

REVELATION REVEALED

and the WOE, WOE, WOE

*The remarkable structure of
the book of Revelation*

PAUL MARTIN



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But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase. And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days." Daniel 12:4,9,10,13

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PROLOGUE

To read (or write) about the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is to travel on a journey. This journey will take us through the Bible in its entirety – not just from beginning to end, but from top to bottom, and all the way round. And gradually (as we are travelling), we will learn to understand not only why God raises certain matters, but also why He puts it in writing in a particular way.

His purposes with man and the world extend over such a long time that much of what He tells in His book is veiled. He takes away this ‘covering’ by His Spirit. At a time He determines, He reveals what was written many centuries ago, but was kept hidden.

Throughout the Bible He predicts what is going to happen, demonstrating His sovereignty over history, and thus showing that He is God. He said that He would do nothing without first revealing it to His servants the prophets. This is the work of His Holy Spirit, not only in the prophets but also in the hearts of those who read His Word, and hear His voice. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Spirit who keeps searching the depths of God and reveals them to us: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”. When Jesus walked the earth, He spoke in a guarded fashion about many matters, using words only the listener with the right ‘ears’ would be able to understand. Many times He said: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”. In the book of Revelation, at the end of each one of the seven epistles, He says: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Bible is full of deeper meanings – implied in parables, historical facts and symbols, which are given to reveal the purposes of God. God reveals Himself in the Bible and in our daily life, and thus in the history of man – He Himself became man in our history.

The hermeneutic which I use in this book to handle Holy Scripture makes connections between the hidden language of Holy Scripture itself and our reality. I hereby freely make extensive use of typology. In the present theology this is not common anymore. Typology, however, is an old and excepted way of interpreting the Bible, which can be found extensively in old writings of the church and also in Scripture itself. Jesus for instance makes use of this when He speaks of Noah and his age and compares this with time of the end; St. Paul also makes use of typology when he takes the slave Hagar and Mount Sinai as type and compares them with the slavery of the present Jerusalem. Also the letter to the Hebrews is full of typologies which

the writer uses to explain the Bible (at the time the Word of God consisted only of the Old Testament). Everywhere in the church, for instance, the typology of the 'crossing of the people of Israel through the sea' is used to compare baptism with it. Finally St. Paul writes to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work". The exegeses of this 'spiritual language' in Holy Scripture should be translated in our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit and may take shape in our own lives. This way the Word becomes flesh again – by His Spirit in us.

This book describes God's pattern and essence in the Bible and the way He makes this visible in the history of our world. Each chapter in this book deals with the corresponding chapter in the book of Revelation. Some chapters are followed by an appendix, in which a single subject is dealt with in more detail. These appendixes contain a summary of subjects that are raised, or things that are supplementary, but also random thoughts.

After the treatment of the book of Revelation you will find yet another appendix as an introduction to the subject 'God's plan with Israel', with which this book concludes. You will also find at the back of this book a description and explanation of the structure of the book of Revelation, followed by a short working out of it.

To conclude you will also find a folding calendar at the back, which clarifies the pattern or blueprint of the book of Revelation. Notice that it is always the last part of a bar, or theme, that is magnified.

Opposite this calendar you also find the pattern of the book of Revelation briefly reproduced in outline form, so that, in addition to the blueprint of the book of Revelation, you also see the pattern in which the book of Revelation is written alongside it. The division of the book of Revelation is represented by sixteen capitals in bold type, from **A** to **P**. From this outline it becomes apparent that, in most chapters under each of the bold capitals, there is first the *total image* overview, and then its *working out* in detail. The *total image* can be compared with the bud of a flower in which everything is present, which then unfolds itself in the *working out*. It can also be compared with the way we store information on a computer: a *total image* can be compared to a folder in which the various stored documents are mentioned only by their name (along with information like the document size) and the *working out* is comparable to the documents themselves which one can then open. The real contents are unfolded after the opening of a document. If a reader does not understand this arrangement of the book of Revelation, that it always presents a total image first and then the working out of it, it may seem that subjects and matters are sometimes repeated. You will find these sixteen boldface capitals in their appropriate places throughout the book.

Before starting to read it is advisable to first take a quick look at these two patterns.

I recommend that you have a Bible near to hand, not only to read the book of Revelation itself, but also to look up the parts of Scripture cited in the text, or the text of the chapter when I cite just a few verses.

In this book I make use of the New King James Version, but you of course can use other translations. It certainly cannot do any harm to consult more translations, so that the existing differences in translation and word value become clearer. When I quote directly from this version it will appear in double quotes in the text like this "...", where I paraphrase the text in order to emphasize or explain, I will use single quotes '...'.

As you read through this book, may you be filled with the Spirit, with wisdom and perseverance,

Paul Martin

Ultraiectum, November 1, MMVII

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

OF JESUS CHRIST

A

REVELATION 1:1-8 PROLOGUE AND BEGINNING

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, is the first sentence of the book we call the 'Bible'. This is derived from the Greek word *biblia* meaning 'books'.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, is the first sentence of the gospel according to John, who directly refers here to the origin and explains Who is this Word.

This book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ begins with a prologue explaining from whom this revelation comes, from Jesus being the Word. Jesus Christ said: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age".¹ He is the beginning of creation, the Word from which creation originated² and is with that creation till her completion. Once complete in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, then the new creation, "a new heaven and a new earth", will spring forth.³

God the Father gives this revelation to Jesus Christ to show to his servants. Jesus Christ sends and signifies it by his angel to his servant John. The apostle John bears witness to this revelation, writes all in a book, as Jesus tells him to do in verses 11 and 19, and sends it to the seven churches. The revelation to which John bears witness is the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all things that he saw.

John himself writes this book to the seven churches in Asia and begins by clarifying to the churches from whom the revelation comes: "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne". This last part indicates the Holy Spirit who is a sevenfold Spirit. In Isaiah 11:1,2 we read: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord". We see this expressed here in the golden lampstand with its seven lights: the Spirit of the Lord forms the one shaft from which emanate six arms.⁴ In Rev.4:5b we read: "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne,

¹ Matt.28:20

² Gen.1

³ Rev.21:1

⁴ more about the place of the golden lampstand you find in the treatment of the first epistle, pages 18 and 19

which are the seven spirits of God". Furthermore in Rev.5:6 we read: "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth". The seven spirits before the throne also find their expression in the seven archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Rafael, Uriel, Suriel, Fanuel and Jechiel (note that each of these names ends with 'el', which means 'God';⁵ Gabri-el for instance means 'my strength is God') – as the eyes of God they go out into all the earth.⁶

The role of the Holy Spirit is crucial. It is the Holy Spirit who searches and reveals the depths of the Father and the Son. The instrumentality of the Spirit is explained by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 2:9-10: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him.' But God has revealed them to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God". This instrumentality of the Spirit, through whom comes the revelation to which John bears witness,⁷ is seen in Rev. 19:10: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy", and Rev. 22:6 – "And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place". So, the Father reveals the Son to us through the Spirit.

Then, having emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit, there follows in verses 7 and 8 a prophecy: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty". This revelation of who He is then continues from verse 12 to the end of this first chapter.

The 'alpha and omega' with which He describes himself we encounter again in His epilogue in the last chapter of this book (22:13), where He adds the words "the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last". The Greek 24 letter alphabet that ends with the letter omega, is a reference to the fact that He is the Word with which the whole of creation is created and will be finished. John also begins his gospel with this theme: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made that was made (...) John [the Baptist] bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said: 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me'".⁸

In Genesis 1 we observe this Word taking on form in creating the heavens and the earth; for everything that is created is created by the Word of God. Everything from a - to - z exists from out of Him: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all

⁵ these names appear in Jewish literature and in the Apocrypha; Gen.33:20

⁶ Zech.3:9 and 4:10 – see also Ezek.1:18-20; Amos 9:8; Zech.9:1; 1Peter 3:12; Rev.4:6,8

⁷ verse 2

⁸ John 1:1-3,15

things".⁹ He already existed before time began and now He is born in time itself, takes flesh, suffers on the cross; is alive again, with this human nature, which had fallen in the first Adam, now glorified, ascended to His Father, and in this flesh He presents Himself to the Father. He promised us He will take us to Him; this then is our hope for the future, that we also will be like Him as He is now.

Consequently Jesus is not only the firstborn from the dead, but He is also, of everything, the firstborn,¹⁰ preeminent in all things,¹¹ the alpha, even as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.¹² He now lives, who died and is raised; who now waits for us until all things have been completed so that we, with Him, may enter the rest of that seventh day. He is also the last one, the omega; for everything exists in God from beginning to end and to all eternity.

That is why the church ends her prayers and psalms singing the words: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

⁹ Rom.11:36

¹⁰ Col. 1:15

¹¹ Col. 1:18

¹² Rev. 13:8

TOTAL IMAGE

B

REVELATION 1:9-20
THE 7 LAMPSTANDS OR CHURCHES

After the introductory, in which He reveals who it is that presents the revelation to St. John, there follows the first vision concerning the seven lampstands. This vision gives a first *total image* that is further *worked out* in the chapters 2 and 3. As already said in the foreword: the *total image* can be compared with the bud of a flower in which everything is present, which then unfolds itself in the *working out*. (In the back of this book you can find the structure of the book of Revelation from which it becomes apparent that continuous first a total image is given, which after that is worked out in more detail.)

The topic of this first *total image* is the church. The first thing John observes when he turns around to see who it is that spoke to him, is not the Lord, but the seven lampstands. In the 20th verse these lampstands are explained: the lampstands *are* the seven churches.

These seven lampstands, or seven churches, are symbolic of the church as a whole, i.e. the church throughout all ages, from the beginning to the very end of her existence on earth. The number seven indicates fullness, a fullness in which nothing is missing – it is all encompassing, perfect and complete. This is derived from God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit who is a sevenfold Spirit. The seven lights of the lampstand express His fullness, or perfect completeness.¹ Each one of the seven lampstands symbolises a complete period of the church on earth, as we will see at the seven epistles in chapters 2 and 3. The time of the church in the making on earth then also will take up seven periods.

The 13th verse continues with the son of man who is in the midst of these lampstands. This indicates that He, who is in heaven as the head of His body the church, is also present at all times and in every period of the church on earth; He is walking between the lampstands² - just as He promised immediately before His ascension in Matt. 28:20: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”. He himself also is part of this *total image* that is given in the lampstands, since He reveals himself in the church and is present in her, as He that is also in creation and in the whole of history. He is the ‘always (hidden) present One’, the alpha and the omega, the beginning of God’s creation and the end of it.

The description of His appearance is as the Son of Man, who is in the midst of the

¹ Ex.25:31,32,36,37

² Gen.2:1

seven lampstands. He, who is the Word made flesh, now stands with this glorified body before the Father. The four gospels are filled with this term 'son of man', which Jesus himself uses. We also find this description as the son of man in chapter 7:13 of the book of Daniel: "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came even to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed".

The description of this Divine son of man in Revelation 1 is full of symbolism:

"Clothed with a garment down to the feet"

He wore such a garment during his earthly ministry; the piece of cloth for which the soldiers, at his crucifixion, drew lots, since it was woven in one piece.³ The priestly aspect is important here, because the priests could only appear in the presence of God in the tabernacle and the temple in a garment like this.⁴ Now Jesus has entered behind the veil, having become High priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.⁵

In Matt.17:2, at the Transfiguration, we read concerning this Son of Man: "and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light". His glorification lies not only in that His body shines as the sunlight, but also in that His garments become white as the light. This symbolises the covering with a new, glorified, changed or different body. After His resurrection He appeared in the midst of His disciples while the doors and windows were closed. This glorified body is timeless, and made of another matter, like a new creation. He has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.⁶

As members of His body, we look forward, not to being unclothed, or found naked when He comes, but to being clothed with a new body. This revelation of Jesus Christ tells us not only who God is, but also what we will be as the church, the bride of this bridegroom.

"And girded about the chest with a golden band"

The chest protects the noble organs like the heart and lungs, so these are girded with the truth for which gold is a symbol.

Now blood is a symbol for life; remember the blood of Abel that cried out to God from the ground; the blood, in which God tells us dwells the soul. It is this blood which is shed by Jesus as the true Paschal lamb to make reconciliation for our sins. On the altar of Golgotha He sheds his blood for us, the blood in which dwells his life.

³ John 19:23,24

⁴ Ex.28

⁵ Heb.6:20

⁶ Heb.7:16

The heart is the organ that pumps the blood through the whole body. The whole of His life-giving blood, and the forgiveness that proceeds from it, is available for even the smallest part of His body which is the church.

The heart goes on and on, beating unconsciously. We cannot influence this beating with our consciousness, and that is probably why we associate the heart with love. By its pounding we have the feeling of being alive.

The lungs are the organs that bring oxygen into the blood. Unlike blood, oxygen is invisible, but it is just as essential to life: without oxygen there is no life. That is why oxygen is a symbol for life, though not for the visible life, but for the invisible, spiritual life. Without spiritual life, just like without oxygen or lungs, we are not really alive.

It is easy to make the connection between oxygen and wind or air, and hence the connection between oxygen and the Holy Spirit. After all, it is said of God's Spirit that He blows wherever He wills. God's Spirit too is invisibly present, and we can feel or sense his presence, just as we can with the wind. As well as God's Spirit, oxygen, wind or air speak to us about the spirit and soul of man. The human spirit and soul are also invisible, and yet noticeably present. When we give someone a kiss we really do share our life, in sharing each other's breath. This is what God did in the Garden of Eden when He created man; man became a living soul when God breathed His breath into his nostrils. Without the soul the body has no meaning; when the soul has left we say that the person is dead. An empty house without an inhabitant soon becomes a waste place.

In short: the golden band about the chest tells us that our life (body, soul and spirit) is completely in Him who is the Truth. We are surrounded by Him, fully protected, and kept out of harm's way. He has overcome all things, and there is simply nothing we can add. Indeed, we are inscribed upon the palms of His hands; indelibly our names are written.⁷

"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow"

The phrase 'as white as snow' expresses the opposite of being sinful, which is represented by the redness of crimson – "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool".⁸

Our Head in heaven is the Lamb with wool as white as snow. He is totally pure – a Lamb without blemish and without spot.⁹ The symbolic meaning of white is purity - being without spot or wrinkle. On white cloth every small spot of dirt is clearly visible, and annoying because it is so. Clothes are a covering and determine our appearance. A white covering symbolizes the purity of life, likewise white hair covering the head.

His head and hair are white. This is God's countenance in the glorified Jesus. At the

⁷ Isaiah 49:16

⁸ Isaiah 1:18

⁹ 1Pet.1:19

transfiguration ‘His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as the light’.¹⁰ We read in 1 Tim. 6:16 that He is “dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see”, and Psalm 104:1-2 tells us: “You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment”. But it is precisely because that light is unapproachable that He also covers Himself with darkness: “He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies”.¹¹ It is a protection for us, just as the Lord said to Moses: “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live”.¹² So that is why Jesus says: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father”. In Jesus God makes himself visible. And the church makes Jesus visible to the world. As his body, the church reveals Jesus Christ.

Now, when we talk to one another we always look at each other’s face, for the facial expression adds to the communication. We recognize Jesus, the head of the body the church, by looking at Him. We can discover Him in each other and in those who are our ministers. “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”¹³ and: “we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake”.¹⁴

“And His eyes like a flame of fire”

The eyes symbolize the prophetic, as is explained in Isaiah 29:10. We are able to see this world because of our eyes; they are the two witnesses of this reality. By looking with two eyes we are able to see depth and to determine distance. A parallel can be drawn: by two witnesses something in court is determined as the truth. In the spiritual realm, the prophet, or somebody with a prophetic gift, sees depth; they are able to look ahead of what is coming on the way, i.e. they are able to see further than the end of one’s nose.

To see with this double sense, light is needed. Light then is also a symbol of this prophetic aspect. Light comes from outside, and not from the eye itself. In the same way, the spiritual eye, the prophet, registers prophetic light coming from God. In popular language therefore the prophet is also called a seer.

But here, Jesus reveals Himself with eyes as a source of light. This corresponds to who He is: God – the Son of the Father, the second person of the Trinity. So, as well as being the Prophet, He is at the same time the Light.

Everything Jesus shows to John, so the whole of this book of Revelation, is

¹⁰ Matt.17:2

¹¹ Ps.18:11

¹² Ex.33:20

¹³ 2Cor. 5:16-17

¹⁴ 1Thess.5:12,13

prophetic light that God gives concerning the present, the past and the future. By this light we can see Him with our spiritual eyes in creation and in history, and in this way our soul is built up in the knowledge of Him and of who He is.

On page 2 I have already indicated the connection between Jesus' eyes (the seven eye's of the Lamb) and servants of God. For instance we see this in the four creatures before the throne full of eyes in front and back,¹⁵ who are also described as full of eyes around and within.¹⁶ And in Ezekiel 1:15-20 where the four creatures or cherubs are described each beside having a wheel: "As for there rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them (...) When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels". In the Bible, images such as these, of for instance the eyes of God sent out into all the earth and also here Jesus' eyes like a flame of fire, indicate that these eyes also take shape in His servants (and this therefore relates to angels and men).

"His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace"

Copper or brass is a symbol of the Spirit. That the copper gives light, as though refined in a furnace, indicates that a force is going out of it. The legs must be strong enough to carry the whole body; though here only the feet are visible because the garment reaches down to the feet. In the book of Job we read in chapter 40:15-18 that brass is associated with strength. God answers Job: "Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you; He eats grass like an ox. See now, his strength is in his hips, and his power is in his stomach muscles. He moves his tail like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are tightly knit. His bones are like beams of bronze; his ribs like bars of iron...". In the Bible shields of copper, copper doors, and fetters of copper are mentioned, and they all indicate the power and strength of the Spirit. Also the brass snake Moses made and held up in the wilderness, so that everybody who looked on it did not die of the snakebites, indicates the Spiritual strength that overcomes death.¹⁷

God shows to us that it is not about normal human power in Psalm 147:10-13: "He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those that fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For he has strengthened the [copper] bars of your gates". It is not human power God is concerned about, but spiritual power.

Furthermore, feet are an image of the evangelist who is permitted to preach the gospel; as Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 6, where he speaks concerning the spiritual armour – "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able

¹⁵ Rev.4:6b

¹⁶ Rev.4:8

¹⁷ Num. 21

to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...". Putting shoes on is an image of preparedness to preach the gospel. In Rom.10:14,15 is written: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!' "

Concerning this Jesus says in Mark 16:15-18: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover". In this passage (and also in the brass feet) a direct connection is made between preaching the gospel and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, by the promise that powerful signs will follow the preached word.

"And His voice as the sound of many waters"

In the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel we read about a revelation of God similar to this first chapter of the book of Revelation; in Ezekiel 1:24 the voice of God is described in the same way: "When they [the four cherubim] went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army". And in Revelation 19:6 we read: "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters...". Waters are an image of people or nations, as Psalm 65:7 tells: "You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples", and in Psalm 93: "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea".

Here God reveals himself with a voice that all people can and will understand. This is what happened on the day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit was poured out on everybody present in the building where they were gathered and the tongues of fire appeared on their heads; they started speaking with other tongues, as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. The crowd was amazed, because they heard each of them speak in their own language: "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs".¹⁸

As He confused the speech of man at the building of the tower of Babel, from which came forth different peoples and languages, yet in this way all these different peoples are able to understand Him.

¹⁸ Acts 2:1-13

“He had in His right hand seven stars”

In verse 20 He explains that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. The word angel means messenger. In the Old Testament angels are messengers of God. The angel of a church is the rendition in Greek of the person who ministers in the Jewish synagogue. These angels, the messengers of God in the church, are better known in present-day church organization as bishops. They are the heads of their various churches and are responsible for the government, building up, growth, and spiritual life of his body, the church. It therefore is not plausible that Jesus would give St. John the assignment to write epistles to spiritual beings. Furthermore, in Dan.12:3 we read that teachers are compared with stars.

Jesus holds these stars, or heads of the churches of the seven periods the church is on earth, in His right hand. The right hand is the hand in which you hold something, because this is normally the stronger hand. If you want to hold a weapon, or to keep something together, you do so with your stronger hand. That is the reason why the right hand is a symbol for the apostleship; they specifically are the instruments to hold together the churches. Without the apostleship the church has fallen apart in factions and different church-denominations. Apostles are called and installed directly by Him who is the Head, and not by human agency.

The left hand is a symbol of the prophetic office. Both hands together are seen in another image, that of the two poles by which the ark of the testimony was carried; the hands that bear the testimony into this world. The golden mercy seat on the ark is an image of the Triune God on which the blood of Jesus Christ, with which He brought reconciliation for humanity, is sprinkled; the ark, which is made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, and upon which the mercy seat rests, is an image of the church which is the body of Jesus Christ, the head, who is now with his glorified body in heaven. Hence the church's walk is set in heaven (in the holy of holies) with Him.¹⁹

Apostle means sent one – apostles are sent as messengers to preach the Gospel and, together with the revealing light of the prophet, they lay the truth and foundation of the church.²⁰ All office in the church comes forth from Him and is revealed by the Holy Spirit in man whom He calls and sends for that reason. That is why in Ephesians 2:19,20 it is written: “you are (...) members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone”. In line with this Paul in the same epistle writes: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift (...) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the

¹⁹ Phil.3:20

²⁰ Col.1:5

fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love".²¹

In his epistle to the Corinthians²² he elaborates on this. It is the Holy Spirit who works these things: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all; for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."

In this chapter *gifts*, *ministries*, and *activities* are identified. These all relate, in their different ways, to the working of a revelation of God. First, the mercy gifts, or gifts of the Spirit, are a revelation of the Spirit.

Secondly, in the ministries, or more specifically in the fourfold ministry in his body, the Son is revealed. In the temple and tabernacle in the holy place (an image of the church) this fourfold ministry is visible in the four cherubim that are embroidered on the veil; they are the revelation of Jesus, who is the door and passage to the holy of holies. This revelation of Jesus Christ in the fourfold ministry within His church we also see in the four creatures, or beings, who are around the throne.²³ The description of these creatures we read of in Rev.4:7: "The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle" – in this image we see the elder, the shepherd, the evangelist and the prophet. Also in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 1, we read of the description of the four creatures, who in chapter 10 are named cherubim. These four cherubim, in which is God's Spirit (and in the wheels), are a revelation of God's glory. In Ezek.1:10 we read: "As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle."

Thirdly, the activities, or workings, are a revelation of God the Father. Note that it is not the people with a gift, ministry or activity, who reveal God's Trinity, but it is one and the same Spirit who works all these things.

²¹ Eph.4:7-16

²² 1 Cor.12

²³ Rev.4

He then writes further on in 1Cor.12: "And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?"

In this fashion Paul explains that all the members of the body belong to one another, and that no one can do without the other. They all, together, reveal Jesus by that one Spirit: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many."

In 1Cor.11 we read about the connection between the body of Christ and communion, and the impact of divisions in the church: "For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it"²⁴ and "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body".²⁵

The question arises how can it be that the church is so divided? Diverse denominations and sects curse one another, unable to look upon each other as baptized in his body. Is this how we discern his body? Do we not, in so doing, eat and drink judgment to ourselves? What Spirit does it reveal?

Jesus prayed in his high-priestly prayer²⁶: "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are (...) I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me..."

"Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword"

This sword is an image and revelation of Jesus Christ, in the way that the Word (i.e. Jesus) has its effect through the Spirit.

His voice, with the sound of 'many waters', now takes on a different symbolic form. A sword is a weapon that penetrates the body; it can even go completely through the body. Isaiah prophesied the following concerning this servant of the Lord: "Listen, O coastlands, to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and made Me a polished shaft".²⁷ Furthermore, in the epistle to the Hebrews is written: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit,

²⁴ verse 18

²⁵ verse 29

²⁶ John 17

²⁷ Isaiah 49:1-2

and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”²⁸

In this way, this sword of God discerns our motives, our innermost thoughts; the deepest matters of the heart lie open and exposed to the eye of God. Through other Christians, the Holy Spirit reveals to us our hidden thoughts in words spoken through the lips of a brother or sister. This can make us feel exposed - we are under the impression that the brother or sister knows everything about us - things we have kept hidden, out of fear, or things we have done which looked impressive but in reality the motivation of our heart was not so pure.

Through such words God allows us to find out that we must not look to human strength. For the brother or sister who seems to know these matters of the heart it is not really their insight (indeed they probably do not understand much about it). But through this word we know ourselves, and we come to recognize that it is God who is speaking through that person. He is indeed a living Lord, who reveals and lays bare, by his Holy Spirit, the motives of the heart, here and now in the present.

“And His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength”

Here we have a kind of summary of His appearance as a whole. Everything seems to give light: His face, His head and hair, His clothing, all is white; in His eyes shines light, a flame; and His brass feet seem to glow as if a furnace were present.

It is as if the sun were shining in the middle of the day, at its highest point and also at its strongest. This is indeed a beautiful description. In our solar system everything revolves around that sun, Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world. The night symbolizes His absence from the earth. In that darkness, He gives the light of the moon, which is an image of the church. The moon reflects the light of the sun. The church on earth thus is the reflection of the sun, of Christ. The church is not the sun which generates the light itself, but the reflection of that same light. In this way every person can meet God in any baptized Christian, for it is his Spirit who lives in us and reveals Him.

By this light we can see with our spiritual eyes and we are no longer blind, as the world is blind. We also receive from Him, who is our Sun, the warmth of His love. And finally the good seed that He sowed in this world will bear its full fruit, a hundredfold, by the growth and effect of Him who is our light.²⁹

Bearing fruit then, for Him, is ever the purpose of the church. That purpose we not only find in the seven epistles from Revelation 2 and 3, which reveal to us the church in the seven periods that she is on earth, but also in the seven seals that follow in the chapters hereafter.

²⁸ Hebrews 4:12,13

²⁹ Matt.13:3-9, 18-23 and 7:16-20

In conclusion, one can say that Jesus reveals Himself in a fourfold way. For it is Jesus who is the Apostle of our confession, visible in the symbol of the golden band about the chest. Jesus is the Prophet, visible in the eyes like a flame of fire. Jesus is the Evangelist who preaches the Good News, visible in the feet of brass. Jesus is the Shepherd, visible in the white garment and in His hair white like wool (both a covering).

WORKING OUT

REVELATION 2 THE 7 EPISTLES

1 st Epistle	2 nd Epistle	3 rd Epistle	4 th Epistle	5 th Epistle	6 th Epistle	7 th Epistle
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Chapters 2 and 3 are a *working out* of the *total image* from chapter 1:9-20; the total image of the 7 lampstands in the midst of which was seen someone as a son of man. As said in the openingword of the previous chapter do the 7 lampstands stand for the 7 periods of the history of the church on earth. Jesus, in the form of one like a son of man, makes clear that He is present in the church throughout her history, and in the description of this form Jesus shows who (and what) He is for us.

These periods of the church on earth are worked out in the 7 epistles of the chapters 2 and 3; the epistles present to us 7 characteristics the church will show in every period of her development. Also the presence and the actions of the Lord in the church throughout this time are worked out in these epistles. So, in the 7 epistles we see again different aspects of the description of the 'son of man' from chapter 1.

Why, in a prophetic book such as Revelation, do we read of epistles that had to be written to 7 churches in Asia-Minor? And why exactly are they addressed to these 7 churches in Asia-Minor? The answer is, that the contents of the epistles were applicable not only to these 7 particular churches then in existence, but also to the Universal church in its sevenfold completeness throughout her history. The epistles together form the sevenfold epistle of Jesus Christ to His whole church of all times and give a description, in spiritual language, of the characteristics or qualities to be found in the whole church throughout her history. Although in the time they were written more than these seven churches existed, the epistles no doubt had direct connection to these seven particular churches together with their angels, or bishops. However, these seven churches were selected as representatives by the Holy Spirit to serve as a model for the whole church then in existence and for the whole church in every period of her development. Everything that is said to the 7 churches, then, is also applicable to the whole church. All the spiritual characteristics that are sketched in the epistles are to be found in greater or lesser measure in each church of whatever time. On the one hand the epistles divide church history into 7 periods each with their own characteristic, while on the other hand they distinguish 7

characteristics that are present in each period at the same time, just as the 7 colours of the rainbow. This way we can consider the 7 churches also as a miniature of the church, the whole church throughout her history.

In Rev.22:16, the Lord says: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches". And at the end of each of the seven epistles the calling sounds to the churches (note, again, the plural form): "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". From this we observe that, in an epistle, the words of the Spirit are not merely directed to one individual church and her angel, but to the whole church, i.e. all churches, not just in every place, but also of the saints (Christians) in every successive generation.

This approach agrees with the whole of Holy Scripture. All the words and actions of God, which in a literal sense concerned the people of Israel, are also applicable to the new, spiritual Israel. The Old Testament prophecies were indeed spoken as a consequence of real, historic events in those days, yet they also relate to spiritual events in the present dispensation of the church. This higher meaning is not something coincidental, but is, in God's purposes, even more important than the literal meaning.

It is the same with these epistles. Clearly, they are written to real churches, existing at that time. But it is also abundantly clear that their contents reach far beyond the limited application of those places at that time. It is ever thus, with the words of Him who sees the end from the beginning. By reading these epistles our view is enlarged and we realize the oneness of the church at all times, in whatever condition. On the one hand, we see the failures into which the saints have fallen, but on the other hand how in all ages God has had His faithful servants. We notice He has much to say about the failures within the churches, but in His love and mercy He does not forget to praise the good points of each.

The church in every period of her development shows certain characteristics. And it is to be expected that, before appearing in her ultimate perfection, the church will show all these characteristics simultaneously at the end of the present dispensation. Also, this series of epistles via St. John to Ephesus and the other churches in Asia-Minor, is a symbolic picture that the whole church successively presents to the eyes of the Lord.

In the following sections it will become clear that the names of the seven churches also contain a meaning. In the whole Bible, since the history of creation, names usually have a meaning. Although not everything is known of the historical root of the names of the seven churches in Asia-Minor, it cannot be a coincidence that they fit precisely to the condition of the church outlined in each epistle.

We are able to distinguish seven periods in the Christian dispensation in which the characteristics described in these epistles are to be found, and which follow each other in the same sequence. Schematically this is shown as follows:

REVELATION 2

Ephesus	±30	–	±100	The apostolic century, from the founding of the church until the persecutions.
Smyrna	±100	–	313	The time of the great persecutions during the Roman emperors.
Pergamos	313	–	754	From the recognition of Christianity by Constantine and the later elevation to Roman state-religion, till the time of papal power.
Thyatira	754	–	1517	From the gradual rise of papal power until the Reformation.
Sardis	1517	–	1813	From the Reformation till the end of the French Revolution.
Philadelphia	1813	–	±1900	The period in which God works a restoration of the church, and also when the Missionary and Evangelical Societies are established.
Laodicea	±1900	–	present	The present time, where a choice has to be made: Hot or cold, but not being lukewarm. God will reject those who do not want to make a choice; but He will dine with those who will accept from Him gold, and white garments, and balm for their eyes, that they may see.

1 st Epistle	2 nd Epistle	3 rd Epistle	4 th Epistle	5 th Epistle	6 th Epistle	7 th Epistle
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THE EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS (±30 – ±100)

The apostolic century, from the founding of the church until the persecutions.

The first epistle is that to the church of Ephesus. This epistle is related to the first period of the church, the apostolic century and especially to the last part of this period during the last years of the life of St. John.

In Greek, the name Ephesus reminds us of a fiery longing and well-being. Ephesus was the most important of the twelve Ionic cities of Asia-Minor, and was known for her trade, her wealth and her sorceries. She was also known by the temple of Artemis, or Diana Lucifera,¹ who was frequently portrayed as having her head crowned with seven stars. However, the church, crowned with her bishops or angels, is the actual Light-bearer for the world.

Jesus begins this first epistle with the salutation: “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” – indicating that this epistle, together with the following six epistles, are the *working out* of the *total image* given in chapter 1 concerning the lampstands and the seven stars. The seven stars are the angels or bishops of the seven churches and they represent the combined bishops of the Universal church. Only to the Lord is given all the honour and love, which binds us together in one body. The angels of the churches are symbolic of the presence of the Lord. Christ holds these angels, not separately, but together – all seven in one hand, His right hand. In this first epistle, the right hand symbolizes the ministry of apostles that was present in the first century of the church.

Also in the tabernacle was a lampstand. This was made of pure gold and stood in the holy place.² The tabernacle is full of meaning. The holy of holies is an image of heaven, the holy place an image of what the (heavenly) church on earth is in Christ, and the Court an image of the church in the world. Yet, because the lampstand was of pure gold, this actually belongs in the holy of holies, in which were both the ark of the covenant (of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold) and the mercy seat (made of pure gold). The golden lampstand with her seven lamps is an image of the sevenfold Spirit of God.³ When Jesus had completed His work on earth and had ascended into heaven to his Father, He sent the Holy Spirit to the earth to dwell in man. That is why the golden lampstand was not standing in the holy of holies, but in the holy place, where also was the table with the 12 cakes of showbread (an image of the

¹ Lucifer means: Light-bearer

² Ex.26:31 and 35

³ Rev.4:5

whole Covenant People). The seven lampstands between which Jesus walks are an image of the same sevenfold Holy Spirit, this time showing that He is always present in the church, in each of the seven different periods. In the temple of Solomon, however, we see ten golden lampstands and thus 70 lights.⁴ Now the temple is an image of the church in the future, when it has been fully completed and perfected. This number 70 is symbolic of all the nations out of which the church, the New Covenant people, will be formed. In the song of Moses in Deut.32 we read in verse 8: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel". On the one hand he points to the confusion of speech during the building of the tower of Babel and on the other hand, now the people of Israel is saved and gone out of Egypt and is on the brink of entering the Promised Land, to the coming into the land of Egypt of the sons of Israel (Jacob). Jacob came with 70 souls to Egypt to escape the famine.⁵ Gen.46:8 records it in this way: "Now these were the names of the children of Israel, Jacob and his sons" after which follows a list. The 70 souls who had come to Egypt are all named sons (see the enumeration of the descendants from verse 9). In verse 26 is written: "All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy".⁶ Moses therefore in his song speaks of 70 nations who came into being during the confusion of tongues of the building of the tower of Babel. These 70 nations we find described in Gen.10. We read there that 14 nations arose from Japheth, 30 nations from Ham, and 26 nations from Shem. The chapter ends with: "These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood". When the number 70 turns up we may consider that (in a hidden way) this number has a relation with all the nations, or all of mankind.

It is the Holy Spirit who will bring together from all parts of the world (and from all times) this spiritual nation, this new 'spiritual Israel' and then dwell in fullness in them. The word 'church' is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* (Latin: *convocatio*), which means 'a called together crowd'.

In chapter 1 we saw that the lampstands are an image of the church. However, the church can only be the lampstand, because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. He is the actual Lampstand, the Holy Spirit who makes us children of God and forms us as the church, or His congregation (the holy place). It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us who reveals Jesus and calls out: "Abba, Father".⁷

In Rev.1:12 we read that Jesus walks among the 7 golden lampstands, and in verse 20 it is explained that the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Here in Rev.2,

⁴ 2Chron.4:7

⁵ see Gen.46:27

⁶ see also Ex.1:5 and Deut.10:22

⁷ Rom.8:15 and Gal.4:6

this is repeated at the beginning of the first epistle: “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...”. However, towards the end of the epistle Jesus says: “or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent”. But Jesus said to Simon Peter: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”. The church, the lampstand in all times, will thus never be without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. How then must we understand that He will, if necessary, take away the lampstand?

From our point of view, it seems that the lampstand has been removed from all seven churches, because these seven churches in Asia-Minor no longer exist. The book of Revelation however is a prophetic book and the seven epistles are part of that. These seven churches stand prophetically as a symbol for the church throughout all the times she is on the earth. When Jesus says that He will “remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent”, He does not mean that the congregation will no longer exist, but that His Spirit will depart from this congregation. After all, the golden lampstand symbolizes, first and foremost, the Holy Spirit (the pure gold), and it is only because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that the church is the lampstand. The church herself is not yet pure, for we are still in our fallen flesh; and as the church, we are only His body because the Holy Spirit dwells in us. When Jesus says ‘I will remove your lampstand from its place’, He means: that His Spirit will disappear from the midst of the congregation. In this way it is possible that a local congregation still exists as an institution, but the Spirit has disappeared from their midst. Only the form remains, but there is no longer any spiritual life.

From the above it is clear then, that a lampstand is not a congregation or church in an administrative sense, but it is a church or body of the Lord in which His Spirit lives and works. Although the Lord can remove a lampstand from a local congregation, it is not possible to remove any of the seven ‘spiritual’ lampstands that symbolize the church in the seven periods of the church on earth.

Jesus acknowledges in this epistle the works of those who serve Him in that first period, their patience and faithfulness, their discernment of evil, their testing “those who say they are apostles and are not”, and their unwearied labour testifying of Him, despite the difficulties they experienced. But He has against them, that they have left their first love and so were in danger of forgetting the Lord’s Return. The Lord here refers to the love of the first congregations that was visible in the beginning, as a result of which many were added because people saw their mutual love in practice. The Lord calls upon them to convert and again “do the first works”, lest He come and “remove the lampstand from its place”.

The church should show this love in practice, being a lampstand that shines light in the darkness, as a light upon a mountain, visible to anyone in this world. The

mutual strife, for example between Jewish and gentile Christians, however, started to be an issue in the churches and the fire of their first love, which was directed towards the Coming of the Lord, diminished. The apostle Paul complains about this leaving their first love. He writes: “All they of Asia are turned away from me”,⁸ and St. John speaks about one of the angels, Diótrephe, as “loving to have the pre-eminence”.⁹ People had become more directed towards persons than towards Jesus Christ.

Yet there were good qualities of the church which remained upright and true. She still hated these deeds which Christ also hates; she still witnessed for justice and truth and against injustice and lies. The church resisted the works and the teachings of the Nicolaitans, who used Christian freedom as a covering for all kinds of excesses like consuming meat-offerings and harlotry. During this time, she still maintained that the Christians had to forsake all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and should live a sober, righteous and god fearing life in this world.¹⁰

As indicated earlier, we must apply the commendations and the warnings of the Lord in the seven epistles not only to the original churches in Asia-Minor and the seven separate periods they foreshadow, but also to every period of the church, and therefore to the present as well. Consequently, this warning applies to us now, and so we must ask ourselves whether we expect the Coming of the Lord and put into practice mutual love. Also, we must search our heart, and take to heart the call to repent and do again ‘the first works’.

To those who “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” and who “overcome” is given the promise that they will eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. The fruit does not grow in the present world, but in God’s Paradise. Adam and Eve left their first love, their faith and trust in God, and, for this reason, the way to the tree of life was cut off. In his letter to the Corinthians,¹¹ St. Paul is already showing his concerns: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”.

By leaving their first love, the church of the first period was not able then to enter the Kingdom and eat of the Tree of Life – to pass from mortality to immortality. In the same way, the people of Israel could not enter the Promised Land – the consequence of their unbelief was that they had to wander through the wilderness for forty years. Still the promise to them who remain faithful is, that they will receive their reward.

⁸ 2Tim.1:15

⁹ 3John:9

¹⁰ Titus 2:12

¹¹ 2Cor.11