTROYED

17:15-18

It is said about the great prostitute that the waters where the prostitute sits “are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages,” i.e. the peoples of the world. Where the Word of God has been proclaimed, there also apostasy will occur. This means that the majority of the people will adopt a kind of christianity that has been accommodated to the world and to unbelief. They will choose themselves preachers and leaders to suit their expectations. The apostle Paul writes

about this in 2 Tim. 4:3-4: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." This is how the prostitute symbolises the accommodated christianity, whose representatives in this way seek praise and support among people and privileges from those who have power.

We are told that those, who together with the representatives of a false christianity have acted in unfaithfulness towards the Lord, are the ones who will destroy the church and the christianity they represent. "The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled."

When the time which the Lord has set for this has come, he will put it into the hearts of the beast and the ten horns - the very ones that christianity will have accommodated itself to - to fulfil their task of bringing the prostitute, the accommodated church, to ruin and to destroy her. They will then hand over their power to rule to the beast, the antichrist, to rule over them until God's Word has been fulfilled. This is in accordance with the Words of Jesus about the salt that has lost its saltiness. The Lord does not give to his faithful the task of destroying the apostate church. He leaves to the godless world, whose support the false church relied on, to do this. Here we can remember what was said in ch. 11 about the outer court of the temple, which was to be given to the gentiles to trample for a set time. This is what happens to those who put themselves under the tempter's rule, they destroy each other and will themselves at the end be destroyed. The prophet Isaiah writes: "Woe to you, O destroyer, you who have not been destroyed! Woe to you, O traitor, you who have not been betrayed! When you stop destroying, you will be destroyed; when you stop betraying, you will be betrayed," Is. 33:1.

The destroyer from the beginning and those who serve him will be allowed to do their work "until God's Words are fulfilled." In this God's power, truthfulness and justice are revealed for those who let themselves be enlightened by his Word and walk in its light.

The Lord demands from his faithful that they should remain near the altar, which means standing firmly by the Word of God, even when others abandon it. He also expects them to make proper use of the Sacraments, even when others misuse them or do not use them at all. He wants them to worship him by heart and in truth, even when others only pay lip-service to him. In this way the faithful will be kept from sharing in the sins of the prostitute.

Jesus speaks in Matt. 24:10 ff of the difficult times that will come for the faithful towards the end of time. Then many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of most will then grow cold. I v. 13 he then says: "But he who stands firm to the end will be saved." This does not mean that man saves himself through his steadfastness. Only the Lord has the power to save, and he saves those who stand firm.

Chapter 18

THE FALL OF BABYLON

18:1-8

Again another angel comes down from heaven. He has great authority, so that the earth is illuminated by his splendour. His message is the same as the one that was mentioned already in 14:8, which is now repeated.

Now the fall of the great city became visible for John. No more respite is given. The angel explains why the great city has to fall. "She has become a home for demons and a haunt for evil spirits," (v. 2). We can see that the description of the prostitute in ch. 17 is very similar to that of Babylon the great. At least they have many things in common. This is a confirmation of what is said in 17:5 about the woman on the beast, the great prostitute. The title on her forehead was: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the prostitutes and of all the abominations of the earth." She has the characteristics of both the secularised church, as described before, and of a corrupt civilisation that had taken the place of God among mankind so that there was no more any room for God or for worshipping and serving him.

MOURNING ON THE EARTH OVER THE FALL OF BABYLON

18:9-19

We are now told how those who had made use of the secularised church for their own purposes will weep and mourn over her destruction. It is the rulers of the world, here called kings, who shall mourn in this way. Others who are mentioned are the merchants of the earth, who had run their businesses everywhere and acquired riches and progress through her in this world. Through spiritual and material bargaining they have made use of the church in order to gain privileges, fame and influence in the world. They have done this by infiltrating into the church and confiscating her organization and her institutions in order to use them for their political and material purposes. Jesus' words in Matt. 21:13 can be applied to them: "It is written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers'."

Jesus drove away all who were buying and selling in the temple area, we are told. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. He will do the same to the church that has accommodated itself to the world, before his second coming to the earth. And then there will be lamentation and moaning among both spiritual and worldly traders who made use of the church in this way. All what they were striving to gain by their hawking is being lost. And when they at the judgment will try to claim that they were labouring in Jesus' name, he shall answer them, saying: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers," Matt. 7:23.

JOY IN HEAVEN OVER THE FALL OF BABYLON

18:20-24

"Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."

Now the Lord has revealed the truth in his Word, the truth that the accommodated church, its leaders and adherents, had denied in their preaching and in their activities, here called magic spell, which was leading many people astray. Now all this that seemed so great and strong in the world, which the multitudes of people trusted in, will be wiped out just as a stone that is thrown into the depth of the sea. This is what the saints have been praying for: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 6:10. When this happens there will be lamentation among those who have rejected and denied the truth of the Word of God. In heaven on the other hand there will be joy and song of praise to God among his angels and all who have been saved. Those who receive the saving truth mourn when the truth of salvation is rejected and despised by men. But they rejoice and praise the Lord, when its victory is revealed.

Chapter 19

THE HEAVENLY SONG OF PRAISE

19:1-10

John heard singing in heaven! “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting.” This was a song of praise to God for his just judgments. The song came from a great multitude in heaven and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures joined in the singing. The great prostitute had by adapting to this world and unbelief denied the truth of the Word of God and his righteousness. Thereby the Word of God had been blasphemed, even when they with their mouths were singing songs of praise and shouting “Lord, Lord.” God himself says through his prophet Isaiah: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men,” Is. 29:13. These words are quoted also by Jesus in Matt. 15:8-9. Now this false church had been overturned from its influence and position by those whom it had tried to please and committed adultery with. And they were the ones that had to carry out the sentence on her.

Those who live in unrighteousness destroy themselves and each other, when they for some time have made use of each other in their wickedness. In all this God's justice and truth are revealed. Therefore an exhortation comes from the throne to all his servants, urging them to praise God. The response to this exhortation was heard in a song that sounded like the roar of rushing waters: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!" God had revealed his power.

Now is the time for the wedding supper of the Lamb, when his bride, his faithful Church, that is those who have remained faithful to him, shall come forward, dressed in fine linen, bright and clean, v. 8: "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear." This is the righteousness of the saints, which they have been dressed in through faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb that was slain. John was told: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" This invitation is by grace alone, and with the invitation follows the wedding robe. In baptism we are dressed in this robe. To be dressed in this robe here on earth means to live by the forgiveness of sins day by day through faith in Jesus Christ. This is to wash one's robe and make it white in the blood of the Lamb. This robe is sufficient both in this life and in the life to come. But he who has received it may despise it and not want to

wear it, trying to sparkle in clothes of his own instead. This is a self-righteousness that manifests itself as hypocrisy or open denial of God. In Matt. 22 Jesus tells us the parable of the wedding banquet, to which all had been invited, without regard of person. But when the king who sent out the invitation came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. When the man was asked how he could get in without wedding clothes, he could not answer. He was then thrown outside into the darkness. At the judgment our own righteousness is useless and there is no excuse to be found for the one who has thrown away the robe he had been given, that had come with the invitation. That robe is given by grace, free, without our own merit.

John fell to his feet, ready to worship the angel who had told him these things. But the angel said: "Do not do it!" The messenger is not to be worshipped, even if he is an angel. An honest messenger of God does not seek his own honor but the glory of God. He does not want to draw people to himself, but wants to lead them to God and the one whom he sent, Jesus Christ. This also shows us how wrong it is with all kinds of worship and adoration of the saints.

THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

19:11-16

In ch. 6:2 we were told about the rider, on the white horse, who rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. We found that it was the Word of God, which in a victorious manner should spread over the whole world before the end comes.

Now we again read about a white horse. The name of the rider who sat on it was Faithful and True. This is how he got to be known by those who received him. His eyes were like blazing fire, which is said here about Christ, v. 12. On his head are many crowns, which are signs of his many victories. The Gospel, which has spread over the world, has brought salvation to those who accepted it and believed in Jesus Christ. Every one who remains in this faith means a victory over the destroyer and his kingdom and a victory for the kingdom of Christ.

It is said in v. 12 that he has a name written on him, that no one but he himself knows. In Exodus 3:13-14 we are told that when Moses asked God about his name, God said to him: "I am who I am." And God also said: "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'." When Jesus in various connections says: "I AM," then this means that he is the one who spoke to Moses. He is the Lord, A and O, the beginning and the end. God's

real name, his secret being, can not be expressed by a name that is known by man. He has from the very beginning revealed himself to man through his Word.

In v. 13 it is said about the rider on the white horse that his name is "the Word of God". Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He is "the Word (who) became flesh and lived for a while among us," John 1:14. He is the one who has conquered the powers of destruction and who thereafter, after his resurrection from the dead, could send out his apostles with these words: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Matt. 28:18-19. And although he was taken up to heaven before their very eyes, he could give them and the faithful of all times this promise: "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." He is present through his Word, where it is preached clearly and in purity, as he has given it to us in holy Scripture. And he is present through his Sacraments, when they are used in accordance with his institution. When he thus is being received, he gives victory over the powers of destruction.

Here in v. 13-16 we are told how John saw Christ coming for the judgment at the end of time. Then he shall come followed by the armies of heaven, which he speaks about on several occasions in the Gospels.

Especially known is Matt. 25:31-46. Out of his mouth came a sharp sword with which he was to strike down the nations. And he was to rule them with an iron sceptre. The sharp sword, mentioned also in ch. 1:16, is the Word of God. Every one has to bow down before the judgment of the Word of God, which is the Word of truth. Those who do not do this in time, when grace and salvation are offered to them, will have to do it in the judgment at the end of time, when no more time will be and grace no further will be offered. Jesus says in John 12:48:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my Words; the very Word which I have spoken will condemn him at the last day.” This is “the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty”, which is mentioned also in 14:19-20, and here in v. 15.

On his robe the rider on the white horse had the name “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” In Deut. 10:17 it is written, that “the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.” He alone is worthy to be feared. Others have power to destroy those who remain under their influence and power. The Lord alone has the power to save those from destruction who remain faithful to him.

JUDGMENT OVER THE BEAST AND THOSE WHO HAD RECEIVED HIS MARK

19:17-21

Here a picture is drawn of a war, where the vultures are gathering over the battlefield after the fight, in order to eat the corpses of those that have fallen. This picture tells us about the final spiritual fight between Christ and his followers on the one side and the antichrist and his followers, who have received his mark, together with the false prophet on the other. The beast and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This lake is also mentioned in 14:10 and 20:10. This is the eternal fire, of which Jesus says in Matt. 25:41 that it has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Those who have received the mark of the beast and have worshipped his image will be “killed” by the sword that comes out of the mouth of the rider on the white horse. They will be judged by his Word, which they rejected, when it offered them salvation.

Chapter 20

SATAN ARRESTED FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

20:1-3

Now John saw an angel coming down out of heaven. He had the key to the Abyss and was holding a great chain in his hand. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him for a thousand years, so that he should not be deceiving the nations any more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he shall be set free for a short time, before the last judgment comes.

Earlier the angels of the Lord had thrown him out of heaven down to the earth, as mentioned in 12:9,12. Here on earth Satan has been trying to destroy people by tempting them to apostasy from God and unbelief towards Jesus Christ, their Saviour. When the time he has been given on earth is coming to an end he will be sent to the Abyss, where he belongs.

THE THOUSAND YEARS

20:4-6

When the devil had been imprisoned John saw the souls of those who had remained faithful to Christ even during the difficult times of persecution. They had not received the mark of the beast and had not worshipped his image. They had let themselves be killed for the sake of the Word of God and the testimony about Jesus, rather than to deny his name. Now they came to life in order to reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Many different interpretations regarding the meaning of this passage have been put forward within Christianity. During the times of persecution of the first centuries after Christ many thought that the millennium would come as a time when the persecutions would cease and the Christians would rule the world. When then the Roman emperor Constantine not only recognized the Christian church and allowed it to work freely within his empire, but also raised Christianity to the status of the official religion of his empire (state religion), then many believed that the millennium had come. This opinion was even held by such a famous man in the church as St Augustine. Even Martin Luther and the reformers seem to have held this view.

Another thought is that the Kingdom of God is to be realized in this world through human development and progress. Here Luther's separation between spiritual and secular government has been lost. One way of thinking that stems from this view is the teachings of Marx, where man consistently has been put in God's place as the one who is to create the kingdom of peace. These teachings stand in direct opposition to what Christ is teaching us. He says: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well," Matt. 6:33. The Marxist-Leninist, materialistic doctrines instead say: seek only that what belongs to this world, then you need neither God, nor his righteousness. These teachings clearly carry the marks of the antichrist and prepare the way in the world for the rule of the last antichrist. That these teachings sometimes are being presented as Christian in essence only confirms what we here have said about them.

If we read what really is said in the book of Revelation about the millennium, then it is obvious that it is a prophecy that has still not been fulfilled. It is further obvious that it does not come through human efforts or through the actions of worldly rulers. Instead it is so, that the more self-important man becomes, the more room will there be for the powers of destruction to interfere. The Word of God tells us this and it is happening even before our own eyes, we

who now live on earth. But God has set a limit for this in this aeon. When that limit has been reached he will act according to his plan. Then those who seemed and believed themselves to have the power in this world will be robbed of all their might. The state-beast, who put himself in God's stead, and the false prophet - the secularized church - shall be thrown into the fiery lake; and the old serpent - Satan - whom they both have served, will be bound in the Abyss.

The details about the situation that will prevail thereafter on earth are, as can be seen, very scarce. That the faithful are again said to be alive and ruling with Christ on earth, seems to indicate that the Word of God will be making headway without resistance from Satan, who now is bound. Many things indicate that the hardening of hearts, which the apostle Paul speaks about in Rom. 11, now will end.

This hardening of heart has struck those of Israel, who rejected Christ. In Rom. 11:25-26 the apostle writes: "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." In the same way he also writes in 2 Cor. 3:14-16: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the Old Covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ it is taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is

taken away.” The people of Israel has through the Scriptures of the Old Covenant received the knowledge of the salvation through Christ, but they are not able to see its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. When the veil will be removed, as it was for the apostle Paul himself, then this people shall confess and proclaim Jesus, that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

SATAN IS RELEASED FOR THE LAST TIME

20:7-10

After a thousand years Satan will again be released from his prison. But he has not changed. He remains the same traitor and will again go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth. Now he will gather all those who let themselves be led astray for battle against “the camp of God’s people, the city he loves,” which means those who have remained faithful to him.

In Ezek. 38 “Gogh of the land of Magog” is mentioned as an enemy of the people of Israel. It is said there in v. 18: “When Gogh attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Lord.” And in v. 23: “And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” This will happen on the last day. The devil

and those who let themselves be led astray by him will be hindered in their intentions through the intervention by God. Fire shall come down from heaven and devour them. The cup has now been filled even for the devil. He will be thrown into the fiery lake, where he together with the beast and the false prophet shall remain for ever and ever.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

20:11-15

Time has now come to an end for the earth and all that belongs to it and for this age. Earth and sky fled for the presence of him who was seated on the throne, and before him are gathered all mankind from Adam onwards. Books are being opened, one of them is the book of life.

Those who have their names written in this book, the book of life, are those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. These will now be told to enter into the kingdom that has been prepared for them from the beginning of the world, as Jesus says in Matt. 25:34. Those whose names are not written in the book of life are those who rejected the grace and salvation in Jesus Christ in their lifetime. They will then be thrown into the lake of fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels, in accordance with the words of Jesus in Matt. 25:41.

Chapter 21

THE NEW JERUSALEM

21:1-6

The Lord said through his prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind," Is. 65:17.

And the apostle Peter writes: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness," 2 Pet. 3:13. In a prophetic vision John saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. He also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, from God. This is Christ's true Church. It is the opposite to the secularized and thereby also false church or Christianity that was mentioned in ch. 17, and which there was called "the great prostitute" or "the great Babylon".

In Heb. 11:10 we are told about Abraham, that "he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". The faithful of the Lord of both the Old and the New Covenant have this expectation in common. John saw its fulfilment when he saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down prepared as a bride beautifully dressed

for her husband. This is Christ's faithful Church in its perfection, where all things which belonged to the earthly imperfection and tribulations had passed away. He who sat on the throne said: "I am making everything new!"

He who speaks thus is the same as he who said through the prophet Isaiah: "See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" Is. 43:19. The new creation begins here on earth in God's kingdom of grace in those who are born again to life in Christ. This comes about through the proper use of the means of grace. This new life will come to fulfilment in God's kingdom of glory in heaven.

The Words of the Lord are trustworthy and true, because he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Therefore what he has said is valid not only for time on earth but also for eternity. To him who is thirsty he will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. It is totally free, by grace alone. He says through the prophet: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" Is. 55:1. Jesus says in Matt. 5:6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

THE SEPARATION

21:7-8

We are here told about the separation, which finally takes place at the judgment. Those who overcome are those who find faith in Christ and remain faithful to him. They become children of God and thereby share in his glory as an eternal inheritance. The cowardly and unfaithful are those who have abandoned the Word of God and rejected his grace and the truth in order to accommodate themselves to the world and who serve the idols of the world. They will be made to share in the lake of burning fire and sulphur, together with the prince of this world. This is the final separation from God.

THE BRIDE - THE HOLY CITY

21:9-17

One of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues said to John that he was going to show him "the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Here we can remember that, according to ch. 17:1 it was one of these angels who showed John the great prostitute. In both cases a city is also mentioned. In ch. 17 it is "Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth."

Here it is "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." The city has twelve gates, the twelve tribes of Israel. We remember what was said earlier about this number, twelve. It refers to the whole, the complete and perfect. Here it means the true Israel, the Lord's faithful in the Old and the New Covenant.

The twelve corner stones with the names of the twelve apostles, indicate that the doctrine, that through them was handed down to us, is the foundation of the true Church of Christ in this world. The same Church will be the Church Triumphant in the time to come, eternity. The apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone," Eph. 2:19-20.

The twelve gates were equally spaced in the direction of the four quarters of the wind: three gates on the west, three on the north etc. All nations on earth will be called into this City, and all who respond to this call and become faithful followers of Christ will enter therein.

In v. 15-17 we are told that the city was measured with a measuring rod of gold. In 11:1-2 we are told that the temple and the altar were to be measured and that those who worship at the altar were to be counted. We were then told that the outer court was left aside, and was not measured, as it was to be left to be trampled by the gentiles. Those who worship at the altar are the believers who hold on to Christ and his sacrifice for the sins of the world. Those who remain at the outer court are the unbelievers. The faithful are in this world a struggling and suffering Church. Now we are told about the victorious and triumphant Church in eternity. Its measurements are twelve thousand stadia, its length and width and height were the same.

By this measurement it is said, as we have found before, about the meaning of this number, twelve, that it stands for completeness and perfection. It can also be said that the inner sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem was a room with a cubicle form, 1 Kings 6:20.

THE EXPENSIVE BUILDING MATERIAL

21:18-21

The building material of which the city was made consisted of precious stones and pure gold. This signifies the costliness, purity and glory of the holy city, which stands for those who have been saved. Like precious stones they are mutually different, but are equally precious. They were redeemed from the power of sin, death and devil by the atoning power of the precious blood of Christ, the blood of the Lamb that was slain. They have washed their clothes and made them white in his blood.

THE ALMIGHTY GOD AND THE LAMB ARE ITS TEMPLE

21:22-27

Here on earth we need temples, buildings set aside for sacred use, where the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered and people can gather for worship and prayer.

In the perfect life with God there is nothing unclean, nothing that separates the saints from him. All such things that had separated them from God have been thrown into the burning lake. There no gates need to be closed. There God and the Lamb are in the midst of them, face to face with them. Neither is there need of any sun nor moon, because the glory of God and of the Lamb shines for them and gives them light. Earthly rulers have no authority there.

The people who are found there are those whose names had been written in the book of life, the book of the Lamb through the new birth. They have remained faithful in their worship "at the altar", even when "the outer courts" were trampled by the gentiles and the faithful were oppressed in the world. They have not received the mark of the beast, but have kept the seal of the Lamb that was slain, even when it brought contempt and persecution from the side of the secularized church. These are the ones who have remained steadfast unto the end and of whom Jesus says that they shall be saved.

Chapter 22

THE RESTORED STATE OF PARADISE

22:1-5

John saw the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It was flowing down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Here is the state of man in Paradise, as it once was before the fall, which we are told about in Gen. 2:9. This state was destroyed through the fall of man according to Gen. 3:23. Through sin man was cut off from access to the tree of life and exiled from Paradise. But now it has been restored. The Lord has allowed the water of life to flow on, so that those who wanted to receive it should get it in this life by grace and through the means of grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments.

A sign and a promise of the restoration of this state, for those who receive it, was the temple stream in Jerusalem, about which the prophet Ezekiel says in Ezek.47:12: "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on the banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor

will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." These words got their first fulfilment through Jesus Christ, who says: "Whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life," John 4:14. The final fulfilment of the Words of Jesus takes place in the glorious life in heaven, where the blessed shall have direct access to the fruit of the tree of life.

No longer will there be any curse, because there will be no sin, through which the curse came. Those who served the Lord in faith and steadfastness during their life under tribulations and imperfection shall here serve him perfectly face to face. And they shall rule for ever and ever. Those who serve God do his will, and thereby they share in his power.

CONCLUSION

22:6-21

Verses 6 and 7 connect to what was said in the beginning of ch. 1. In v. 8-9 we find a repetition of what was said in 19:10 about not worshipping anything else but God. In v. 10 John is told not to seal up, i. e. not to hide the Words of the prophecy of this book, "because the time is near."

The prophet Daniel too received revelations referring to the end of time. He was told: "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end," Dan. 12:9. The end of the time began when the redemptive work of Christ had been completed and he had ascended into heaven. Then the apostles were told: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven," Acts 1:11. The faithful believers in Christ must live in this world awaiting the end of time, when Christ shall come back for the judgment, as he himself has said in Matt.25:31-46.

The revelations, which John received in order to write them down in a symbolic language, will be fulfilled during the time before the return of Christ. They were given to his faithful, so that they should be able to see and recognise the things that take place before Christ's return. They need to recognise the powers that battle over and within man - Christ, the Saviour, and Satan, the destroyer. The battle that has been described for us is a battle that involves all nations, peoples, states and individuals until the end of time. These prophecies are not to be hidden under any seal, because their fulfilment has already begun.

In Dan. 12:10 it is said: "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will under-

stand, but those who are wise will understand.” The wicked, those who do not let themselves become enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, are guided only by their own minds. This is the reason why they do not see or understand the things that have been told here, even those that take place before their own eyes.

Therefore it is said in ch. 22:11: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile.” On the other hand, the one who listens to the Word of God, who communicates with God in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide him, he will also understand what has been written in this book. “Let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.”

Verses 12-15 again point to the unavoidable final separation between the righteous and the unrighteous. He who speaks is the “the Root of Jesse”, i.e. the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He is “the Alpha and the Omega,” the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Therefore all what he says in his Word remains valid. For the same reason any addition to his Word and any deduction from it brings disaster over man, because it leads men astray, away from the truth and thereby from God. He who testifies to these things says: “Yes, I am coming soon.” To this his faithful of all times answer: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”