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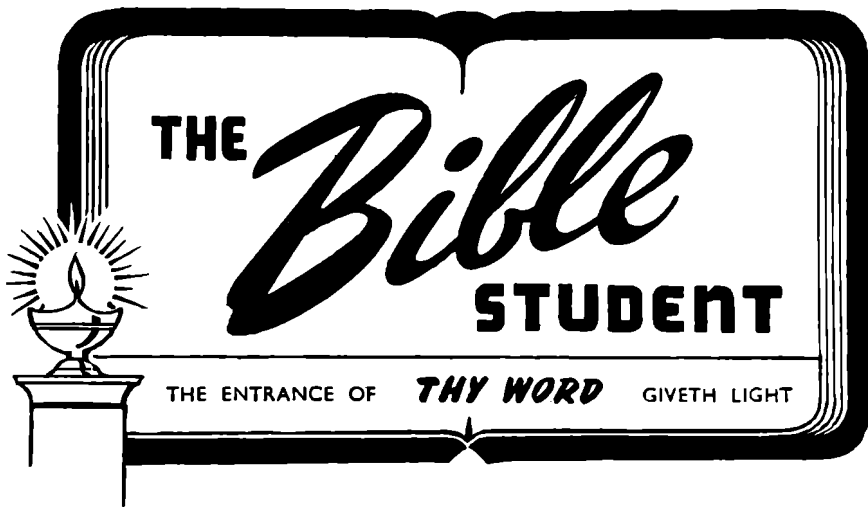
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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

in the last verse, 'The Lord that made heaven and earth shall bless thee out of Zion'. It is the psalm that anticipates the blessing of the coming Millennial day when the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing on His wings. Then Zion will be the centre from which Israel, and through Israel the whole habitable earth, will be blessed in that day when the purpose of God to head up all things in Christ will be fulfilled and He sets His King upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6). As Joel predicted, deliverance will come in Zion, and again the holy mountain will be the literal dwelling-place of Jehovah on earth.

But, before the terrestrial Zion is restored to its exalted position and becomes again 'the city of the great King', the Lamb of God, the Redeemer, will stand with a blameless, guileless company of His redeemed, the firstfruits to God and the Lamb, on the celestial Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1). These will form a part of the true Israel of God and be eternally associated with the King in His heavenly kingdom. How reassuring, then, and full of promise are the words, 'Ye are come to Mount Sion'!

## THE APOKALYPTIC LETTERS

(Revelation, chs. 2 and 3)

E. W. ROGERS

There are three ways in which these letters may be read to profit.

First, *historically*, as communications to churches which actually existed at the time when they were penned, relating to things which then concerned them.

Secondly, as a *prophetic outline* of the course of Christendom from its inception until its final rejection.

Thirdly, as a *message for the present time* in which all the conditions envisaged exist concurrently and are found here and there in different places today.

In the permissive providence of God, errors sprang up early in the church's history. This was not altogether bad, for it afforded

occasion for the Apostles, inspired by God's Spirit, to deal authoritatively with them for the permanent benefit of all believers of later times. Moreover, varying conditions and circumstances arose and these also caused the Apostles to write their letters. It is of the utmost importance to the student of Scripture, therefore, to read the Epistles in the light of the background which gave rise to them. These letters have, in the goodness of God, been preserved to us, and as the centuries have rolled by, it has become apparent that all of them have an ever-living message for all the people of God at all times, although as particular things predominantly characterised particular times, some letters were of more especial pertinancy than others for the then time being.

Thus, in apostolic days and soon after, the *Ephesian letter*, written by John would have been most appropriate. As persecutions later arose in the Diocletian era, the *Smyrna letter* would have been a source of special comfort. Then, in the easier-going days inaugurated under Constantine who adopted Christianity and 'married' the professing church to the State, the *Pergamos letter* would press its warnings. And, as time rolled on, and darkness settled down upon the scene, with the Roman corrupted church in such oppressive power, what a cheer to the faithful remnant the *Thyatiran letter* would have been. Further, who can fail to see the relevancy of the *Sardis letter* to the imperfect and dead Protestantism that arose consequent upon the Reformation? Thank God that from the midst of the surrounding deadness there sprang the Wesleys, Whitefields and others of evangelistic zeal who stirred the world: a *Philadelphian* door was opened and no one could shut it till He Who alone had power to do so saw that the time was ripe therefor. Those days have passed and no one enlightened by God or His Word can fail to perceive that we are today in the *Laodicean* condition which so soon is to be broken into by the Trumpet sound, calling away the believers to meet the Lord in the air (Rev. 4:1).

Thus the letters may be read *prophetically* as outlining Christendom. 'Christendom' be it noted: here is not given the history of the 'Church which is the body of Christ'. That is in the midst of Christendom but Christendom is a wider thing. Christendom

embodies the true and the false: wheat and tares: good and evil: the mass and the remnant. It is the 'Kingdom of the heavens' of which Matthew speaks. It embraces the 'overcomers' and the others. But only the truly regenerate are in the Body of Christ: Christendom has both regenerate and unregenerate.

These letters may also be read as *depicting conditions co-existing in our own times*. We have but to look into our own hearts to discover the cause of the first complaint. How easy it is to leave one's first love and be in an Ephesian state. We have merely to look around and see what is happening in some parts of the world to know that Smyrna conditions are abroad today. 'State churches' show that the Pergamos condition has not passed with the progress of time. Corrupt Rome, oppressing so many peoples, is truly Thyatiran. And so we could go through all the letters. We must not over-emphasize the prophetic view to the exclusion of the practical: we must not pay attention to the Laodicean letter to the exclusion of hearkening to the message in each of the others.

These epistles should be read in the light of what John saw as recorded in Revelation ch. 1. He saw One whose 'countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength'. He was the 'Son of Man', the Lord Jesus in judicial capacity, walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Those lampstands represent seven churches set by God as a light in immediate darkness. There are also the 'seven stars' which, we are told, represent seven angels. Much has been conjectured concerning these 'angels'. Were they individuals who took the letters to the various churches? That is, were they merely 'messengers'? Perhaps so, assuming that each belonged to, and represented, the respective churches. Were they the responsible guides in these assemblies? In the light of Heb. 13:13 and 1 John 2:28 this may well be, for clearly the condition of the church reflects either favourably or otherwise upon the 'angel'. Or, do they depict spirit beings: that just as each nation has its 'prince' in the spirit realm (Daniel 10) so each church has its 'angel' in the same sphere? Perhaps so. This suggestion has at least this in its favour, that we are able to avoid interpreting a symbol by a symbol. Or, does it designate the

'spirit' or 'character' of each church? One thing is clear that, whatever interpretation we accept it should agree with the tenor of the rest of Scripture and not be made a pretext to justify the superintending control of one man in one church.

God often employs angels when things are not right: when sin has come in between His people and Himself. He cannot then deal with them directly but only through intermediaries. Sin always creates distance. This may explain why the communications were sent to the 'angel' though it has to be admitted the employment of an angel does not invariably denote distance. The problem of the 'angel' is not easily solved.

Observe, John sees the *sun*, *stars*, and *lampstands* (not, be it noted, 'candlesticks,' which consume themselves by use, but 'lampstands' which are dependent upon an external supply of oil for light), but he makes no reference to the *moon*. Why? The moon signifies Israel, and the present dispensation is characterized by the setting aside, of Israel hence its absence here. Later there will come, first, the 'time of the new moon', and then of 'the full moon', when God will resume His dealings with His earthly people and Israel will be nationally restored and reinstated in her land as head of the Gentile nations. But now she is 'Lo-Ammi', 'Lo-Ruhamah'; she has no king nor prince, obelisk or teraphim, no ephod nor priest (see Hosea, chs. 1 and 3). She is buried in 'the dust' of the Gentiles and is nationally 'dead' (Daniel 12 and Ezekiel 37). It is not God's way to deal at one and the same time with the Church and Israel, though at the commencement of the Church, God for a little held out an offer to Israel. The church is a heavenly body; Israel has to do with the earthly sphere.

While captive in Babylon, Daniel was given an outline of the history of Gentile civilization and its bearing upon the Jew. Likewise, while captive in Patmos, John was given an outline of the history of Christendom and its bearing upon the church. Each has, up to the present time, been fulfilled with such detailed accuracy that we have in these prophecies an incontrovertible evidence of the infallibility of Holy Scripture, and the evidence of their inspiration. It is altogether beyond the power of

any man to forecast millenniums ahead and to portray their unfoldings with accuracy. Only the Spirit of God could do that.

The Lord Jesus is the speaker in each letter, but each affirms that the Spirit also is the Speaker. 'Let him hear what the Spirit saith'. The Persons of the Godhead are One, and none acts independently of the other. Thus *God* gave the revelation: the *Lord Jesus* speaks in the letters: and the voice of the *Spirit* must be heeded.

Moreover, what is written to one church is a message for all. 'Let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches'. What happens to one should be a lesson for all: 'all the churches shall know' (Rev. 2:23). This is a most important principle. The doctrines and practices as written by Paul apply to 'all the churches of the saints' (see I Cor. 7:17; 14:33; 11:16; 16:1). While each church is independent of the other administratively, (no church having right to meddle with the affairs of another) all are, nevertheless, bound to each other by the common tie of responsibility to the same Lord, whose commands should be obeyed by all. The peculiar suitability of each of these letters to the special circumstances of any one church does not affect the applicability of its message to all.

*(To be concluded in next issue)*

## A THIRD TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

DR J. E. SHELLEY

President Ben Zvi said tonight that 'our generation standing on the verge of the Third Temple would not wait as long for the ingathering of the exiles as had our ancestors'. (Extract from *The Palestine Post*, February, 1954).

The third temple! Even at this late hour there are some Christians who vigorously affirm that our Lord's prediction that 'the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet would stand in the holy place' (of the temple) was completely and finally fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Titus destroyed the temple.

A discussion of these views is not the object of these remarks. It is sufficient to say that if this view is correct no third temple is yet to be erected on the temple area in Jerusalem. This area, it is well-known, is now called the 'Haram-Es-Sherif', and contains the Dome of the Rock, and the Mosque of Aksa and other buildings. The Israeli advanced positions, outside the Damascus Gate, are now within a few hundred yards of the area.

*(Continued on page 204)*