

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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The Breastplate's Jewels

"Thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel ... And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial ... Thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work ... of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it. Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof. And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: ... sardius, topaz, carbuncle ... emerald, sapphire, diamond ... ligure, agate, amethyst ... beryl, onyx, jasper ... set in gold in their inclosings" (Exodus 28:9, 12, 15-20).

These "jewels" represent the saints of God, now in the course of preparation for their future positions on the shoulderpieces, and in the breastplate of the world's High Priest (Malachi 3:17). Perhaps, therefore, God intended us to learn certain lessons by way of those ancient stones. Unfortunately, we are not able to identify precisely all the stones that were used in Aaron's breastplate.

"Great difficulty is met in any attempt to translate the Greek and Hebrew names mentioned in the Bible into names that would be used for the same minerals in a particular country at the present day. It is only within the last century, through the development of the sciences of chemistry and crystallography, that it has become possible to define mineral species with any considerable approach to precision. In ancient times minerals were regarded as belonging to a single kind, and indicated by a single name, that are now distributed into different kinds and mentioned under different names" (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

Not knowing, then, the precise modern names of many (perhaps any) of these stones and being thus in almost complete ignorance concerning their individual and peculiar crystallography, it seems to us a bit presumptuous to build on such meager facts, any system of interpretation involving these features.

What we are reasonably sure about is that they were uncommon, *i.e.*, rare stones; though the Hebrew text does not in itself imply that they were "precious" in the precise and accurate sense of that word. But they were stones whose color and beauty were due to small amounts of mineral salts present when the crystals were being formed as molten rock was allowed to cool and solidify.

"With the exception of diamond, which is crystallized carbon, the gems are composed of alumina or silica or a combination of them in varying proportions with or without other molecules" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1942, Volume 10, page 95a).

Thus, for example, the agate, amethyst, beryl, chalcodony, chrysolite, emerald, garnet, jasper, onyx, opal, sard and topaz contain silica as a basic ingredient. The ruby, sardius, sapphire (lapis lazuli), and topaz contain alumina as a basic ingredient.

The three most common elements in the earth's crust — constituting more than 82% thereof — are oxygen (a gas), silicon (a non-metal) and aluminum (a metal). It is these three in the form of silica and alumina compounds that, as already suggested, are the basic ingredients of most of our beautiful gems. Yet, despite the predominance of these elements in the earth's crust, gems are comparatively rare!

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Traditional representation of Aaron's breastplate. The Bible does not record the order of the names to be inscribed on the stones, so that identification of a tribe with a certain stone is guesswork.

Perhaps this is due to the extraordinary conditions and circumstances under which gems are formed. Among these are:

- (1) The intense heat, such as prevails within the bowels of the earth, and which keeps rocks in a molten state.
- (2) Pressure so great that it forces this liquid rock through fissures and crevices of the earth's surface.
- (3) The slow cooling processes which enable crystals to be formed.

The color of these stones is sometimes augmented by the accidental presence at the time of formation of such other elements as chromium, iron, lithium, magnesium, manganese, titanium, etc.

We are suggesting, since gems are made of the commonest elements of the earth's crust, that the Lord's "jewels" (Malachi 3:17), generally speaking, are also "made" of the commonest elements of human society — the poor. Surely, no one will deny the fact that there are many, many more

poor people in this world than there are rich. But "richness" is not necessarily a matter of what is commonly called "wealth," for it can be also of wisdom, education, ambition, and even of nobility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). And though the rich are not excluded (Matthew 19:26), there will be comparatively few of them to enter the spiritual phase of the Kingdom (Mark 10:23).

On the other hand, as we have already seen, despite the preponderance of the elements necessary to form gems in the earth's crust, there are comparatively few gems actually formed, and these few are the result of excessive heat, high pressure, and a slow cooling process. This, dear friends, finds a most beautiful counterpart in the fact that though there are many, many poor, only an infinitesimally small number of them ever become "gems" and these only as the result of:

- (1) Fiery trials.
- (2) Untoward pressure of circumstances.
- (3) Being rightly exercised in and by these.

Thus they are being crystallized into "gems" — characters worthy of being enshrined (enclasp) in the "golden ouches" (Exodus 39:13) of the divine nature.

The color of the natural gems, as we have seen, was sometimes inherent in the original silica or alumina compound, but was sometimes augmented by the accidental presence of other chemical elements at the time when the gems were being formed. Just so it is with the "gems" which will adorn the antitypical "breastplate." There is a natural beauty of character in all of God's saints — the result of the ordinary trials of life; but there is sometimes an added luster, enhancing this beauty, coming by graciously bearing with the accidental (providential) presence in these trials of such other elements as misunderstandings, reproaches, etc.

— Anton Frey, Notes on the Tabernacle, pages 303-305

Priests and Levites

"And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 66:21).

The context of the above verse places it in the time when all nations "shall come, and see my glory" (Isaiah 66:18). It describes the aftermath of the battle commonly called "Jacob's Trouble" which is detailed in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Here we find the saga of the escapees of that conflict (where God fights for Israel as in days of old) returning to their native lands. There they proclaim what they have observed. As a result, the nations to which they return bring back the remaining Hebrews to their homeland in Israel.

This brings us to the verse in question, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD." The majority of Christian commentaries refer the "them" to the converted Gentiles who affect Israel's return. Their support lies not in the grammar of the Hebrew text, but in their

interpretation of the verse itself. Applying this to the literal Aaronic priesthood and order of Levites, they reason that this right is inherent to the Jewish people and therefore must refer to the Gentiles who would have no right to aspire either to the office of priest or Levite.

However the time setting of the verse negates such an interpretation. At that point in time neither Jew nor Gentile has any legitimate claims to the Aaronic order, for all genealogical records have been long since destroyed. The verse is not to be interpreted according to the ancient Jewish system, but describing a priestly and Levitical function based on the concepts of the Law arrangement.

We suggest that the “them” of our verse, therefore, refers to the returning Israelites and not to the Gentiles who are credited with bringing them back. These offices refer to two distinct functions of restored Israel in Messiah’s kingdom.

PRIESTS

In the worship services of the Tabernacle and Temple, the officiating priests were to come from a specified lineage, that of Aaron. However the term priest (Hebrew, *kohen*, Strong’s 3548) is used in a wider sense in Scripture, both before and after the ceremonial priesthood of the law. Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God (Genesis 4:18). The sons of David are also given the title of *kohen* (mis-translated chief rulers in most versions) in 2 Samuel 8:18.

Many authorities ascribe the office of a domestic priest prior to the introduction of the Aaronic order to the firstborn son in a family. If such be correct, it adds insight into the transfer of the Levites for the firstborn during Israel’s wilderness wanderings.

The etymology of the word *kohen* (priest) is worthy of note. The Arabic root suggests one who delivers a message from God, taking an intermediary role between two parties, representing each to the other. This connects well with the priestly work of Job when he prayed for his “miserable comforters” (Job 16:2, 42:8-9). It should be remembered also that one of the high priest’s functions in ancient Israel was to seek the counsel of God through the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30, Ezra 2:63).

Saalschutz in his *Archaeology der Hebraica*, ca. 78, attached a slightly different thought to the Hebrew word, giving it the meaning of one who ministers in sacred services (note Isaiah 61:6). McClintock and Strong give it the significance of one who “draws near” to the Divine presence while others remain afar off (Exodus 19:22, 30:20).

Therefore we conclude that some of the faithful Jews who return to Israel after their final battle will assume these domestic priestly roles of being intermediaries between God and man, drawing near to God to bring his message to the people and seeking his counsel in regard to the affairs of resurrected mankind.

LEVITES

While all priests were Levites, all Levites were not priests. The consecration of the priests and their services are described in Leviticus 8 and 9 while the consecration and services of the Levites are given in Numbers 8. In the Old Testament worship services, the Levites were accorded three distinct roles.

(1) Servants of the Tabernacle — “I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary” (Numbers 8:19).

(2) Teachers of the Law — “And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Nehemiah 8:9).

(3) Singers of Praise — “And these are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who remaining in the chambers were free: for they were employed in that work day and night” (1 Chronicles 9:33).

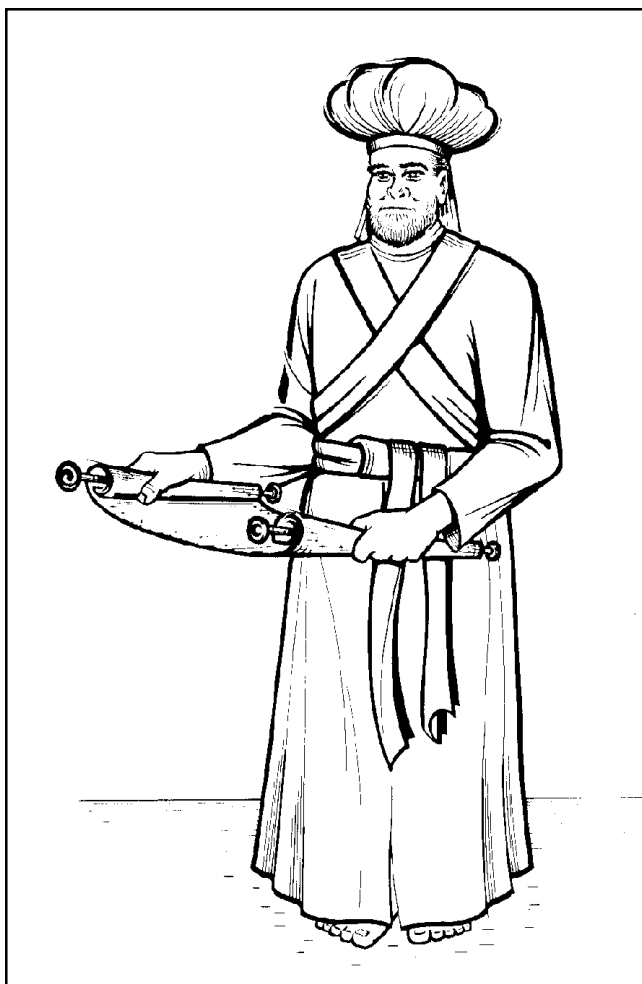
These texts imply that restored Israel will have the Millennial age responsibilities of assisting man in their worship, teaching them the laws and regulations of that kingdom, and leading them in songs of eternal praise to Jehovah



The High Priest in Robes of Glory and Beauty

and his reigning Son. Our text says that God will “also” take of these latter returning Jews for “priests and for Levites.” This has three additional implications.

(1) The word “also” suggests that they are joining another group who already has these offices. These would appear to be the faithful remnant who come through Israel’s final battle. Micah 5:7 speaks of this class as showers upon the grass, “And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.”



A Priest in Sacrificial Linen Garments

(2) At the same time, we recognize that this will be the time mentioned by the Prophet when “a nation shall be born in a day” (Isaiah 66:8). Israel will be that nation: (1) Spiritual Israel, the “holy nation”; and (2) Fleshly Israel, its earthly representative. From Israel the light shall shine out which will bring the chastened world to its knees, and usher in the promised pouring out of the Lord’s spirit of holiness “upon all flesh after those days,” as it has been poured out upon his true servants and handmaids during these days (Joel 2:28, D638). Hence, this word may further indicate a close relationship with the resurrected prophets of old who will be “princes in all the earth” (Psalms 45:16).

(3) The phrase “take of them” indicates that not all of these Jews who return in this final exodus will be taken for the positions of priests or Levites. This implies that all of these immigrants will not possess the necessary faith at first to fill these positions.

Israel restored will indeed have not only an honored role in the Messianic kingdom, but will have many useful and vital occupations in their work as ambassadors and laborers in the great restitution work of helping all of resurrected mankind up the highway of holiness. Of them, with the resurrected ancients at their head, it shall truly be said, “And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26).

— Carl Hagensick

The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia stood about 28 miles southeast from Sardis in the plains of Hermus, and about midway between the river of that name and the termination of Mount Smolus. It was a city of commercial importance conveniently located as the gateway to the high central plateau of Asia in Asia Minor. The name means “brotherly love” and commemorated the loyalty and devotion of Attalus II (220-130 BC) to his brother Eumenes II. Strabo, the historian, called Philadelphia, “a city of earthquakes.” Earth tremors were frequent, and had caused many former inhabitants to leave the city for a safer home. The severe earthquake of 17 AD, which devastated Sardis almost completely, demolished Philadelphia — but by the ’90’s it had been completely rebuilt with the aid of an imperial subsidy.

THE KEY OF DAVID

Found within the city was a church of Jesus Christ to which the sixth of the seven letters in Revelation is addressed. It has been observed that this epistle has a tinge throughout of Old Testament prophetic language and imagery in connection to the circumstances of the church in conflict with the Jewish community dwelling there. It opens with a description of the Savior: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Revelation 3:7).

This address was Hebraic both in conception and expression. The holy One is he of Acts 3:14 as opposed to “the synagogue of Satan,” in Revelation 3:9. He is “the true One,” and this title appears to be chosen to declare an attribute of our Lord as opposed to “those who say ... and are not, but do

lie,” in verse 9. We also learn that He is the Sovereign One — “He that hath the key of David.” Literally this was a reference to Eliakim, son of Hilkiah (Isaiah 22:20-25.)

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Isaiah 22:22).

“He that hath the key” is a symbol of right and authority referred to in Matthew 16:19, where David is a type of Christ, the true church, head and body (Gems from the Mine, page 664.) Indeed we may see that Eliakim also typifies those to whom is entrusted the “key,” the emblem of right and authority, “over the house of David.” Christ, the heir of the throne of David, shall reign over both the house of Jacob, that is, fleshly Israel (Luke 1:32, 33) and spiritual Israel “for ever” as “a son over his own house” (Hebrews 3:2, 6). Note carefully where this key is, Eliakim had the key laid upon his shoulder. In the Millennium, Christ, the antitypical David, has the key of supreme power of government “upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

The phrase, “he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth,” are generally to be taken to mean that only Christ has the power, that is, the right and authority, to enlarge the work and opportunities of his church and to contract them. The verse that follows seems to require this. It was proper that Peter should open the Gospel door to the Gentiles (Acts 10, 11:17, 18 and especially 14:27). However, he was wrong when he tried to shut it again (Galatians 2:11-18). A great door and effectual had been opened for Paul at Ephesus in spite of enemies (1 Corinthians 16:9, RV). He found that a door was open for the Gospel when he went to Troas (2 Corinthians 2:12) and he asked the believers at Colosse to pray that “God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Colossians 4:3, RV). Christ has the keys to open the very prison of the grave and death (Revelation 1:18).

CHRIST’S APPRAISAL OF THE CHURCH — AND PROMISED OPPORTUNITY

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

The translation should read “thou hast little power,” not “a little strength,” as in the Authorized Version. This probably was a consequence of the fewness of the Christian congregation there; possibly also to their poverty as contrasted with the wealth of their Jewish adversaries. The commendation that they had kept Christ’s word and did not deny his name both employ the past tense. Possibly this refers to some time of special trial when both those temptations to break Christ’s word and deny his name were put before the church. When Christians were brought before the heathen magistrates in times of persecution, they were required to renounce the name of Christ and to disown him in a public manner. It is possible that, amidst the persecutions that raged in early times, the members of the Philadelphia Church had

been summoned to such a trial, and they had stood the trial firmly. It would seem from the following verse in Revelation 3:9 that an effort was made to induce them to renounce the name of Christ. Sadly, this was encouraged by those who professed to be Jews, though they evinced the spirit of Satan (John 8:37-45, especially verse 44). Thus, the Philadelphia Church had this in common with the church at Pergamum, who held fast his name and did not deny the faith (Revelation 2:13, 14:12, RV). Indeed, as the church in that city was at the heart of the great road system for Lydia, Phrygia and the lands to the east it was in an ideal location for the proclamation and spread of the Gospel. This meant an opportunity for mission work, since the Gospel had not yet penetrated north-east of the central Phrygian plateau.

Christ also promises that he will humble, but not destroy their enemies: “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee” (Revelation 3:9).

This is a bold metaphor directed against hostile and unbelieving Jews (Romans 2:28, 29) and the promise to Philadelphia holds a larger promise for these enemies of the Gospel than that to Smyrna. To Smyrna it was that “the synagogue of Satan” should not prevail against the faithful in her (Revelation 2:9, 10). To Philadelphia, the promise is that she should even win over some of the synagogue of Satan “to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” Paul writes in harmony with this speaking of those convicted of their error who will fall “down on his face [and] he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Corinthians 14:25). Assuredly, the Philadelphia church is the special object of Messiah’s love, for it is the Christian church that is now the true Israel of God. And though Isaiah’s words have a partial fulfillment now, they will be wholly fulfilled in the kingdom.

“The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 60:14).

CHRIST’S PROMISE

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial (temptation), which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

They had manifested the patience that he required through all their trials (Revelation 14:12). Patience in one trial results in the grace the Lord gives us to bear another. The evidence that we have been patient and submissive may be regarded as proof that he will give us grace that we may be patient and submissive in the trials that are to come. The Greek phrase in the promise “keep you from” can mean either “keep you from undergoing” or “keep you through.” He will so keep them that they shall not sink under the trials, which will be a severe temptation to many; and that they

would be kept from the temptation of apostasy in calamity.

The hour of trial (temptation) may have been inspired by the terror and calamity of the frequent earthquakes. The memory of disaster as in 17 AD was an ever-present warning. The whole city had to live in the midst of such danger and was always in dread of such a trial.

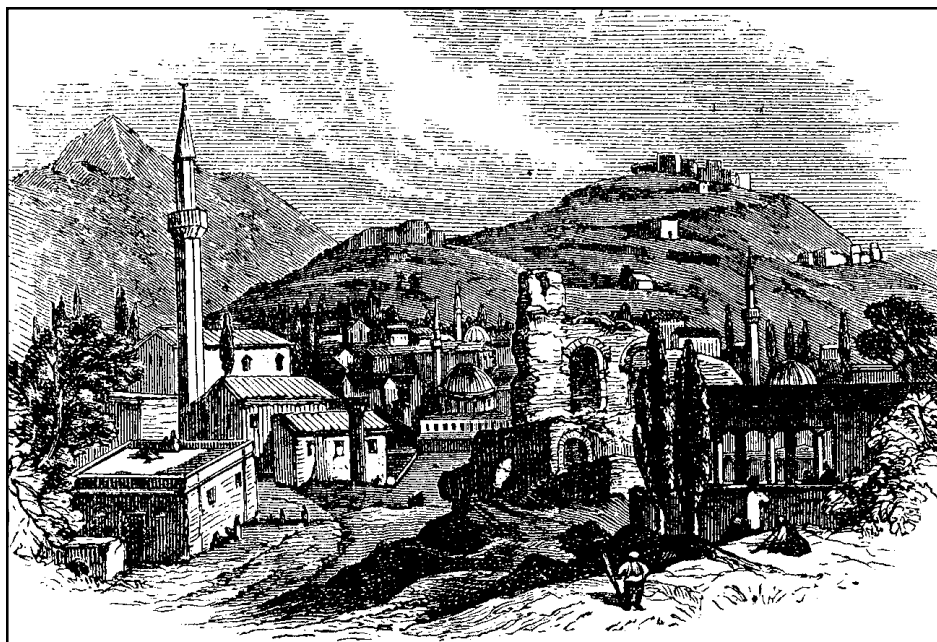
Yet the phrase, “which shall come upon the whole world,” shows the widespread nature of these trials (Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24:21, Mark 13:19, 20). The whole Roman Empire was the world to them and in Trajan’s time (98-117 AD), these persecutions, which raged elsewhere, were to come upon all Christians living under the Roman Empire. Prophetically, the great time of trouble and period of testing occurs at Christ’s second coming (presence, *parousia*). As such, it should be connected with the phrase “I come quickly” in Revelation 3:11. The persecutions that befell Philadelphia shortly after were the earnest of the great tribulation at Christ’s second presence (*parousia*). The purpose of this trouble is explained to the church. Christ seeks “to try them that dwell upon the earth” — to test their character.

“Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,” stands as an encouragement and comfort to the Philadelphia church and a great incentive to faithfulness and consolation under trial. Whatever truth and piety they possessed, “the word of my patience” just committed to them for keeping involved the promise of the kingdom and the “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10, 2 Timothy 4:8). The warning is that no “man” (tempter) should cause them to lose the reward which shall be the portion of those that persevere to the end. This they would lose if they exchanged consistency and suffering for compromise and ease.

“I COME QUICKLY”

Do the words, “I come quickly,” have any prophetic significance? We notice in these letters that to Ephesus (33-73), to Smyrna (73-325) and to Pergamum (325-1160) nothing was said about Christ’s second advent. To Thyatira (1160-1378) the message was, “Hold fast till I come” (Revelation 2:25). To Sardis (1378-1518) it was, “if therefore thou shalt not reform, I will come on thee as a thief” (Revelation 3:3). To Philadelphia (1518-1874) it was, “Behold, I come quickly” (Revelation 3:11).

Does the Trend Continue? To Laodicea it is, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20). It appears evident that the messages to the Churches are epochs drawing nearer and nearer to the Fifth Universal Empire!



Philadelphia, in Asia Minor

PILLARS IN THE TEMPLE

“Him that conquereth (overcometh) will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall no more go out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name” (Revelation 3:12).

The challenge to conquer, or overcome, occurs in each letter (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). He that conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, *i.e.*, he shall have a fixed and important place in the glorified church hereafter.

It is no objection to this view, that there is no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22) but rather a corroboration of it. That glorious city is all temple, and Christ’s victorious ones are its living stones and pillars (1 Peter 2:5, 1 Kings 6:7). He that is thus fixed in his eternal place as a pillar in the heavenly temple will never more, from any cause, depart from it. He will be immovably firm, unlike Philadelphia, so often shaken and notorious for calamities by quakes.

The language in which Strabo (Books XII, XIII) describes the earth tremors of Philadelphia is remarkable in connection with the promise of the pillar that should not be moved: “The city of Philadelphia is full of earthquakes; the walls are constantly cracking, and some part of the city is always in trouble, wherefore the inhabitants are scanty.”

Concerning 17 AD, Tacitus (Annals 2:47) remarks, “twelve populous cities in Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake which happened at night, and therefore the more sudden and destructive was the calamity ... it is related that mountains sank down, that level places were seen to be elevated into hills, and that fires flashed forth during the catastrophe” (Revelation 16:18, Isaiah 40:4, Luke 3:5, R511:3).

Philadelphia was one of these twelve shattered cities. Yet, Christ's promise of the overcoming church's pillar-like stability, and "I will write upon him the name of my God," seems to build upon the promises to the conqueror we read elsewhere (Revelation 7:3, 9:4, 14:1, 22:4). As the golden plate on the High Priest's forehead bore the sacred epithet "Holiness to Jehovah" (Exodus 28:36-38), even so the overcoming saints in their royal priesthood shall bear His name openly as being wholly consecrated to Him and His service.

Holiness is the basic moral quality within a person whether in action or at rest. Holiness applies to what one is, *e.g.*, "the Holy one of Israel" (Isaiah 60:14). Inward and substantial holiness is the significant thing that God requires and highly values. Such holiness was shown in type in the rites and ceremonies of Israel and this is to be a reality for the overcomer. There was also a sense in which God's name was put on every Hebrew of the children of Israel. Each child received the words of the priestly blessing as a sign that their lives should be dominated by a sense of consecration: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27, also see Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 2:5, 9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

This name will be written on the forehead of all who see His face (Revelation 14:1, 22:4) as will the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem. Those who belong to the New Jerusalem as one of its citizens (Philippians 3:20) hold the inscription of the name of the city as a token of citizenship. The character and atmosphere throughout are the marks of the New Jerusalem's heavenly origin as the city "which cometh down out of heaven from my God" (Revelation 21:2,10).

The name of this city had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah, "They shall call thee the city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 60:14). A city is a symbol of a kingdom or dominion, and so is symbolized by the new dominion coming from heaven to earth. At first it will consist only of the Bride of Christ and the company enumerated by Paul (A295, Hebrews 12:18-23).

"MY NEW NAME"

Names reveal character. Christ's new name at his second advent symbolizes all that he is by virtue of his redemptive work for mankind (Isaiah 9:6,7). Yet we read, "and he had a name written, that no one knew but he himself" (Revelation 19:12) and, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14, R1820:6).

In this sense, no person "knows" the new name except they who receive it, for it is, "The Righteousness of Jehovah." This is the name whereby she shall be called (Jeremiah 33:16, 23:5, 6). Righteousness is the outworking of that inner quality when its activity conforms to God's accepted standard. Righteousness applies to what one does as we read, "Thy righteous acts (judgments) are made manifest" (Revelation 15:4).

This name is appropriate to the work and office of our Lord Jesus, the head of the Church and our Bridegroom. He stands as the representative of God's righteousness. That this name will be appropriate to the glorified Church is shown in that she not only shares her Lord's suffering for righteousness, "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Colossians 1:24, 1 Peter 5:9), but is also promised a share in all the glories of the Lord, as a wife shares her husband's honor and name

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The church in Philadelphia was located in a rich and powerful city, connected by trade with a large district towards the east and north, for which it formed a center. Thus it was well suited to be one of the central churches in Christianized Asia. In so far as a church attained Christian purity, its character rises to a higher plane; in so far as it degenerates from that high level it becomes affected by its earthly surroundings.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two churches which are addressed in terms of almost unmingled praise. Philadelphia had kept the Lord's word and not denied his name. It is described in Revelation 3:8 as having but a little power (strength). They knew the meaning of real weakness. Perhaps they were small in number, poor in material matters, mean in social standing being composed of the lower classes of Roman society. The church may have exerted little influence on the city and was to all outward appearances in a state of weakness. But Christ is building his Church with earth's broken things. Men want only the strong, the successful, the victorious, the unbroken in building their empires — but God, through Christ, is the God of the weak, the unsuccessful, of those who have failed.

To this church Christ has set before it an open door, as in Ephesus, so in Philadelphia. Yet, if the door was open, there were many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9) and there was opposition as in Smyrna (Revelation 2:9). This opposition appears to have come from the Jewish population of the city. Their resistance to the Gospel of Messiah was so fanatical that they are again called, not a synagogue of God, but, "the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews but are not, but lie" (Revelation 2:9, 3:9).

How gracious of the Lord that there is the promise that this synagogue shall yet recognize the love which the Lord had bestowed upon this church and come to worship before their feet. Yet, there was the threat of future tribulation. The clouds of persecution were gathering. Christ warns them of the coming trials and temptations but at the same time promises, "I will keep you from the hour of temptation which is coming upon the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth."

They had kept his word. He would keep them. He would not spare them from the suffering, but he would uphold them in it. They are exhorted to continue strong and energetic, as it had hitherto been, and to "hold fast what thou hast" (Revelation 3:11). Philadelphia had so many festivals

and temples that it was called “Little Athens.” The hope of a memorial — a name, a statue, or a pillar — in one of its great temples proved a powerful incentive to good citizenship. But the volcanic region of Philadelphia was frequently visited by seismic shocks in which the most massive buildings and all their memorials perished. In Christ’s name the church is promised the things that cannot be shaken. Every victor in the spiritual conflict will be as a pillar, not in a crumbling earthly shrine, but in the enduring temple of God, and graven on the tablets of his own memory (intellect) the mystic names of God and His New Jerusalem, and Christ’s new name.

—David Skein

It Came to Pass

Once at a testimony meeting the leader asked each one to quote a favorite Bible verse. One brother simply quoted the words, “And it came to pass.” This surprised everybody because it is not even a verse. Yet he insisted that the phrase “and it came to pass” was the one most meaningful to him. “Why?” asked the leader. The brother explained that in every trouble the problem or the difficulty did not come to stay; it came to pass. It came to teach its particular lesson; to leave its imprint upon his character; but it was not, of itself, a finality. It did not come to stay — “It came to pass.”

—Robert Seklemian

Psalm 119

This psalm is all about the Word of God. It is unique in several ways. It is the longest of all the psalms; in fact it is the longest chapter in the Bible, with 176 verses. These verses are not the divisions of an editor — they are inherent in the original. There are precisely 22 parts to this psalm, each containing 8 verses. Each verse in part one begins with the Hebrew letter Aleph, each verse in part two begins with Beth, each verse in part three begins with Gimel, and so on through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Every verse in the psalm (except 122 and 132) specifically mentions the Word of God by one of the following words: law, testimony, way, precept, statute, commandment, judgment, word. The psalm extols the merits of reading, studying, meditating, and applying the words of Jehovah into our hearts, our lives, our beings.

From this psalm come these familiar praises. “O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (verse 97). “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (verse 165). “Thy testimonies ... are my delight and my counsellors” (verse 24). “I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (verse 34). How well these expressions fit the mind and attitude of our dear redeemer. How wonderful if these would express our sentiments also.

As the 22 sections of this psalm promoted the Word of God to the Jewish people, it is interesting that an early record says the holy books of the Hebrews were 22 in number. The comment is by Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the first century AD. Here is the passage.

“We have ... only 22 books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine ... five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death ... from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia ... the prophets ... wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life” (Against Apion, I, 8).

BOOKS RECOMBINED

All 39 books of our Old Testament were included in the 22 books Josephus mentions, by combining some books which we now distinguish. The 12 prophets closing the Old Testament were combined into one book of the “Prophets,” the double books of first and second Samuel, Kings and Chronicles were made into one book each. Nehemiah combined with Ezra, Ruth with Judges, and Lamentations with Jeremiah.

A LAMP UNTO OUR FEET

One of the familiar texts of this psalm is verse 105. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Probably this text was in Peter’s mind when he said the “word of prophecy” is “a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). Peter seems to mean that the lamp of prophecy guides the church to the end of the age, when the morning star appears — Christ at his second advent. A morning star is seen only by the watchers, who are awake before the breaking of the new day. In the past, Christians studied prophecy to mark the progress of events toward the end of the age. But now we are here. The lamp which guided us here now shows we have arrived.

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins there are two elements which relate directly to Psalm 119. (1) Matthew 25:6 says “at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom” — then the virgins rose, and went out to meet him. Psalm 119 says “At midnight I will rise ... because of thy righteous judgments” (verses 62, 63).

(2) The parable is all about the lamps the virgins took with them, the wise taking sufficient oil, the foolish being less careful. These lamps represent the Word of God, and Psalms 119:105 identifies this symbol. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

Therefore Psalm 119 has special meaning to us today. It encourages us to study the Word of God, to see by its light the unfolding truth — to anoint our eyes with eyesalve. In the light of this lamp, we have been richly blessed. The meat in due season has greatly strengthened us.

—Adapted from a study by I. A. Joseph, India