

QUIET TALKS ABOUT OUR LORD'S RETURN

by Samuel Dickey Gordon

Gordon's comprehensive treatment of Christ's return as the center and climax of His purposes, providing biblical teaching through careful study of Scripture, examining Christ's own teachings from the Gospels, and exploring the steps in God's prophetic program.

83 Chapters

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Preface

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In my boyhood days I heard much from Mr. Moody's lips about our Lord's return, and belief in it became a real warm thing to me. Later I became rather confused over the different teachings regarding it, until by and by it was practically pushed out of my working program. I still believed that I should live so as to be always ready if He should come, but I had no grasp of the true teaching about the great event, even while I felt tremendously the emphasis placed upon it in the Bible. It had practically slipped out of my prayer-life. So that if prayer influences in any way our Lord's return, the confusion in my mind robbed my prayer of that influence.

Then I was led to pick up the Bible afresh on this subject. Earnestly trying to forget all the books I had read, I went prayerfully and slowly to work to gather out, and gather up, just what the Book itself teaches. I had no thought of making a book; I was concerned only with getting straightened out myself. The result arrived at has profoundly affected my outlook as a follower of Jesus Christ, my attitude toward the great problems of Christian service both at home and in foreign mission lands, my prayer-life, and my understanding of numerous passages of Scripture hitherto obscure to me.

And so because of the deep and deepening conviction that one's right outlook, and attitude and prayer exert a positive influence upon the time of our Lord's return, and that in this subject is found the key to the clear, broad grasp and understanding of the precious Word of God, I am letting this modest little messenger in print carry to others the results of my study, and the method by which the results were reached.

I am not concerned so much about any one accepting what is put down here, but I am deeply and intensely concerned that many may make a fresh, thorough study of God's Word, on the simple plan used here, or any other adequate plan, that its clear, emphatic teachings may be clearly and broadly grasped, and the whole life yielded to their power.

The plan followed is, not to study present world conditions, nor the likelihood nor unlikelihood of certain things happening, but only to try to gather up the teachings of the Book on this subject.

The final work on the manuscript has been done while crossing the Pacific Ocean, and in China. The distance from home makes impossible my own attention to proof-sheets. I am deeply grateful to Mr. Revell for his great kindness and painstaking care in personally supervising the reading of the proof-sheets.

S. D. G.

1. About Our Lord Jesus

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A Brief Continuous Biography

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Almost the first you hear of Him He was mending a break. It was a bad break, too. He mended it by His own direct touch. He gave a bit of Himself. It was just like Him. That's the sort of thing He has been doing ever since. The greatest act of His life was mending a break, and doing it by giving Himself utterly out.

The story of this first mending is in the opening page of our old Bible. The story of creation is told in the single opening sentence of ten words. There is no calendar, no process is given, just the simple tremendous fact of creation stated. The second sentence tells with pathetic brevity of a break, sad and tragic. Then He—our great Friend—gave Himself to mend that break. His Spirit "brooded tremulous with love" over the disorder. That personal touch of love and power does quick, wondrous work, and man's home is ready for him. Again He gave Himself—His breath, and so man comes to His home, and into sweet fellowship with this wondrous father-mother-God. They are alike, and so can be fellows in spirit and life.

This giving of Himself is His most characteristic trait. He has been doing it constantly, and is. Eden and Calvary are the two mountain peaks, but the peaks are merely the highest points of the whole mountain range. He gave His breath in Eden, His blood on Calvary,—simply two parts of one act. In giving His breath He let us know that whenever the need might come He would give His blood.

This reveals His heart's longing. It is a bit of His exquisite parable-teaching. He wants what He gives, one's very self. A clergyman in the Midlands in England told me of a father and little daughter. They were continuously together whenever possible. Then an estrangement seemed to come. She would excuse herself, saying she had something to do, and leave him. This went on for a long time. He was deeply grieved, but said nothing. Then one morning, it was his birthday, she brought him a pair of slippers with her face all aglow. "Oh," he said, "thank you so much; where did you buy them?" "Buy them! I did not buy them. I made them. See, every one of these pretty stitches I put in with my own fingers!" "Oh," he said, "and it took you just two months to do it." "Now who has told you my secret?"

"No one told me, daughter, but it's been just two months that I missed you so much, and felt so grieved and wondered what had happened, and why you stayed away from me." Then he said very tenderly, "Thank you so much for the slippers, but next time remember it's your-self I prefer to anything you can give me." That was his father heart speaking out. That revealed a bit of the God-image in him. We bring our service, our things. God gave Himself. He longs for us, ourselves. So He says in creation, in Eden, on Calvary, and evermore by His Spirit.

Before coming to fix that first break He was in the Father's presence, in closest touch, from the earliest untimed morn of the uncreated beginning. It was His love for us that drew Him down to our corner of the universe. After coming He remained in most intimate touch with all our life. But after the Eden break He had much greater difficulty in getting men to recognize His presence. Yet some

did. Enoch and Noah used to take long walks with Him, and help Him in carrying out His great plans of love for men. He used to talk with Abraham under the stars about His longings for the race.

He had a hard time one night down by the little Jabbok stream to hold Jacob to His plan for helping the world. He had to change Jacob's step so they could walk together, though it grieved Him sorely to do it. He watched with tender care while the messenger-nation was having its birth pains in Egypt; patiently trained Moses to tend the new-born, and talked to him out of the desert bush; went along with them Himself from Egypt through all the desert road to Canaan; guided Joshua in the conquest; taught Samuel how to pray; and trained David how to shepherd sheep and people. When things were getting into bad shape He had a talk one day with Isaiah in the Jerusalem temple, and afterwards a series of talks with Ezekiel down by the Chebar.

All this time He was never absent from any part of His earth, or His race of men. They failed so largely to recognize or respond to Him. But, though deeply pained and grieved at His heart with what He saw, He patiently remained, sustaining life by His own direct touch; giving answer in the soil to all their requests; sending sunshine and rain and fragrant dew; speaking in their hearts; responding to every longing cry; and grieved that they understood so little what He was saying to them.

Then things got into the very worst shape. Something more must be done. So He wrapped Himself about in the garment of our humanity, and came in among us, through a very low door, and lived our life, shared our experiences, felt our temptations, met our tempter and worsted him. He went through the narrow Gethsemane gateway, up the steep hill of Calvary, where His great heart broke under the weight of our sin. So He made a new way for us back home. So He won the love of our hearts. So He forever worsted our enemy. The third morning He rose, then later rose up higher, back again to His Father's presence.

He was seen once after going back. It was by John. It was a sight never to be forgotten,—eyes of flame, feet like burnished brass, a face as the sun shineth in its strength, head and hair white as wool, as snow, a voice like many waters in the sense of authority it conveyed, but tender as a woman's in speaking with John. I do not know that the white hair speaks of the intensity of His suffering on earth; it may not be so; but so it always seems to speak to my own heart.

I recall the incident of the mother whose daughter confessed her wayward conduct, but was utterly hardened to the shame of it. The physician confirmed the truth of the young woman's statement. Not a word of reproach escaped the lips of the heartbroken mother, but the next morning when she came to breakfast her hair was white. And the sight made the daughter realize the mother's awful grief, and her own sin, and broke her heart into penitence. Our Lord's face in the glory bears the deep marks of His awful sufferings for us.

There He has remained since, praying for us men, thinking about us, doing all He had been doing before, and looking forward with eager expectation to coming back again. During the Kingdom time He will be seen on the earth as during the Transfiguration, in a wondrous glory.

After the Kingdom time is over He will gather all the race together around about Himself. He and they will walk together under the trees of life, by the river of life. His presence will flood the wondrous garden-city with light. And they shall see His face, and His likeness shall be in their

faces.

His Return,—the Centre and Climax of All His Plannings

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His coming into our midst in human garb was because of our going away. We had gone away from Him. He came to us. He had a wondrous plan for living in our midst as King. But sin broke the plan. His coming again is to finish up the plan broken at the first coming.

God and man were together in a garden; it was a wondrous garden, trees, flowers, fruits, singing birds, beautiful animals, and a river of water of life clear as crystal. Together they talked and walked and worked, finishing up the work of creation. Then man went away, then farther away, then he lost his way back, then didn't want to come back. God never went away, and has never gone away. He remained, and remains, in all life just as before, but unrecognized, largely, not wholly.

Through two thousand years He has called and wooed, but the ears grew deafer. Then, while still wooing by His presence, He prepared to come in a new way that they could not fail to understand. A new nation was made. It was to be His new doorway in. Through it He would come as a Man. It took a long time to get the doorway ready. At last He came to it, so He could get through it, into His world in this new way.

But the door was all barred, logs crossed over it, up and down, and overgrown with thorns and poison ivy. But His love impelled Him to push through, carrying the crossed logs as He came, all torn by the thorns, dreadfully scarred, but He reached His race; and some began to understand the fire of love in His heart.

But that trouble at the door interfered with the full carrying out of His plan. He had a wondrous plan of love for the whole race through coming personally in this new way. Sin broke the plan. He gave His life to rid man of the sin. Then He planned that His friends down among men—those who had understood His love and purpose should go and tell all the others. Then He planned to come back again, and carry out the great love-plan interfered with by that trouble at the door.

And He will. So He says. And He has a way of getting the thing done that He has set His heart upon. Some of the dear friends He sent out to tell the others have not kept the plan quite clear in their minds. This has delayed things some. But the coming again is the very centre and climax of all His plannings, and He has never been known to fail. His love is a fire whose flames never burn low, nor lose their fine glow.

2. On the Knees, With The Book, Finding Out Just What It Teaches About His Return

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[Note: This section of the book gives the method by which the results are reached, as well as the results themselves; and so it includes a good deal of detailed study. Section III gives the results only, and in much briefer, simpler shape.]

Some School Rules

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The Mosaic of Truth

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The way in which the Bible is written is a good deal like a mosaic of which the pieces are not yet fitted together. The gathering of the different pieces of the mosaic, finding their relation, and fitting them in place until all are accurately together, each piece next to its fellow, is a fascinating task, yet requiring much patience. The more homely, more familiar thing of the same sort is the geography game of blocks by which young children are taught first lessons in geography. It is the fascination of the old mosaic turned into practical use in child-training.

So it is with the Bible. A full statement of its teaching on any one subject is never found all together in one place. The revelation of truth is gradual. The book is a growth. It is a school book with its parts carefully thought out and adjusted so as to be best suited to us. It is as if the Holy Spirit had a clearly defined purpose in so doing. He is a rare teacher. He wants us to become thoughtful, prayerful students of this Book, gathering out and then gathering up from its various parts the bits of truth, and then fitting them carefully and accurately together.

But He is thinking in yet deeper than this. He is thinking chiefly not of the truth itself, but of us, who will be purified and trained and made "free," free from prejudice and ignorance and immatured beliefs and lives, through the truth. He would draw us to the Book that He Himself may come more into our lives. Quiet brooding over its pages is an opening of the life to Him. He inspired these pages. He is in them. He broods over them. He reaches out of them to mould and refine and deepen those who come brooding prayerfully over them.

The beauty and meaning of each piece of the mosaic comes out fully only as it is in its place in the whole design. This is peculiarly so in the Bible. The full meaning and beauty of any passage comes out only as it is gotten into its place in the whole mosaic of truth to which it belongs. The verse beginning "In nothing be anxious" [Note: Php_4:6.] is a wonderfully strengthening message taken by itself. But when you find it is a bit of Paul's prison Psalm, that he is a prisoner with chain at wrist and ankle, awaiting trial and likely as not the executioner's axe, yet he is singing this bit of message in joyous major key out of his prison house,—that gives a new, rich significance to his earnest word not to be anxious. He knew from sweet experience what he was talking about.

Herein is the great value and fascination of broad reading of the Bible. I mean reading it as a whole, by the page, as a story. We still have the individual beauty or sweetness of any one passage, and then find it yet richer when looked at in its setting. And only in this way can the full meaning be gotten. The meaning of any one verse or statement is modified and coloured by the other statements on the same subject. We ought to try to get something of a broad grasp of this Book of God. Then we will come to have a simple common-sense understanding of the general sense of Scripture, which in turn helps so much in understanding particular verses.

Admission to the School

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The humblest, busiest Christian has the enormous help of possessing a book from God. It is not large; it is written for the most part in simple, direct language; it comes to us in our own mother-tongue. By agreement of all it contains the highest ideals. And, even more, it brings to us the Man who lived those ideals amid circumstances just like ours. And it does yet more, it gives the secret of power in living these ideals. And that is something no other book of West or East does, or can do.

This Book of God reveals what He wants us to know. It has been most strikingly preserved through centuries of neglect and of hatred. The best scholarship of the world has made it an open Book to the humblest, most unlettered person who can read. Our English translations are remarkable pieces of work. Here any one may come and learn just what God Himself would have us know on any matter of practical life.

The ticket of admission at the door of this schoolroom can be gotten and used by any one. It is not wisdom, nor scholarly knowledge, nor mental alertness, valuable as these are. If so, most of us would be staying outside the door. It is a ticket any one may bring. I will not say may easily bring, but may surely bring if he will.

That ticket has three coupons to it; namely, a humble spirit, willing to sit at a teacher's feet as a little child and be taught; an open mind, willing to let the lifelong, deeply rooted ideas go when the light coming in shows they should; and an obedient life, willing to change and shape the daily habit of life to whatever the Book may teach.

The best posture of body for the scholar in this school is down upon the knees. It is not always possible actually but can be in the spirit that controls the body. The joint of the knee has a most striking connection with will and eye and ear. The bending of the knee-joint helps to bend that stiffest of all human joints,—the will. And as the will bends the eye opens, and the ear opens, and the inner understanding finds the windows opening and new clear light softly flooding in. Prayer is the essential as one comes to this Book. With it will come and stay the willingness to be taught, to be shown where we are wrong, and to bring the life up to the teaching. That threefold willingness will be as a sure guide, leading you by the hand into the clear, sweet light of truth.

Now we want to come to this Book to find out just what it teaches. There is another way of coming to this Book. It is a common way, and a most difficult way to avoid taking. We are so constantly tempted to take it, and may be so accustomed to taking it, that I want to put up a good plain signpost of "Beware" over it here. It is the habit of going to the Book to find proofs for what we believe. And it is surprising how, if you are not particular about the connection of words in Scripture—and users of this way usually are not—how you can find something, a phrase, a verse, that seems the very thing you need to prove your point.

Our friends who, honestly enough, use this way should remember that it was the way used by the Tempter in the wilderness in trying to turn our Lord aside from the right. The evil one is a very skilful partial-quoter of Scripture, and has an astonishingly large following, doubtless an unconscious following, among earnest, godly people.

The Atmosphere of the Book

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There lived a dear old saint of God in Württemberg many years ago, who was scholar and philosopher as well as saint. That part of Germany is even yet fragrant with the sweet odour of his name. And all the Western Church is under tribute to John Albert Bengal for his Christliness as well as his scholarship. Bengal had three most remarkable rules for Bible study. They are like John's Gospel in one regard, simple as a child's speech in form, but deep as the Pacific in meaning. The first was "Get everything out of the Bible." That is to say, let it be the teacher. Get your beliefs and information, not from books, nor from commonly current teachings and beliefs, but only and wholly from this Book. Do not come to prove your theory but to find what is truth. That's a hard rule to follow; should I say that it is rarely followed?

Bengal's second rule was, "Read nothing into the Bible." That is a rule yet harder to follow. Maybe it can't be followed fully. Everybody has some bias or prejudice. It's all the stronger when we don't know it's there, as is so often the case. There needs to be a strong purpose and constant practice and much prayer and deep humility of spirit to follow this second rule. Yet only so can one get to the real truth.

The third rule is as simple and calls for hard work:—"Let nothing remain concealed in the Book." I am quoting these rules freely from memory. The first rule makes the result dependable, as being indeed true; the second makes it accurate; the third makes it fully rounded, avoiding partial or half-views, which are so easily gotten hold of. These are remarkable rules that would free us from unreliable, inaccurate conclusions and from half-truths or partial truths, mixtures of truth and error.

Now I want to make a faithful attempt, at least, to follow these good rules of good old Bengal faithfully and steadily through these simple talks. There is no subject where there seems to be more of the confusion that attends inaccurate and half-stated and fancifully conceived theories, honestly enough though they may be conceived, than this subject of our Lord's return. It will take a severe mental effort, and much prayer, and undiscourageable hard work, to hold aside all one has heard and hears, and attempt to find out just what the Book teaches. And it will take yet harder work and more prayer to put it into simple shape for us common folk, whose study time is limited, to get hold of easily.

There is another point to guard as we go into this schoolroom. We will be constantly tempted to stop and ask, "Why! how can that be?" regarding some point brought out in the study. As, I have gone through I have found so much that is utterly surprising, and quite contrary to what seems possible or probable, that it has taken a strong, steady purpose to hold these questions off until the facts of the Book were all gathered out. It may seem quite impossible, or at least wholly unlikely, that certain things spoken of will occur. It would involve such radical and seemingly impossible changes in the affairs of the nations.

We should, for the time being, hold determinedly off all attempts to fit together things in the world as we know them, and the things which the Book says are to be. We are not studying the probability of the statements of God's Word being true, nor weighing present events, but simply trying to find out just what the Book teaches. One thing at a time makes better work. We want to hold off our puzzling questions until we get through, and give the Book a fair chance to state its case fully without interruptions.

It will help us much to remember that the Bible has a Jewish atmosphere. It was written wholly by Jews. It was written in Jewish surroundings. To the writers the Jews are God's chosen people. It is through the Jew that blessing is to come to the rest of the world. Their minds and hearts are full of a Jewish kingdom to be set up in the earth. They even think of the Jew as a superior people, as well as being favourites of God. In the latter pages, that is the prophetic pages, and the period of the Gospel and the Epistles and the Revelation, there is an intense expectancy of the Kingdom coming. That, of course, meant to them a Jew kingdom, ruling over all nations, and bringing blessing to all.

We have swung so far away from all this sort of thing that it seems almost impossible to get the Jew standpoint of these writers. Our atmosphere is intensely non-Jewish; the Bible word for it is Gentile. We live in a Gentile atmosphere. The word really means the "nations," as distinct from the Jews. The very phrase reveals the intense Jewish atmosphere of the Bible writers.

To-day, the Jew is a scattered, despised people. He has been persecuted alike by the Christian Church, the Mohammedan, and the nations, and is being still in certain quarters. During the later centuries the wave of persecution has largely spent itself. He has come into a position of great prominence and importance. Yet he is to a large degree simply tolerated, because of his great wealth especially, and because of his unquestioned ability. The Jew, even where he has greatest liberty and opportunity, is tolerated, despised, and thought of as inferior, without analysis as to just wherein he is so.

Now sympathetic approach to any subject is essential to a fair understanding and appreciation of it. In studying a great painting, one seeks to get the artist's conception sympathetically, in order to appreciate what he has put on canvas. And so here we must attempt to get something of the Jewish standpoint and Jewish atmosphere of the Bible time and writers if we are to get the correct perspective of the pictures presented there.

From Our Lord's Own Lips

From Our Lord's Own Lips

How the Gospels Grew

How the Gospels Grew

Let us turn first to the Gospels. It helps to remember just how there came to be four Gospels. Mark's seems to have been the earliest, as it is the simplest of the Gospels, and the one keeping more nearly a chronological, rather than a topical order of events. It is the simple recital of the leading things of that period as Mark learned them from Peter, and wrote them down under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

But there were certain questions troubling earnest Jews which it did not answer. That this Jesus was really the Messiah of their prophecies was a puzzling thing to thousands of earnest, godly Jews. Their Messiah when He came was to establish a kingdom. This Jesus had not done so. How could He be the promised Messiah? This was the question that puzzled John the Herald as he lay in prison. [Note: Matthew 11:2-19.] This Jesus filled out all the personal side of the prophecies, the teaching and healing and so on, but He did not fill out the official side; He did not establish the Kingdom. Why? But the official side could be filled out only through His acceptance by the nation; and instead of acceptance He was being rejected. And our Lord in replying to John simply said he must be content to wait. Jesus would not anticipate the actual rejection which He clearly saw was coming.

Now Matthew's Gospel was written for these Jewish questioners. Its whole atmosphere is peculiarly Jewish, to a degree quite beyond Mark and Luke. It begins with the kingly genealogy, and sets forth for Jewish readers how fully this Jesus fulfilled personally all the old prophecies, and did not fill out the official because He was rejected by the nation. Then later Paul was sent out to the great outer, non-Jewish, Gentile world. And as one is always led to adapt his message to the people he deals with, so Luke, Paul's companion, was led to write a Gospel for these non-Jewish outsiders, in which much of the Jewish standpoint and atmosphere and phraseology is left out.

Then that generation passed away, and there came another generation, a later one than that to which Jesus humanly belonged. To them, and so to all after generations, John's Gospel is written. The first three Gospels are absorbed with the rejection of Jesus. Why was He rejected? There must have been some reason for it. John's Gospel groups together incidents and facts showing that Jesus was indeed rejected, but that it was by the small group of men holding the official reins of the nation and driving hard. And they were controlled by the basest, most selfish and devilish motives in their rejection. And He was accepted by men of all classes; He was doubted, then inquired into, and then believed and trusted lovingly and loyally, against bitterest persecution, by men of highest rank and humblest. This simple setting of each Gospel helps much in tracing its teachings. Of the four, Matthew's is the one in which the Jewish colouring is strongest.

We want to go through each of these Gospels and gather out just what is taught about our Lord's return. Before doing so, however, a question arises. How shall we regard the teachings addressed by our Lord to the inner circle of disciples? How do these teachings apply to us Gentile Christians?

There is a twofold division of all men in the Old Testament,—into Jews, and the nations, or Gentiles. This twofold division is in constant evidence, and is natural enough in a Jewish Book. In the New Testament there is a new group called the "Church" coming to the front, making a threefold division, namely Jew, Gentile, and the Church. This new group is a body of people containing—strange to say, very strange to a Jew—both Jew and Gentile, associated on terms of intimacy and love. The link that binds them together is personal attachment to Jesus. This threefold division is sharply marked in the New Testament. The Jew is quite distinct from the nations, and the Church is as sharply distinct from each of the others.

This distinction should be kept clearly in mind, for the usage of our day tends to rub it out. That is, the distinction between the Jew and all others is as sharply marked as ever; but that between the Church and the nations is not distinctly marked, but rather blurred over or wiped out. In most nations designated as Christian (and that means all nations of the Western World) the Church is made a function of government, an integral, official part of the nation. And in our own American nation there is a constant attempt or tendency to consider the Church as something that works upon society or the nation as a whole, rather than being a distinct body whose influence upon society and the nation may be more marked and greater, because of the principle involved in the line of separation between the two being sharply drawn.

Now without making any comment on this, one way or the other, it should be noted that it tends to blur out in our minds the distinct line between the nations and the Church which is so sharply defined in the Bible. To get a clear understanding of the teachings of the Scripture one must remember this sharply drawn line between these three bodies of people,—the Jews, the nations, and the Church.

Now this leads us back to the question, how shall we regard the teachings of our Lord to the disciples? that is, how do these teachings apply to us, who are members of His Church? There is no Church in these Gospels. It was not formed until the day of Pentecost. Well, there were no disciples chosen until after John's imprisonment. John was Jesus' official representative. Treatment of him was treatment of Jesus. John's imprisonment was the first sharply decisive event pointing to the rejection of Jesus the King, and so the Kingdom. It was so accepted by Jesus. It is at this point that He makes certain changes. He begins the selection and training of a small group of men. He begins preaching to the multitudes; and He changes His centre of activity from Judea to the less dangerous neighbourhood of Galilee.

These disciples were Jews racially, but in allying themselves with Jesus they had practically broken with the national leaders. The antagonism between the national leaders and Jesus was sharply drawn that baptism day in the Jordan, when John the Herald's witnessing to Him was received with such silence by the Jerusalem deputation. [Note: John 1:19-34.] It grew more sharply and bitterly marked until the climax of the cross was reached. That antagonism extended to Jesus' followers. Near the close Jesus' going back into the vicinity of Jerusalem was considered dangerous to His life. This is shown by Thomas' remark about going to Bethany:—"let us also go that we may die with Him." [Note: John 11:8-16.]

These disciples were Jews racially but not representatively. They were the group around which the Church of the day of Pentecost was shaped. They were the seed of the Church. The only words spoken about the Church in the Gospels are in Matthew's Gospel. [Note: Matthew 16:16-20;

Matthew 18:15-20.] They are spoken only to the inner circle of these men. And—mark it keenly—they were spoken after the break with the national leaders was so decisive that Jesus was beginning to prepare His disciples for His suffering and death. There are three main groups of Jesus' teachings in these Gospels, of instruction to the multitudes, of criticism and disputation with the leaders, and of instruction to the inner circle of disciples. The line between these groups of teachings is distinctly drawn.

Now these disciples were the Church in its seed form, they were the leaders about whom the Church would form. And so the teachings to them are to them representatively as the Church, and therefore they are teachings to the corporate Church, and to those of us belonging to the true Church. It will help immensely to keep this simple distinction in mind as we push on.

Clearing the Decks a Bit

Clearing the Decks a Bit

Let us turn now to Matthew's Gospel. There are two classes of passages here. A few dealing directly with His coming again; and many more which deal with the subject of the Kingdom. These latter include a striking group of parables. These Kingdom passages should be included, because to these people the coming again was for the purpose of setting up the Kingdom; because Jesus speaks of the Kingdom in answer to their question about His coming; [Note: See Matthew 24:3 with Matthew 25:31.] and further because Jesus does not begin speaking about coming again until His rejection at this His first coming is clearly assured. This is the setting of all the Gospel teaching on the Second Coming,—it is because He is being rejected at the first coming. We will leave these Kingdom passages for the present, and look at those that speak directly of His coming again.

There are four passages in Matthew's Gospel where our Lord speaks directly of His coming again. The first is in the tenth chapter, where He is sending His disciples out on a preaching and healing tour. And He says that they will not have visited all the cities of Israel to which their visitation is restricted "till the Son of Man be come." [Note: Matthew 1:23.] This is one of the really puzzling passages, as to just what it means. We shall be coming back to it after awhile.

The second passage is in the sixteenth chapter, at the time when Jesus was beginning to teach the small inner circle about His coming, suffering, and violent rejection and death. He refers to a time when He "shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels." [Note: Matthew 26:27, Matthew 26:28.] He adds that some of the disciples to whom He was then speaking would not "taste of death" till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom. This seems to point to the Transfiguration scene occurring just afterwards, witnessed by three of those to whom He spoke. It was the only thing within the lifetime of these men to which the words could apply. The Transfiguration scene seems to be a bit of pictorial teaching regarding both the Kingdom and the coming again. Our Lord Jesus, with a glory shining out from His person so dazzling as to stupefy one's senses (even as Daniel was stupefied in the last of his visions), standing upon the earth, engaged in earnest conversation with two saintly men of the Old Testament time, one of whom had not died but been caught up into the open heaven out of sight of earth, these three talking about things on the earth,—this is the picture of the Kingdom of God coming in power.

The fourth is His reply to the high priest at His trial, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." [Note: Matthew 26:64.]

The third of these is of yet greater interest in the amount of teaching it includes. It is in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five. These two chapters make up what may be called the Olivet Talk. It was a talk by the Master with four of His disciples, including the three leaders, on the top of Mount Olivet, one day during the last week, after His terrific denunciation of the Jewish leaders.

This Olivet Talk grew out of questions asked by these disciples. It was a private heart-to-heart talk with this inner group, three of whom had been admitted more intimately than any others into our

Lord's life. Jesus is talking with the same three who had seen the glory on the Transfiguration Mount, and in the chamber of Jairus' daughter, and soon would be with Him in the Garden agony. Andrew has come this time with his brother.

Jesus had been speaking about the destruction of the magnificent temple of Herod. They asked two or three questions, namely, when would this destruction take place? What would be the "sign" of His coming? and of the full-end or consummation of the age? A rapid glance through the former talks with the disciples [Note: Matthew 10, 13, 16.] makes clear that these questions grew out of what He had said before. They are using His language in asking their questions.

Before looking at the teachings of this Olivet Talk, it will be good to clear the mind a little regarding it. It has been associated quite commonly with the destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman Emperor Titus in the year 70 a.d. Now it is true that this whole talk grew out of Jesus' remark about the destruction of the temple and so presumably of Jerusalem. And such a destruction did take place by the Romans in the year 70. But that destruction was not accompanied by all of the things named here.

There was terrific suffering among the Jews during that awful siege of Jerusalem. But there are at least three things spoken of here that did not take place at that time. The Gospel had not been preached "in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations" up to the year 70, though there is evidence that within the early centuries it had been taken as far as to India and China on the east and to Britain on the west. The general disturbance of the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, stars, and the powers that hold the solar system together, did not occur then. And the coming of the Lord in glory as openly seen as the lightning, did not of course take place then. These events are connected with a destruction of the temple and city, yet did not have their fulfilment in the Titus destruction.

One other thing will likewise help to clear the decks as we start into this bit of study. That is regarding the word "generation" in verse thirty-four, [Note: Matthew 24:34.]—"this generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished." The word under our English word "generation" has different meanings, like most words in any language. It may mean all the persons living on the earth at any one time. Or, it may mean a race or stock of people. In all translation and interpretation the general sense of the passage decides which one of two or more suitable words to use in any given instance. In this case we are able to see, looking back, that it could not mean the generation of people then living, for the words, were spoken about the year thirty-three of our common chronology, and the Titus destruction took place about thirty-seven years later, so that, with the common reckoning of thirty-three years to a generation, that generation had practically passed away. If the words read "this race shall not pass away," the allusion would clearly be to the Jewish people, and would be a prophecy of the remarkable preservation of the Jew, distinct from all nationalities during these long centuries, a preservation that has been the puzzle of historian and philosopher alike.

The Olivet Talk

The Olivet Talk

We turn now to look a little into the teachings of this long talk. Let us keep in mind that this is our Lord's answer to the questions about His coming, the full-end of the age, and the destruction of Jerusalem, which in their minds was connected with His coming.

The Olivet Talk, in Matthew's account of it, may be easily grouped under three general headings, after the introductory bit out of which it all grew. The first of these may be called the tribulation group of paragraphs. It runs from verses four to forty-four of chapter twenty-four. In it our Lord speaks of a time of great distress or tribulation coming to the whole earth. This is the uppermost thought through the whole section. This is apt to come as a distinct surprise to one who is listening for something about His coming again. Yet this is the first thing He speaks of in answering the questions about when He will come.

There are five distinct paragraphs in this tribulation section. The first paragraph runs through verses four to eight. It cautions against evil men coming under the pretence of being Christ, and gives the general characteristics of the tribulation in its beginnings as wars, rumours of wars, famines, and earthquakes. Paragraph two runs through verses nine to fourteen inclusive. It tells of great tribulation coming to our Lord's followers. It helps here to remember who these disciples are representatively,—not the Jewish nation, but the Church. The Church will suffer during this awful time of persecution, and some will be killed. As a result of the terrible persecution there will be a great testing and sifting. Many will "stumble," that is, give up their faith; false religious teachers will add to the confusion; and the love of many true Christians will grow cold. These are the general characteristics of the time for the Christian people. Then our Lord gives a clue to determining when the end of all will come,—it will not be until the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world as a testimony unto all the nations.

The third paragraph runs through verses fifteen to twenty-eight. It gives the opening event of this tribulation time, by which its beginning may be surely recognized. Jesus makes a quotation from Daniel, referring to something or some one called "the abomination of desolation"; when this is seen standing in the holy place of the temple in Jerusalem, that will indicate the beginning of this great tribulation. And our Lord significantly adds "let him that readeth understand." This event will be followed by a time of awful happenings. The tribulation will be such as has never been known, and never will be again.

It will be a time of such terrible experiences for Christ's own followers that for their sakes it is mercifully shortened. One of the marked traits of the time is the false religious teachers who will have power to do miraculous things to attest their teachings, and deceive men. There will be many pretended Christs, but the real coming of Christ will be as unmistakable before all men as the lightning flash in the sky. That is paragraph three of the tribulation section.

The fourth paragraph is a brief one but brings us to the central event we are thinking of. It runs through verses twenty-nine to thirty-one, and fixes the closing event of the tribulation time. There will be disturbances in the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and stars, and "the powers of the heavens (i.e., powers of physical attraction and cohesion) shall be shaken." Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. His appearance will cause mourning among all the tribes of the earth. The word translated "mourning" has in it the thought of grief. And that suggests a sorrow and penitence among men when they see and recognize the Lord Jesus in His glory. Then He sends His angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and the redeemed will be caught up into His presence from every corner of the earth.

The final paragraph of this first section runs through verses thirty-two to forty-four, and mingles earnest pleadings to faithfulness with additional information. The budding of the fig tree was a certain sign to them of the coming of summer, so these occurrences will be the sure indication not only of His coming but that He is near. [Note: Matthew 24:32, Matthew 24:33.] Then comes the prophetic utterance about the preservation of the Jewish race until all these things take place. [Note: Matthew 24:34.] Then an assurance of the absolute certainty of these events occurring; [Note: Matthew 24:35.] but the secrecy of the time from all, save the Father. [Note: Matthew 24:36.] The people of the earth will be as unprepared and as completely taken by surprise as were the people in the days of Noah. [Note: Matthew 24:37, Matthew 24:38.] The separation of some being caught up, and the rest being left on the earth, would come as they were busy about their common duties, utterly unexpectant of anything unusual likely to occur just then. [Note: Matthew 24:40, Matthew 24:41.] Then is the earnest plea to live so as to be always ready for His coming however unexpected it may be when it actually occurs.

The second section may be called an exhortation, a pleading section, whose note has already begun in the closing sentences of the section before. There is an earnest pleading for "faithful" and "wise" followers in a parable of the good and the evil servants. [Note: Matthew 24:45-51.] Then the plea for wise followers is illustrated and emphasized in the parable of the virgins, [Note: Matthew 25:1-13.] and the plea for faithfulness in the parable of the talents. [Note: Matthew 25:14-30.] Our Lord tells us to "watch," and then in these two parables tells us how to watch. Our lives are to be so lived that we are ready for our Lord's coming at any time. And while watching and waiting we are to be working, making the very best use of what He has given us to use for Him. Watching means waiting expectantly, and means working, doing His will while waiting and watching. The three w's must go together.

The Talk ends with the judgment section. [Note: Matthew 25:31-46.] It speaks of all nations, but the language used makes it clear that it is not a judgment of nations corporately, but of people individually; for they are separated "one from another," and the basis of judgment is one's personal treatment of the Lord Jesus in the treatment of those belonging to Him. The last sentence of the chapter makes it clear that this judgment is a final scene. It closes the chapter of earthly probation, and of earth events.

It is interesting to note that the line of division between the Jew, the nations, and Christ's followers, is distinctly drawn in this Olivet Talk. The Jews are referred to in the third person, as "this people," [Note: Luke 21:23.] as "they," [Note: Luke 21:24.] and as "this race." [Note: Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32.] The nations or people of the earth generally, as distinct from Jew and from the

group of Christ's followers are referred to, likewise, in the third person, as "Gentiles." Christ's followers are spoken to, the second person being used. The persecution which they suffer is "for my Name's sake." [Note: Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:12.] To them is promised special wisdom in need; [Note: Mark 13:11.] it is they who are urged to be watchful against the evil, and for His return. Indeed the whole talk is addressed to the circle of Christ's own people, later called the Church.

Here then may be put into a few sentences the teaching of Matthew, from our Lord's own lips regarding His return. It is to be preceded by a time of tribulation, which will be a terrible experience for all, and of sore testing and suffering for God's people. This will be introduced by an event in the Jewish world at Jerusalem, something or some one, called "the abomination of desolation," set up in the holy place in the temple at Jerusalem. And it will come to an end with an unsettling or shaking of the powers that hold the heavenly bodies in their places. Then our Lord Jesus Himself shall come openly to all, in great glory, and gather to Himself His own followers, leaving all others on the earth. His coming will find the world wholly unprepared. These events are absolutely sure to take place, though the time is absolutely unknown to any one on earth.

The remarkable preservation of the Jew in his distinct identity separate from all other nationalities is foretold, and becomes an evidence of the certainty of these events. Christ's followers are earnestly urged to live with this as the chief thing to look forward to. The thought of being ready for Him at His coming is to be the constant incentive in all living and serving. They are to be always ready, especially watchful against everything that would prevent their being gladly, joyously ready for Him whenever He may come. They are to be quietly at work doing His appointed task for them while waiting, and watching. The Coming and the setting up of the Kingdom are regarded as belonging together, the Coming being for the express purpose of setting up the Kingdom. Then there is a simple swift picture [Note: Matthew 26:27 to Matthew 27:3.] of the Lord Jesus coming in His Kingdom, or as He will be seen in the Kingdom time. It shows to us our Lord Jesus in most dazzling personal glory, standing on the earth, engaged in earnest intercourse with two men, two of His faithful ones; one of these two has not died, but been caught up into the heavens; their intercourse is regarding matters on the earth. Sometime at the close of all earthly life there is to be a general final judgment of all persons living on the earth. This is a brief gathering up of the teaching in Matthew.

Two things should be noted about these Matthew teachings. One is this:—there is no chronological hint of any kind, as to when all this will occur, nor as to how long the period of tribulation will be. On the contrary we are emphatically told that the time is unknown. The other is this:—the description given deals almost wholly with the evil that is coming, and which seems to come to a terrible climax, which is ended by the Coming. It touches only lightly the glory that will be for God's people, yet that light touch is a distinct one.

Fore-Gleams

Fore-Gleams

Mark's Gospel contains about the same things as Matthew, in briefer shape, with no additional information. There are the indirect passages referring to the Kingdom, and three passages referring directly to the Coming. These three are:—the transfiguration paragraph; [Note: Mark 8:38 to Mark 9:4.] the reply to the high priest at the trial; [Note: Mark 14:62.] and the Olivet Talk. [Note: Mark 13.] The latter is the chief passage. It is shorter than in Matthew; the latter part of Matthew's account is omitted; [Note: Matthew 25.] there are some details not touched there; but essentially the teaching is the same, with the chief omission just noted. The main teaching is about the tribulation, its characteristics, its opening and closing events, the Coming, and the plea for watchfulness.

Now let us turn to Paul's friend and travelling companion, dear Doctor Luke. He tells us a good bit not in the other Gospels. He had evidently talked with many of our Lord's intimates, including His mother, from whose lips he probably got direct the exquisitely told story of her unusual motherhood. He visited the scene of the Gospels, sifting facts and gleaning all available information. Then he settled to his glad task of writing a Gospel for the non-Jewish world, which Paul's blessed aggressiveness was being used to open up to the message of the Christ.

Here are the same references to the Kingdom as in the other Gospels, which we are to study a little later. Then there are the direct teachings about the Coming. There are five distinct bits here. First comes the transfiguration paragraph, [Note: Luke 9:26-30.] which is here substantially the same as told by Matthew and Mark. Then there are three other bits, which may be called fore-bits of the Olivet Talk, as they are woven into the same warp of thought and fact; and then the Olivet Talk itself.

The Olivet fore-bits all come toward the very end. They suggest that our Lord was thinking much during these last days of the then present rejection, and of the future events, which would make right what was now so terribly wrong. The first of these is in chapter twelve. In the opening paragraph He is telling the disciples of the need of boldness and fearlessness in witnessing for Him, and intimating that it would be in the midst of opposition and persecution. [Note: Luke 12:1-12.] Then the man who wanted our Lord to help him get some money from his brother, drew out the parable of the rich farmer-fool, [Note: Luke 12:13-21.] and leads Him to talk to the disciples about trusting God fully, and putting the things of God first. [Note: Luke 12:22-34.] Then follows a paragraph earnestly pleading that His followers live constantly like men "looking for their Lord." [Note: Luke 12:35-48.] Here is the earnest word about how to watch. We are to be busily and intelligently doing the task our Lord has assigned, while our hearts are ever on the alert for the music of His coming feet.

Then in the short paragraph following [Note: Luke 12:49-53.] the words gets intenser. One can almost see the intensity burning in the Master's eye as the words are read. He has come to cast

fire (the greatest of all purifiers) upon the earth, and He longs that the time were ripe for its awful but needful, and really in the results blessed, work to be begun. But He had an awful personal experience to go through first of all, and His soul was in the grip and bondage of His great purpose, with an intense sore longing to have it accomplished. The time was coming when loyalty to Himself would lead to a severing of some of nature's dearest human bonds. It is a distinct sounding ahead of the note of terrible persecution of which a few days later He speaks on Olivet's top to the inner group.

The second Olivet fore-bit is in chapters seventeen and eighteen. [Note: Luke 17:20 to Luke 18:8.] It begins with the Pharisee's question about when the Kingdom was coming, in which there mingles both sarcastic contempt and a critical watching for something which they could use against Him. It's a bit unfortunate that the translation of His reply is not more nearly accurate, even in the revisions. Practically He said to them, "the Kingdom of God is not discerned by narrow-eyed, critical scrutinizing such as you are so apt at. There will be no calling out 'lo here! lo there!' There'll be no need of that. For the Kingdom of God is now in your midst, openly proclaimed and attested by the most unmistakable supernatural power." It's a pity that the translation "the Kingdom of God is within you," so often quoted in quite another setting, still remains even in our American revision. Certainly the Kingdom was not in these Pharisees, who were even then plotting His death, and trying to entangle Him into some utterance which they might use against Him.

Then follows a quiet bit of talk with the inner circle, in which He speaks of what is afterwards repeated in the Olivet Talk, as we found it in Matthew. The Son of Man is coming again after His rejection; the coming will be as open as the lightning. The conditions on earth will be as in the days of Noah and of Lot, utter forgetfulness of God, and unpreparedness for the Coming, which would separate men as they were engaged at their ordinary occupations, some being caught away, and some left behind. Then He tells the story of the judge, the widow, and the adversary, to illustrate the sore pressure in which His followers would find themselves, and especially the great need of "not fainting," but of being insistently persistent in prayer. And He closes with a tremendous question, "when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" And the whole inference of the question is that the faith He is urging will be a very scarce article during the awful time of stress before He comes.

The third of these fore-bits comes on the day of His royal entry into Jerusalem. As He approached the city that day, from the east, He came to the turn in the road which, all at once, shows the city lying stretched out before one's eyes. As He beheld its beauty, and realized its doom, the tears stole down His face, and John walking by His side hears Him talking aloud, but as though to Himself, about the destruction of all this fair beauty. It is the same note as that on which the Olivet minor dirge is sung. [Note: Luke 19:41-44.]

Luke's New Paragraph

Luke's New Paragraph

It is only a day or two after, that He is sitting on Olivet's top and answering the eager questions of the inner four. Luke's account [Note: Luke 21.] follows exactly the lines already noted in Matthew, but it has two features not included there. We remember that this Olivet Talk grew out of His telling about the destruction of Jerusalem, though the particular item of the destruction itself is not directly spoken of in the Matthew talk. Now here that item is expressly spoken of. One paragraph deals wholly with the destruction of Jerusalem. [Note: Luke 21:20-24.] The rest of our Lord's words, of which this paragraph is a part, must be kept in mind. Naturally this paragraph fits into its place in the whole talk, and its meaning is influenced by, and partially gotten from, its surroundings.

One slight change in the translation will help to make the meaning clearer. The word "land" in verse twenty-three would in this instance be more accurately translated earth,—"there shall be great distress on the earth." It is so sometimes given as an alternate reading in the margin. Taking the whole talk into account, the reference clearly is not to the land of Palestine, but to the whole habitable earth.

We should keep the Book open here as we talk together. A careful reading of these lines makes one thing quite clear. Certain parts of this paragraph clearly refer to the destruction under Titus in 70 a.d.; just as clearly certain parts of it were not fulfilled at that time. Note a few items:—"Jerusalem... compassed with armies," and "they—the Jews—shall fall by the 'sword,'" would evidently be fulfilled at the Titus destruction. "They—the Jews—shall be led captive into all the nations," easily dates from that time, when a renewed and complete scattering of the Jew took place. "Jerusalem... trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," clearly began then, and remains true to this hour. "Days of vengeance," "wrath upon this people," would be true of that time, whether fully fulfilled or not. But "days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled" would as clearly not be fulfilled by the Titus destruction. "Great distress upon the earth," taken with the rest of the talk, would not be fulfilled by the great distress at that time in Jerusalem and Palestine.

Having gotten this preliminary clearing-up look at the paragraph, let us note a little further just what it seems to teach. And it will help much if we can put on our Jew ears for a moment, and try to listen as the intense Jew listened. The striking passage is in verse twenty-four. Four things stand out. There was to be a time of judgment upon the Jew and Jerusalem, during which it would be trodden under foot "of the Gentiles." But the Jew ear would quickly note that this is to be for a fixed, limited period of unnamed length, that is, until the time of Gentile leadership has been fulfilled. That puts a distinct ending to the time of Jewish oppression. Then, by simple, clear inference, there would be a cessation of this non-Jewish world-leadership, and a Jewish restoration. Fitting this paragraph into its place in the whole talk, the Gentile period would end in the great tribulation, at the close of which would be the coming of our Lord, and with that the Jewish restoration.

It will be remembered that the opening event of the tribulation is to be some one, or some thing, called the "abomination of desolation" being set up in the holy place of the temple. The tribulation ends with the open, glorified appearing of Jesus before the eyes of all. This would mean that the temple at Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The city, of course, was rebuilt centuries ago. But the temple never has been, the land being under the control of the Turks, and the site of the temple occupied by a mosque.

The strong temptation here is to run off into speculation as to the likelihood or unlikelihood of such a thing, and how it could be. But we have agreed to hold off all such questions, and simply gather up the teachings, without discussing their seeming probability in view of the way things are just now. So we must resist this strong temptation, and hold all such questions off, until we are through with this bit of work.

There is one other bit in this Luke account of the Olivet Talk, which is not in Matthew or Mark. There it is clearly taught that the Christian people will experience great testing and suffering during this tribulation time. Here is a new note of encouragement added regarding that saddening prospect,—some will be kept untouched and unharmed in the midst of that awful time. This is the very last word in Luke's account, [Note: Luke 21:36.] "Watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail (or be accounted worthy) to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Through watchfulness and prayer some will use the grace freely given, and pass through the experiences without hurt of any sort, though not without having great pain in spirit because of these happenings. Even so the three Hebrew young men were in the fire, [Note: Daniel 3.] but were untouched by it, save to be freer by the burning of their bands. This possibility is held out to us by our Master as the point of His last earnest plea that we shall be ready, watching and waiting and working, with our eye steadily fixed forward to His glad appearing.

The Startling Answer

The Startling Answer

John's Gospel is written on wholly different lines from the first three; they are made up of a certain common group of occurrences running through our Lord's life and ministry. John's is a gathering up of specially selected occurrences to show that, while Jesus was rejected by the leaders, He was accepted by many others of all classes. It contains only a few direct allusions to the Coming.

In the last long quiet talk with the disciples, on the eve of His suffering, while still about the supper table, He speaks of His coming again and receiving them unto Himself, [Note: John 14:3.] as a bit of comfort in their distress over His going away. Sometimes in that evening talk He speaks of Himself and the Holy Spirit interchangeably; the coming of the Spirit is as His own and the Father's coming to them. [Note: John 14:17-23.] Sometimes He speaks of seeing them again, when He clearly refers to the resurrection appearances. [Note: John 16:16-22.] But in the beginning of the talk the Coming is to receive them to Himself that they may be where He is, [Note: John 14:3.] and a little later on He refers again to this. [Note: John 14:28,

In the great fishing chapter, added at the end of this Gospel, they are walking quietly along the shore, after the good breakfast prepared for their hunger and weariness by our Lord's own thoughtful, loving hands. John is walking near by, when Peter asks about John's future. And our Lord quietly replies that each man shall receive direct his own leading in the plan for his life, by saying, "if I will that he tarry till I come," and so on. [Note: John 21:22.] The passage is chiefly interesting to us just now, as indicating His teaching of a spirit of constant expectancy of His coming again, as a thing that might occur in their lifetime. There are some indirect teachings in John, which we come to see belong to the subject, but these are the only direct allusions, and do not add anything new to what has already been gathered.

Let me try to gather up in brief shape these teachings of our Lord in the Gospels, omitting many details so as to get a comprehensive grasp of the chief things taught. There was to be a total destruction of Jerusalem, which we can recognize as having taken place in the year 70 a.d. With this would come a scattering of the Jews among the nations, which we know began at the same time. There is a period of time called "the times of the Gentiles," apparently referring to the world-leadership by nations other than Jewish. But by clear inference there is a definite though unnamed limit to its length. The scattering of the Jews, and their loss of control of Jerusalem, are to continue to the end of this period of Gentile leadership. That period will end with a terrible time called the great tribulation. The initial event of this will be at Jerusalem, in the holy place of the temple, which would necessitate a rebuilding of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem, at some time before this tribulation begins. At some time, in connection with this tribulation, there will be another destruction of Jerusalem, and a fulfilment of all the judgments written in the Scriptures regarding the Jews.

The tribulation will be a terrible time of war, famine, and earthquake for all the earth, and of great persecution and suffering for Christ's people. It will be the most distressing time the old earth has ever known, or ever will know. It will end with disturbances in the solar system. Then the Lord Jesus will come on a cloud in great glory openly before the eyes of all men. His own people will be caught up into the heavens, all the rest of the people being left on the earth. Then will come the Jewish restoration, and the setting up of the Kingdom on the earth.

And then there is a simple picture of the Lord Jesus in His great personal glory, standing on the earth, holding intercourse with His faithful followers regarding matters on the earth. This is spoken of as "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom." And then there is a final scene of a general judgment of all people on the earth.

Such seems to be the startling answer of the Gospels to our eager question about our Lord's return. We still hold in check the questions that insist on crowding in, as to the probability of such things occurring, and wait in prayerful reverence to learn what more will be found in the other pages of the Book. And as we turn the pages into the Acts and Epistles, a deeply earnest prayer goes up that our hearts may be in such sympathetic touch with our Lord Jesus, that we may be yearning after that, which He is so intently and lovingly urging us to be ready for.

From His Followers' Lips and Pens

The Startled Disciples

The Startled Disciples

We turn now to the Book of Acts, and to the Epistles, most of which belong chronologically within the leaves of the Acts. It helps much in reading Paul's letters to have them fitted into the places in his journeys where they were written. It may help some of us, to jot down here the places in the Acts where they fit in.

I Thessalonians fits in at Acts 18:5, and II Thessalonians in at verse eleven of that chapter. Professor Ramsey, of Aberdeen, the best recent authority on the subject, fits Galatians in at chapter Acts 18:22, though for a long time some of us had it marked in at chapter Acts 20:2 and Acts 20:3, as written from Corinth. I Corinthians fits in at Acts 19:10, probably written toward the close of the stay at Ephesus. II Corinthians comes in at Acts 20:1-2; and Romans probably at Acts 20:3. Then there is the prison group, written while Paul was a prisoner at Rome, but in his own hired house. Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians would thus fit in at the abrupt ending of the Book, i.e., Acts 28:30-31. I Timothy and Titus are written after his release, and II Timothy during his second imprisonment, while he is waiting for his forced exit into the glory of the Master's presence.

It is of intensest interest to turn from the Gospels to the Book of Acts. In the Gospels there is a most urgent note in the Master's tone to the inner circle to be ready for His return. In the Acts there is the intensest activity in preaching Christ to all peoples regardless of difficulties and opposition. It needed a special touch to make it so. These men were gazing intently up into the sky, when they are reminded of Jesus' return, and so apparently of the part they are to play in the interval. Of course it was the coming of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal power that made all the difference in these men. It is of peculiar interest to note that under the Holy Spirit's guidance, these men, who had received such earnest teaching about Jesus' speedy return, are absorbed in taking the Gospel of His death and rising again everywhere. Watching meant witnessing while watching. We shall find that they never lost the expectant note about His speedy return in the midst of their most strenuous witnessing.

There are four passages in the Book of Acts that speak of our Lord's return. The first is a bit of instruction from our Lord Himself. [Note: Acts 1:6-11.] He is talking with the little inner group of disciples, or apostles, the "sent-ones." They are thinking, without much thinking, that perhaps His presence with them now is the Coming again of which He had spoken. He has been away; now He is back. Maybe now He will set up the Kingdom. The Kingdom was their one thought in connection with His coming. It is both striking and instructive that He does not answer their questions about the time when the Kingdom is to be restored, but instead turns their thought to what they are to be doing while waiting for the Kingdom time to come. They are not to be absorbed in counting, but in witnessing.

We will all do well to sit at the Master's feet here. There's such a temptation to ask questions, that would better be "laid upon the table" for some future time, and to be figuring up dates and probabilities, whereas the one thing to be doing is to be witnessing, lovingly and clearly, about our Lord Jesus, His love, His death for us, and His present power to help us; and holding all we are and have for this blessed witnessing, to those at home, to our Samaritan neighbours whom we don't like, and out to the farthest reach of the globe. Those men never forgot that word. It became the controlling word of all their lives. It was the last they heard from the lips they loved so dearly.

They were standing grouped about Him on Olivet's top while talking. Then they are startled at a wholly unexpected occurrence. His feet are off the ground! now they are higher! up and up He goes, probably smiling quietly in their eyes as He goes, and now a cloud—not a black rain-cloud, a bright glory-cloud—sweeps gently down out of the blue, and conceals His dear form, and they see Him no more. His task on the earth for the present being done, He yields to the law of spirit-gravitation upward, and rises toward the true centre of His life. They stare upwards after Him with eyes bulging and mouths open. Maybe they hope to get another glimpse. Certainly they are startled by such an unexpected occurrence.

Then two messengers in white appear, messengers from the upper home world whither He has gone; they are not called angels, but "men." They ask them why they stand looking up; there is great work left in this world to do. Then they make the simple unmistakable announcement that this Jesus, whom they had just plainly seen rise up into the clouds, would some day be seen coming out of the clouds in just the same way. At once they remember the Master's teaching that they are to wait for power, and then go out witnessing. And immediately they go off to do as they are bid. "Waiting" means obeying His Word while waiting and watching.

Steps in the Program

Steps in the Program

The second passage is in Peter's talk to the great crowd on the day of Pentecost. [Note: Acts 2:16-21.] In explaining the remarkable thing that has just taken place, and set all Jerusalem to talking,—the coming of the Holy Spirit and the speaking in strange tongues,—he quotes the Joel passage. It speaks of such an outpouring. But he quotes the entire passage which speaks of a day of the Lord to come, a great and notable day. Before it came there would come a great crisis, terrible happenings on earth, "blood and fire and smoke," and startling happenings in the skies. Peter tells them that the Jesus whom they crucified is the One who is to come after these terrible happenings.

The third passage is in Peter's sermon after the healing of the lame man, told in chapter three. He is preaching to Jews, to whom the Kingdom is the one passionate thought, especially at the great reunion of the Pentecost festival then being celebrated. He is urging upon them that the crucified Jesus is their Messiah, through whom the Kingdom must and will come. And he urges these Jews to repent and accept their Messiah. Then comes the passage of special interest, in verses twenty to twenty-six. The purpose in this preaching Peter is doing, is that they may repent, and so "that He may send the Christ... Whom the heavens must receive until the time of the restoration of all things." [Note: Acts 3:20-21.]

The words, "that He may send the Christ," would indicate the purpose of the preaching of the Gospel at this time. It is of course that men personally may be saved; but beyond this it is that Christ may return for the next step in His program. This is a helpful bit of light on the mission of the Church. The one main objective to be kept ever in view by the Church in all its activity is the return of the Lord. The purpose of His return is the restoration of all things. This to the Jew meant the setting up of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is to come through Christ, and at the time of His return. But there is yet more. Peter appeals to Moses and the Prophets, reminding them of what they were so fond of insisting upon, that they were "the sons of the Prophets and of the covenant" made with Abraham, that "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Then occurs this striking statement, "unto you (Jews) first God having raised up His servant sent Him to bless you" and so on. That is, the preaching of the Gospel is to be first to the Jew, because the Jew is to be the channel of God's promised blessing to all mankind.

The fourth bit in Acts is in the story of the first council of the Church. [Note: Chapter 15.] It was held at Jerusalem, at the time of the visit of Paul and Barnabas, after their first missionary journey out in the Gentile world. There was a sore question troubling the Church at Jerusalem, and carried into all the places, or many of them, where Paul had been preaching. It arose out of confused ideas about the Jew and the Church. The Church had been of course wholly a Jewish affair up to the time of the vision of Peter on the housetop at Joppa. Then began aggressive work among the outside, non-Jewish, Gentile peoples. Paul's mission was peculiarly to this outside, non-Jewish world, while he always preached first to the Jews in every place. These Pauline Churches

contained both Jew and Gentile, but with more Gentiles than Jews. But the Church at Jerusalem remained probably wholly, or almost wholly, a church of converted Jews. The atmosphere there was intensely Jewish.

Now there were certain leaders who taught that these Gentile Christians must become Jews as well as Christians in order to be saved. They could not get hold of the fact that the Jew was rejected racially and nationally; that is, as the distinctive Jew he was rejected, really self-rejected through his rejection of Him who would have brought in the Jew-Kingdom. Personally the Jew could be saved as anybody else, but the time of Jew leadership was over for that time. These leaders apparently could not get hold of this. The confusion was a natural and easy one, in such an intense Jewish atmosphere as Jerusalem. According to all the prophecies, God's plan for blessing to all men was through the Jew. That the Jew was set aside nationally was a hard thing for them to grasp.

This conference of Church leaders was held at Jerusalem to discuss this matter, which was disturbing the Gentile Churches greatly. James, our Lord's brother, seems to have been acting as Chairman or President of the Conference. He seems to give voice to the decision arrived at. [Note: Acts 15:13-21; Amos 9:11-12.] His explanation is as intensely interesting to us Gentile Christians as it must have been to the Jew Christians who were open-minded enough to receive it. In effect his explanation is something like this. God's plan of blessing for the world is through the Jew, as the leaders contended, but as matters stood, there was something else to come before this Jew-national blessing to the world. Peter had told how God had first visited these Gentiles to take out of them a people for Himself. And this, he says, is in perfect agreement with the prophecy in Amos, where it says that "after" this is done the Kingdom will be established, and then through it (the Jew-Kingdom) the Gospel is to be preached among all, in order that all the nations may seek after the Lord.

Here are three steps in James' summary. First of all before the Kingdom is set up, there is to be the preaching among the Gentiles, and the taking out of a people for God; then the Jew-Kingdom set up, and then through it a widespread evangelizing among all the peoples of the earth. That Gentile period has extended so long, including our own times, that it is as difficult for us to conceive of it coming to an end and the Jew coming in again, as it was for the Jew leaders to conceive of a Gentile being saved without becoming a Jew. It is the same question practically in the Church today, as in the Jerusalem Church during that first generation, but with the main issue reversed. They could not conceive of a Gentile Christian movement independently of the Jew. We practically find it impossible to conceive of a Jew movement displacing the Gentile leadership in the whole earth.

Let me now try to gather up in a word what additional light is gotten from these Acts passages. Jesus is to come back in the same way as He went up from Olivet, that is, personally, openly, on the clouds, and at an unexpected moment. Before that day there will be a time of terrible crisis in the earth and the heavens, corresponding to the tribulation of the Gospels. Meanwhile the great purpose or mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel to all men in order to bring Christ back again. And this preaching is to be always to the Jew first, because it is through the Jew receiving the Christ that the Kingdom will come, and through this Jew-Kingdom is to come the great blessing to all the earth.

An order of events in this broad program of God running through centuries is as follows: First of all, before the Jew-Kingdom is set up, there is to be a time of Gentile evangelization. This agrees with our Lord's word about the Gospel being preached in all the world for a witness. Then will come the Jew-Kingdom and Jew-leadership among the nations of the earth, and through this new Jew movement there is to be a worldwide evangelization, bringing greatest untold blessings to all the earth.

Then there is the distinct word about our present personal attitude. We are not to be counting dates, nor to be figuring out probabilities, but to be absorbed in witnessing, that is, in taking the news of our Lord Jesus as a personal Saviour earnestly and lovingly to all men. Watching means witnessing, ever on the alert against anything that would keep from the witnessing by life and lip. This is the thing our Lord longs to be finding us doing when He comes back.

Paul's Letters

Paul's Letters

Paul's letters are written, in each case, to meet some pressing need among the people whom he knew personally, and had largely won to Christ. The exception is the Epistle to the Romans which was written to those whom he had not met, but whom he hoped to be able to meet. It is probable that as he wrote these letters he had no thought at all of their being preserved and becoming a part of the sacred Canon. They were not written by a man in a well-appointed study, carefully balancing and polishing up sentences. Rather they bear the impress of being written by one absorbed in his other work, and as these crying needs come, stopping long enough, or catching time in between times, a bit later at night, or in an unusually early morning hour, to write. They come out of a hot heart, in intense burning sentences, which run into and climb over each other in their eager intensity, but which have a rare clearness, and power of logic.

He mingles tender pleading, careful instruction, stern rebuke, and solemn warning. He speaks freely of his experience, as he writes to these his dear spiritual children, whom he has begotten in the Lord with much hard labour and birth pangs. These letters must be read with the Acts to get the full grasp of Paul's missionary work. The Acts reveals his intense active campaigning from place to place; these Epistles give the teaching side of his work. They give us not only glimpses into the life of these primitive missionary Churches, but reveal the sort of a preacher and teacher and pastor Paul was, and reveal, too, the Gospel he preached and lived. Unconsciously, he was being used by the Holy Spirit, not only to that generation, but to the Church of every generation since, and until our Lord shall come.

Of the thirteen letters which we know are from his pen, only two make no allusion to the subject of the Coming; i.e., Galatians, written to meet the sore situation developing among the Christian groups of Galatia, and the exquisite little personal note to Philemon, the owner of Onesimus, the runaway, but now converted and returning, slave. We will take these up briefly in the order in which they were written.

The first letter to the group at Thessalonica was written when Silas and Timothy came from there to Paul at Corinth with their report of how matters were going. It contains four incidentally woven-in allusions [Note: 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.] to the Coming, which indicate how much it ran through all his teaching, and was held up constantly as an incentive, and as the one bright thing to look forward to. Then there occurs a teaching paragraph. [Note: 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 1 Thessalonians 5:10.] There was deep sorrow in some Thessalonian Christian homes over believing loved ones who had died. And the personal sorrow was a bit sorer because they had been expecting all to be caught away instead of some dying. And they were in doubt as to just what was the future of these who had slipped from their clinging grasp.

Paul assures them that their natural sorrow over the personal absence for the time need not be increased by ignorance as to the happy provision made for these. They would be not only included at the Return, but be given the courteous distinction of precedence at that time. Then he gives a little order of events in reference to this. The Lord would descend from heaven openly, before all, with a shout, the voice of Michael the archangel, and with the trump of God,—a threefold openness and publicity. In response to that call, and as if drawn up out of their graves by the spirit attraction of Jesus' presence in the air, the bodies of the believing dead would at once, under the touch of their Lord's life-giving power, rise, inhabited once more by their old-time tenants, up into the Lord's presence in the air; then by the same power would come the transforming touch upon the bodies of living believers, and they, too, would answer the upward pull of the new gravitation, and rise into the presence not only of the Lord, but of their dear ones as well.

What a wondrous double meeting that would be! meeting Him, and meeting these loved ones, so tenderly loved, and lost, but only for awhile. Then there would be no further separation either from Him or from them. This full knowledge of the Lord's loving plan for our loved ones as for ourselves would be a comfort to them in their hour of sorrow.

Then he goes on at once to remind them that they need no special teaching about the great fact of the Lord's return. They had been carefully taught about this, and the wickedness by which they were surrounded was a constant reminder that it would be in just such a time that the Lord would come. To the unbelieving world that coming would be as unexpected and as disagreeable as a thief stealing into one's house in the dead of night. In the midst of the self-complacency that says "things are moving along all right; there is no need to be disturbed by "these religious alarmists," would suddenly come the awful experience of the tribulation time preceding the coming of the Lord Himself. There is the earnest pleading to be watchful against the subtle temptations to laxness in love and in life which surrounded them. The intense expectancy that characterizes Paul, and all these Scripture teachings, comes out in verse ten;—whether we are caught up while yet alive, or are overtaken by death before He comes, as our loved ones have been, we shall in either case be with Him, and that is the one longing of our souls.

The Restraining One

The Restraining One

The second letter to these Thessalonians seems to have been drawn out by the need there of more instruction on this subject of the Lord's return, because of misunderstanding, or inaccurate teaching, regarding it. At the time of Paul's visit to Thessalonica, there had been intense opposition to the Gospel preaching, and the little church formed at the time had experienced much persecution and suffering. Paul's first word here is one of comfort to these suffering Christians. [Note: 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.] When the Lord Jesus came these sufferings would be at an end. He would deal out a just judgment upon the wicked, and be glorified in these who are now suffering. The Coming is to be a time of judgment for the wicked, and of reward for those trusting Him. We may be patient in the midst of opposition. All will be made right that is most wrong, when He comes. When suffering because of wrong, keep your heart steadily looking to His return.

Then Paul comes to the special matter in hand in writing this second letter. [Note: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.] Word had reached him that some were teaching that the day of the Lord is just at hand; [Note: King James version, "at hand"; English Revision, "now present"; American Revision, "just at hand." The force of the word underneath our English is, usually, something "threatening" or "impending," something "near at hand." The meaning "now present" could hardly seem right because they knew that neither the time of judgment called "the day of the Lord," nor the actual return of the Lord, had taken place.] that is, that His coming might be expected at any moment. They seem to have been quoting Paul as authority for this. Some were taking up this new phase of teaching; others were troubled because it did not agree with what they had been taught by Paul himself. It is to correct such teaching that he now writes to give specific instruction on this point. And he feels so much concerned that they shall not be misled by inaccurate teaching that he beseeches them not to be misled, nor beguiled by such teaching.

Then he gives specific teaching on this point. A rather careful reading of the paragraph brings out six things. (1) There is to be a falling away, that is, a falling away in the Church. This will come first of all, before the Lord's coming. (2) Then there will come to the front a leader of evil called "the man of sin," or "of lawlessness," "the son of perdition," the "lawless one." Then follows a description of this person. He sets himself up in opposition to God, sits in the temple of God, and claims to be God. [Note: This at once brings to mind our Lord's quotation from Daniel about the "abomination of desolation" standing in the holy place.] This leader of evil will have supernatural Satanic power in working all sorts of miracles and wonders to deceive the multitudes. (3) He will be slain, utterly destroyed, by the mere appearance of the Lord Jesus when He comes.

But the fourth point is of immense interest, there is now a restraint upon the power of evil. The spirit of lawlessness of which this leader will be the embodiment, that spirit was even then already at work, but it could not do as it would because of a restraint holding its desires and powers in check. And Paul reminds them that he had taught them regarding all this. This evil leader is to be revealed "in his own season." There is a purpose of God sleeplessly at work. (5) Then there will

come a time when this restraint shall be withdrawn. Then when restraint is withdrawn all the power of evil will head up in this one. (6) Then at some time after he has been at work, deceiving the multitudes with his miracles of lies, the Lord Jesus will suddenly appear in the heavens, and his appearance will destroy this terrible leader.

Put into fewer words, there would be a falling away in the Church, then there would come a terrible blasphemous leader of evil in the world; this evil one would be slain by the Lord's appearance; but at the present time there is a restraint upon this power of evil; there will come a time when this restraint shall end, then will come the awful crisis of evil under this terrible leader, and then he would be destroyed by the coming of the Lord. Such seems to be the substance in brief of this surprising addition to this subject given here.

There comes up at once an intensely interesting and practical question,—what is this power that has been and is holding evil in restraint? Paul reminds them that they know, for he had taught them. May we know with certainty? One might at once think that it refers to the body of believers, the Church, whose presence in the world is undoubtedly a restraint upon evil. Our Lord called the true believers, the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." Salt preserves from decay and corruption. Light scatters darkness.

But the restraint is by a person; there is "One that restraineth now, until He be taken out of the way." The restraint spoken of here is not by a body of people, but by one person. It is a restraint of evil by good. It is a restraint that has been exercised by this person then, and ever since, and at the present time, and until the time when He is withdrawn. There can be but one such person. It is the Holy Spirit who is restraining. This is part of His mission in the world. And the withdrawing of the restraint could mean only this, that there will come a time when He will withdraw from the earth,—an awful time!

Now this withdrawal of the Holy Spirit would seem to mean the withdrawal of the Church, or the company of believers. That would seem a very natural conclusion to draw. And it would be a delightful conclusion, for it would mean their escaping all the awful time that follows that withdrawal. Yet a little thinking into the matter brings up difficulties at once. There will be believers on the earth during the time of the tribulation, which clearly corresponds with the sway of this lawless one. Our Lord's teaching in the Olivet Talk would seem to make that clear. He tells His disciples how they will be persecuted, and some killed, and how He will give them special wisdom for every emergency; they are told about the false Christs so as not to be deceived by them; and He earnestly pleads with them to be true and watchful during the awful apostasy of those days. Paul's own teaching is made clear by the opening sentence of this chapter—the Lord's coming, with which the whole chapter is concerned, is the time of "our gathering together unto Him." And His coming is after the restraint is withdrawn and the lawless one has come and run his course.

Now, of course, wherever a believer is, the Holy Spirit is in him. The Spirit is our life, even where He is not fully obeyed, or is ignored, yet He remains as our life, and as the seal of our ownership by the Lord Jesus. Therefore the withdrawal is not from individual believers. There remains only one thing, and that is that the withdrawal is from the Church as such. It will be a withdrawal from the corporate body called the Church. And such withdrawal would be for a reason. It at once lets in a flood of light as to the conditions prevailing in a corporate body which came into being by the coming of Himself. He is its life. Now for some reason He withdraws. This is a very solemn thing to

recognize, and to repeat. The very suggestion brings great sorrow to one who loves the Church. There will be much more to say about this in the talk to follow on the Church.

Here it should be noted, that one of the few distinctive things about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, was not simply that He came into or upon individual men. That was equally true of men in Old Testament times. The distinctive thing, touching this, was that He came upon a body of men, incorporating them by His presence into a new unit called a Church. There will be more to say about this in the talk on the Holy Spirit. Here we simply note the awing, solemn fact that at some time before our Lord Jesus comes the Church will have come into that condition that the Holy Spirit will have withdrawn from it.

A Prophetic Conversion

A Prophetic Conversion

After making extensive missionary journeys, Paul was led to spend two years in Ephesus, the great centre of Asia Minor. So he touched not only that city, but the whole of the large population of cities and villages of which it was the natural centre. While here, perhaps toward the close of his stay, he wrote to the Christians in Corinth. He seems to have written a previous letter not preserved; they had written asking several questions that were agitating them. This letter is in reply to these questions. It contains eight passages of interest in this present search. There are four incidental allusions woven into the warp of this letter. [Note: 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 11:26; 1 Corinthians 16:22.] Then there are three brief teaching bits which we will look at briefly.

The first of these is in a paragraph [Note: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.] in which he is pleading with them to live pure, earnest, godly lives. Jesus Christ is the foundation stone, but the life we live is the superstructure built upon it. "The day" of the Lord's coming would be a testing time of the life. It would be a fire test,—the fire of His presence. It would not be a matter of service, or work, but of character, of how truly we have lived the Jesus life in our daily life.

Our God is a consuming fire, but He consumes only what should be consumed,—what can't stand the fire. A single moment actually in the presence of the Man whose eyes are as a flame of fire, [Note: Revelation 1:14.] at whose feet the Apostle of love, who lived so close to Him, fell as one in a deadly stupor,—a single moment will reveal every bit of dross, and then burn it up, leaving only whatever pure gold of loving allegiance to Himself there may be. Our coming into His very presence in the air, at His coming, will be a testing and purifying, and losing of everything that can't stand the test of His eyes.

The other two teaching portions are in the great resurrection section at the close of the letter. [Note: Chapter 15.] Paul has been answering questions and objections current among these Corinthians, so lately won out of their raw heathenism. In one paragraph [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.] he connects the resurrection of believers with the Coming, and gives an order of events in relation to both the resurrection and the Kingdom. The first item is Christ's own resurrection; then the resurrection of Christ's people at His coming. Then our Lord is to reign as King on the earth until every enemy, including the last one—death—is completely abolished. Then would come the end when the Kingdom would be delivered over to the Father. It is interesting to note the broad sweep of these simple sentences. There are up to the present time nearly nineteen centuries between the two phrases "Christ the firstfruits," and "they that are Christ's at His coming." There is the whole length of the Kingdom time between the words "Christ's at His coming" and "then (cometh) the end."

The paragraph at the end of the chapter [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.] is about the change that will take place in those who are living at the time of the Coming, and who have the warm touch

with Jesus that the word "believeth" stands for. Paul has been talking about the resurrection body. The bodies of the believers who have died will be raised, but by the touch of divine power they will be utterly changed bodies, all the limitations gone, and all the powers God meant us to have, in full possession. Then he goes on to speak of the change that will take place in the bodies of the living believers. There must be a change to make us ready for the changed condition of the new, wonderful, resurrection life. We will not all die, but we shall all experience a blessed change in our bodies. The trumpet shall sound, then the dead will be raised, and then in an instant, as quick as the winking of an eyelid, the living shall be changed. And they will answer to the law of their changed condition by rising up into the heavens toward Jesus Christ, the new centre of gravity.

There is one other bit to notice in this letter. It says nothing about the Coming, and might easily be passed over, in searching on this subject. But it contains a word which starts one to thinking. And the light that has come thus far on attendant events makes one a bit keener in the search. It is in this same long resurrection section, at the beginning of it. [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:8.] Paul is grouping the appearances of the Lord after the resurrection. And, as the last item in his grouping, he says, "and last of all as to the untimely born he appeared unto me." The old version says, "as one born out of due time." In reading the old version, unthinkingly, one might think that it meant that he was born late, coming into the family of Christ after all of these others named,— "last of all." But the word underneath expresses the thought found in the revision. He speaks of himself as a child who comes to birth before the usual time of full maturity for birth. What does he mean? The word used is an immensely significant and suggestive one. It recalls at once the very unusual way in which his conversion took place.

Paul's conversion stands wholly apart from every other recorded conversion in the Bible, or outside of it. Conversion takes place through some preaching of the Gospel, in print, or by some personal word, or in public address, at some time in child training, or in later years, blest by the Holy Spirit. That is the way marked out by the Holy Spirit for seeking to win men. Paul's was utterly, radically different. It was through the Lord Jesus Himself appearing to him, suddenly, unexpectedly, out of the clear heavens above his head, in such wondrous dazzling glory of light as to make the sun's light throw a shadow, and to blind Paul's eyes.

It is significant that three times in the book of Acts that story is told, in much detail. [Note: Acts 9:1-9; Acts 22:6-11; Acts 26:12-18.] It would suggest a purpose on the part of Him who was guiding the writing of that book. This is the unusual way in which the conviction came to Paul that the Jesus whom he hated, and whose followers he was doing his utmost to hound to death, was indeed the Messiah of his nation, and the Saviour of his own life. This was his birth into a new life. And this was a being born before the time, an untimely birth. What does it mean?

Well, we have already learned that a Jewish national restoration is to come with our Lord's return, and through this there is to come a worldwide evangelization and worldwide blessing. This clearly implies, and necessitates, that the re-constituted Jewish nation would be a regenerated nation, born again as a nation, by the power of the Holy Spirit, even as its individual members would be, and as any one is today. The change is connected with our Lord Jesus' coming, sometime in the future. This strange unusual conversion of Paul, seems meant to be a prophetic illustration of what will take place when the birth time of the new nation has fully come. The Lord Jesus' appearance in the open heaven, in a dazzling glory of light clear above the shining of the sun, will do for the

nation of the Jews what it did for this man Paul.

Paul, the strict orthodox Jew, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised the eighth day, brought up in Jerusalem, the Jew Capital, at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee of the Pharisees,—this Paul becomes a bit of acted prophecy to his own people and to all the Church. In the manner of his conversion, in the thoroughness of the change wrought by the Holy Spirit, and in the character of his after career, he seems to be God's message of what is to take place with his nation some day. His after career was a passionate, undiscourageable, tireless preaching of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles of the world. What would it be were a whole nation of Pauls so sent out by the Lord Jesus!

The Old Tent and the New

The Old Tent and the New

There is no one of Paul's letters in which he lays bare his inner heart, to these members of his spiritual family, so much as in II Corinthians. An exquisite tenderness and pleading runs through its lines. The great suffering he has been through has left distinct marks, deepening and enriching, tendering and mellowing his great strong nature. The weaving in of the allusion of the Lord's coming, so common in all his writings, and which reveals how near it lay to his heart, is found in the first chapter. [Note: 2 Corinthians 1:14.] The day of the Lord is the one dear, cherished objective never out of his vision.

There is a paragraph devoted to one phase of the Lord's coming, couched in language of much simplicity and beauty. [Note: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.] It reveals more than any other words from Paul's pen, how intense was his expectation and longing that the Lord's coming might be in his own lifetime. He speaks of his body as the earthly tent in which his spirit is sojourning for a little while. If it should be dissolved or fall to pieces he is sure of a better one which would never decay (Acts 28:1). The weaknesses and sufferings, of which he seems so conscious in this letter, make him long most intensely for a change to the better bodily dwelling place for his spirit (Acts 28:2).

It is not a longing to lay aside this temporary dwelling place of his body. For then when the Lord came he would be "found" in an unclothed condition, the old body being laid off and the new one not yet received (Acts 28:3). He longs that the new and better one might come to take its place before it is laid aside. Then what is temporary and weak in it would be swallowed up by the new touch of life upon it (Acts 28:4). For this is the dear plan of God for His children, not a death coming, but a new life coming, even for the body. And the Holy Spirit living in these bodies is the pledge He has given us in advance that some sweet day He Himself is coming to claim His own, and release these bodies from every touch of death, and give them every touch of life (Acts 28:5).

He is perfectly happy in heart whichever thing the Lord shall appoint him. Yet there is such an intense longing to see the Lord Himself, that, because remaining in his body would mean absence from the immediate presence of Christ, he is willing to leave his empty body down on the earth, and go through the process of dying that he may be in the wondrous presence of the Lord (Acts 28:6-8).

Then he swings to the north star of all his conduct,—it was his ambition whether living here, or, through death living up yonder, to be well-pleasing unto the Lord (Acts 28:9). For the whole inner heart and life would be laid bare when they were all gathered, living and dead, in His presence for a reckoning of the life lived on the earth. He longed that in that hour he might be found well-pleasing to the Lord whom he loved (Acts 28:10).

It is probably not very long after this that, while in Greece, in the city of Corinth, he wrote the only letter to a Church which he had not visited, the Church at Rome. But he had many dear friends there. A member of the Church in the near-by town of Cenchreæ, a deaconess, a godly woman,

and an earnest worker there, found it needful to make a visit to Rome. Paul is led to take advantage of this to send a letter by her to the group of believers in the imperial capital. It is a remarkably compact, clear, full summary of the Gospel he believed so firmly, and preached so lovingly and earnestly wherever he went.

There are here two teaching passages about the Coming, in addition to an exhortation to faithfulness. [Note: Romans 13:11, Romans 13:12.] The first occurs as a parenthesis in the eighth chapter. Verse twenty-six connects directly with verses sixteen and seventeen. The intervening verses (Acts 28:18-25) form a distinct parenthetical paragraph. It will make the reading clearer to note that most of verse twenty is a small parenthesis within this larger one. It would help to have it read in this way:—"the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God (for the creation was subjected to vanity not of its own will but by reason of him who subjected it), in hope that," and so on.

The whole thought here is turned toward the wondrous result for Christ's people at the Coming. It was then a time of much suffering among Christ's followers, everywhere, because of their faith. Paul's pen reveals indirectly how much he had felt, and was feeling, the suffering he himself had gone through. In the midst of this he passionately points out the glory that is to come to them all. There is to be a revealing, or unveiling, of the sons of God, as though now we were in disguise, but then it will be openly seen that we are of royal lineage. At that time would come such a glory as to far more than compensate even for such suffering as was being endured. The longing for that coming time is put into the intensest language. In the midst of all their suffering, there is a continued inward groaning and sighing for that glad time to come when the body will be redeemed out of its present servitude into the glorious liberty of God's children.

There occurs here a very striking bit about the lower creation, which is as interesting as it is rare. The whole creation, which would seem to mean vegetable as well as animal life, is under a bondage, the curse of decay and death. Against its own wish it was put into this bondage. The thing that appeals to our sympathies at once is that the creation is spoken of as though conscious of this. It, too, is suffering, as well as we. And he, who has felt oftentimes to the point of pain, the mute appealing look in the eye of some horse or dog as though asking for sympathy or help, or the melancholy braying of the donkey in North China, will feel at once an answering within, to this rare note in Scripture. The whole creation is joining with us in unutterable groans and birth pangs, earnestly looking forward to its release with ours, out into full free life. It is this continued thought of the glory, that will come with the coming of the Lord Jesus, that helped to steady these Christians, and that made them so eager for the glad day of release.

There is a word used three times here [Note: Acts 28:19, Acts 28:23, Acts 28:25.] that helps. It is the word "wait," which means literally to wait patiently, steadfastly, or, to wait it out. Some of us have been waiting more or less patiently, or maybe it has been impatiently, but we must "wait it out," till that blessed day of His appearing.

Jewish Expectations

Jewish Expectations

Following immediately upon the heart-stirring and melting climax of this eighth chapter, comes the remarkable Jewish section of this letter, in chapters nine to eleven. This Jew Section is a bit of the Gospel Paul preached. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He, the intense, exclusive, one time intolerant, Jew, was now burning out his life in preaching to Gentiles. He was strenuously insisting, in both preaching and letters, on faith as the one way of salvation, and making unacceptable comparisons (to the Jew) with the commonly accepted Jew belief of salvation by a faithful keeping of the law. Was there a suspicion, slanderously fostered by his enemies, that he was embittered and turned against his race, which had so bitterly hounded him since his conversion? If so, it would surely be forever silenced among all who knew him, by the opening paragraph of this section, with the love and tenderness and pain and unutterable yearning, and willingness to be utterly sacrificed forever, which filled his heart toward the Jew.

In this remarkable section on the Jew, three things may be picked out as the central points, after the Jewish review and the contrast between the faith and the law way of salvation. The Jewish nation has been rejected, that is true, painfully so to these intense Jews, but it is a partial, not an utter rejection. God's ancient people are not utterly cast off; [Note: Romans 11:1-2, Romans 11:11.] their partial rejection is for a certain limited time; [Note: Romans 11:25.] and it has been made a means of great blessing to the outer nations. [Note: Romans 11:12, Romans 11:15 cp.]

There is to ensue a period of Gentile leadership and dominance in the world, but it will be for a definite, well-defined, though unknown, length of time. [Note: Romans 11:25.] At the close of this period, there is to be a Jew-restoration, which would mean a Jew-Kingdom; and to Paul that meant, with Jesus as the King. [Note: Romans 11:23-24, Romans 11:26, Romans 11:27.] It will be through, or on the basis of, faith in the Lord, a Kingdom of earnest believers. [Note: Romans 11:20, Romans 11:23.] By simple inference, very clear to a Jew, the Gentile period would be followed by a world leadership of the Jewish nation and Kingdom; [Note: Romans 11:25.] and through this there would come yet greater blessing to the rest of mankind. [Note: Romans 11:12, Romans 11:15.] This in brief is the summing up of this Jew section.

We turn now to the prison group of letters, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians; omitting Philemon, which contains nothing on this topic. The one passage in Colossians reminds us that when Christ is manifested, or openly revealed to view, then we too shall be openly revealed with Him in glory. [Note: Colossians 3:4.] In Ephesians he urges them to withstand in "the evil day," [Note: Ephesians 6:13.] which would seem to refer to the time of the lawless one preceding the Coming. Philippians has four allusions, two woven incidentally in. [Note: Php_1:6; Php_4:5.] The third refers to the resurrection out from among the dead which occurs at Christ's coming; [Note: Php_3:11.] and the fourth to the glorious change in our bodies when the Saviour comes. [Note: Php_3:20, Php_3:21.] Here as in the first group of letters the Coming is the continual incentive, never out of sight.

The personal letters to Titus and Timothy contain six brief passages. In the letter to Titus "the looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ," is coupled with "denying ungodliness" and living "righteously," as three things to be kept steadily in view. [Note: Titus 2:11-13.] In his first letter to Timothy he says that the Spirit saith expressly that in latter times some shall fall away from the faith, and specifies the special evil things marking those falling away. [Note: 1 Timothy 4:1.] He is not quoting some Scripture in which the Holy Spirit so speaks, apparently, but is rather speaking of something that has come to Him repeatedly and with emphasis, directly from the Holy Spirit. And near the close of the letter, in a word of solemn admonition to his "true child in faith," he again holds up the coming of the Lord as the objective in all his ministry. [Note: 1 Timothy 6:14.]

The second letter to Timothy finds him back again in prison, and re-emphasizing again strongly, that in the last days grievous times would come within the Church. Those who hold to a form of godliness would deny its power, and be lovers of everything except God. [Note: 2 Timothy 3:1-5.] And again he admonishes Timothy by the appearing of Jesus Christ, and by His Kingdom, that he be faithful, in view of the falling away in the Church that he could even then feel was coming. [Note: 2 Timothy 4:1-4.] Then as he feels the tug of the chain at wrist and ankle, and feels that the end is near, he looks back for a moment at the long hard road he has been travelling since Damascus, and quietly writes, "I have fought the good fight,... finished the course,... kept the faith, henceforth... the crown of righteousness which the Lord... shall give me at that day; and... to all that have loved his appearing." [Note: 2 Timothy 4:7-8.] So from end to end of his letters runs this bright thread of the Lord's return.

The anonymous letter to the Hebrews has four brief allusions. As certain as death, and as judgment after death, is the fact that Christ will appear a second time to complete the salvation of those waiting for Him. [Note: Hebrews 9:27-28.] The second passage is striking as being the only one in the Epistles suggesting the present attitude of our Lord Himself toward the coming day. It is an attitude of expectation. [Note: Hebrews 10:12-13.] The eager expectation that runs through all these early Church pages is but an echo of the eager yearning of His own heart. He who once was so eager to have His great work for man on the cross accomplished, [Note: Luke 12:50.] is now as eagerly looking forward to the day when every enemy shall be subdued, and the Kingdom turned over to the Father. He is waiting and watching in heaven, while His people are waiting and watching upon the earth, both with eyes fixed eagerly forward on the same thing.

The third passage put emphasis on being steady, waiting it out, with the assurance that "yet a little while, how little! how little!! and He that cometh shall come," [Note: Luke 10:35-37.] with quotation from Habakkuk. [Note: Habakkuk 2:3.] And the final allusion is not directly to the Coming, but to the assurance quoted from Haggai [Note: Haggai 2:6.] that there is to be a terrible shake-up in both heavens and earth, that the unshakable Kingdom may sway both heavens and earth. [Note: Haggai 2:6-8.]

James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, in his letter to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout all the Churches, urges patience, steadfastness, waiting it out, "until the coming of the Lord," and assures them that the coming presence of the Lord is "at hand." [Note: James 5:7-8.]

Peter's first epistle to the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, reminds them at its beginning, that salvation would be complete only when revealed in the last time. And makes clear that it is "the

revelation of Jesus Christ" he is thinking of; then the present distress would be forgotten in the glory; [Note: 1 Peter 1:5-7.] and he urges that the coming "revelation of Jesus Christ" be the guiding, controlling motive constantly. [Note: 1 Peter 1:13.] And toward the close he urges to fervent love, sound mind, and thoughtfulness in prayer, because "the end of all things is at hand." [Note: 1 Peter 4:7.] He reminds those who are being persecuted that they would have fellowship with Christ in His coming glory, even as they were then having fellowship in suffering. [Note: 1 Peter 4:13.] And a little later the under-shepherds of the flocks are urged to faithfulness, and reminded that when the chief Shepherd would appear they would receive an unfading crown of glory. [Note: 1 Peter 5:4.]

The second Epistle of Peter has a teaching paragraph, [Note: 2 Peter 3:3-13.] which makes an immensely suggestive addition to what has already been gathered out. He is talking about the sad days that would come in the Church "in the last days." Men would make light of, and jeer at the suggestion that the Lord would actually come again. They would mockingly ask "where is this promised Coming? things are going along just as they always have, and always will." There is a very significant phrase here,—"they wilfully forget." Their wills dominate their memories, and make them forget what it is uncomfortable for them to remember. Poor fools! they suit their religion to their lives, instead of finding God's plan and insisting on fitting their lives to that. The special thing wilfully forgotten is that God judges sin, that the very atmosphere enveloping the earth contains the elements of judgment held in check by God.

The destruction by water in the time of Noah is God's standing warning to all men, of a like reckoning that will come again. The atmosphere now surrounding the earth is stored with fire waiting only the slightest touch of the quiet, wondrously patient Hand, which the world so persistently ignores and blasphemes. The reason for the delay in the coming of the Lord is only the great, tender, longsuffering love of God toward men, and the earnest longing that all may repent, and none be lost. But that "day of the Lord will come;" it will come to these jeering mockers as unexpectedly and disagreeably as the thief breaks in while the household sleeps. Then both heavens and earth shall be destroyed by fire; but later there will be a new earth and new heavens, even as Isaiah had prophesied. [Note: Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22.]

There is a very suggestive word here. Because of all this we are urged, by holy living and godliness, to be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God." [Note: Isaiah 3:12.] The Revision says "earnestly desiring," with "hastening" in the margin. The word underneath is translated by some form of the word "hasten" every other time it is used, and would seem to be correctly translated so here. The teaching of course is that it is actually in our power, simply by our godly lives and faithfulness, through grace, to bring nearer the day of the Lord's return. There will be more to say about this in "Difficulties and Questions." But the thought that one's faithfulness to the Master, in the midst of prevailing unfaithfulness, may bring nearer the hour of the return, which He so longs for, makes one's heart beat just a bit quicker and warmer, as a prayer is sent up for more grace.

The Gospel in a Single Word

The Gospel in a Single Word

John, in his old age, felt, as did Paul, the intensifying of the indications of the last times. Three of his five allusions to this subject, in his first and second letters, touch this point. "It is the last hour," he writes, and then, using a word for the lawless one peculiar to his writings, speaks of the many Antichrists then present, as growing evidence of the coming of the Antichrist. [Note: 1 John 2:18.] These were evidences of the last hour. He urges that we so live, abiding in Christ, that when He is openly revealed we may be boldly confident, with no sense of shame as we come into His presence, because we have not been so abiding in the midst of last-hour conditions. [Note: 1 John 2:28.] Then he reminds us that if we are truly living as children of God, the world will not be able to understand us, nor the motives controlling us, even as Jesus was not understood. And further he reminds us that when our Lord is openly revealed we shall be made perfectly like Him, for we shall see Him as He is, and that sight will have transforming power over us. And the blessed anticipation sets us determinedly to being pure now, the great likeness to Him. [Note: 1 John 3:2-4.]

The last two references are to the one whom John calls "the Antichrist." They are simple but immensely instructive and significant. They explain just what is the genius and the distinct mark of both the Antichrist, and of the spirit of Antichrist which will precede the coming of Antichrist himself. By this mark that spirit may be unfailingly identified now, and that person, when he comes. "Every one that confesseth not Jesus, is not of God, and this is the spirit of Antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh, and now it is in the world already." [Note: 1 John 4:3.] The force of the word under "confesseth" is to declare openly and positively. There is a striking alternate reading in some manuscripts. In place of "confesseth not" is "annulleth." It is not a change of thought, but a putting of the positive side of the truth. Where Jesus is known, not to confess Him openly is to annul Him so far as your testimony is concerned, that is, to do away with Him, to deprive Him of what is His.

Jesus is the whole of the Gospel. God's message to us is condensed in a single word—Jesus, with all its tremendous meaning. Jesus is the outshining splendour of God's glory, and the express image of His person. He is the only begotten God, now in the Father's bosom, the only one through whom God is known, or can be known. He is the only one through whom the Father can be approached. Jesus is God. Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. [Note: Hebrews 1:3; John 1:18; John 14:6-9; Matthew 11:27.] And the one central, tremendous event for which that Name stands is the death upon the cross. He, Jesus, is our only message to men. He that gives his strength in service to anything else than telling and taking Jesus to men is annulling Him, and, whether intentionally or not, consciously or not, he is in that revealing that he is under the dominance of the subtle spirit of Antichrist.

This is a tremendous thing the Holy Spirit is saying through John. It should send us off to our secret chamber, there alone on our knees to look at our service, and testimony, and all the swing

of our life, and ask does it all spell out "Jesus," and only Jesus, and all of Jesus? The whole attack of the Antichrist is upon the person of Jesus, and upon what He did in dying. The attack upon the Bible is really an attack upon the person of Jesus. When you begin to question it, you begin to question that He was all it declares Him to be.

And the attack upon the person of Jesus is a very cunning attack on the meaning and peculiar value of the dying on the cross. The one who is hidden behind the Antichrist spirit now, and the Antichrist himself when he comes,—he hates the cross, he hates the blood of Jesus, and every mention of it; he fears it; aye, more, he must flee like a whipped coward before it. This explains the subtlety of his attack upon the Book of God, and the only begotten God Himself. This same thought is repeated in the seventh verse of the second letter.

The little one-chaptered epistle of Jude fairly scorches the paper with its denunciation of men within the circle of God's people who were even then, in Jude's time, doing the very thing John has spoken of,—denying the only One. [Note: Note Jude 1:4, Jude 1:8, Jude 1:10, Jude 1:12-14, Jude 1:16, Jude 1:19.] Such have been found in every age. It was to such that Enoch preached, before the flood, of the coming of the Lord, and judgment then. The Apostles had plainly taught that there would be such in the last times. [Note: 17, 18.] Then the coming Christ fills Jude's eye, as he reminds them of Him, who is able to guard them from stumbling in the midst of this faithlessness, and to present them without blemish before His glorious presence. [Note: 24.]

An Echoed Longing

An Echoed Longing

Now shall we try to gather up simply and clearly what has been found in these epistles. Throughout, the Coming is continually held up as an incentive to faithfulness, and to patience in suffering persecution. At the Coming certain things will happen to those who are trusting themselves to the Lord Jesus. Those who have died will be raised. [Note: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 1 Corinthians 15:52; Php_3:11.] Then the living will have their bodies changed, [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Php_3:20-21; Romans 8:23.] and be caught up to meet the Lord with the raised ones. [Note: 1 Thessalonians 5:17.] Then there will be judgment of how the life has been lived, [Note: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.]salvation will be perfected, [Note: 1 Peter 1:5-7.] including our bodies. [Note: Romans 8:23.]

And then will be great glory, more than compensating for all the misunderstanding and persecution. [Note: Romans 8:18; 1 Peter 4:13; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:8.] We will be without blemish, [Note: Jude 1:24.] and we shall be like Him. [Note: 1 John 3:2-4.] Dying is like putting off an old wornout garment; the Coming will be like having a new garment. [Note: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.] We will be openly acknowledged by our Lord. [Note: Colossians 3:4.]

But the Coming is not to be expected at any moment; certain things open to all eyes will happen first. There will be a falling away on the part of some Christian people. [Note: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Jude.] This will be one of the marks of the time preceding His coming. [Note: 1 John 2:18.] One feature of this will be a making light of, a jeering, at the teachings about the Lord's return. [Note: 2 Peter 3:3-4.] This falling away will continue, and intensify, until a world leader called the lawless one, or man of sin, shall come to the front. [Note: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.]When he has run his course he will be slain by the sudden appearance of the glorified Jesus in the heavens. The spirit of lawlessness, which will come to a full head in this leader, was already then at work in the world, but it was being hindered by a restraining power. The Holy Spirit now in the world is that power of restraint. At some time He will withdraw, or be withdrawn, from the corporate Church. That withdrawal will be the signal for the lawless leader to swing into action.

The Coming will be to set up the Kingdom on the earth, with the Jew restored to premier place among the nations. The present rejection of the Jew is partial, not absolute; it is for a limited time, though thus far, a long time; that rejection has been made a blessing to the nations, us Gentiles; the present Gentile leadership in the earth will come to an end, then the Jew nation will be re-constituted, but on the same basis as the true Church, namely, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and through it will come worldwide evangelization and infinitely greater blessing to all the world than it has ever known. [Note: Romans 11.] Paul's conversion seems to have been an acted prophecy of the manner of conversion of the Jew nation. [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:8.]That Kingdom shall continue under the blessed sway of the King until all enmity has been completely put down; then the Kingdom perfected shall be duly delivered up by the Son to the Father. [Note: 1

Corinthians 15:24-25.] At the end of all, the heavens and earth shall be burned up by the chemical elements in the atmosphere, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. [Note: 2 Peter 3:3-13.]

The lower creation is conscious of suffering, and is expectantly longing for the time when it, too, shall share in our deliverance from all the effects of sin. [Note: Romans 8:19-22.] The world will be utterly unprepared for the Lord's coming; it will come as unexpectedly and disagreeably as a thief breaking into one's house in the night, [Note: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4.] though abundant warning has been given from the flood time on. [Note: 2 Peter 3:5-7.] The genius of the lawless one is indicated by John's name for him,—the Antichrist; his spirit is now at work in the world, and reveals itself in every thing and every one that is not a positive holding forth of Jesus to men. [Note: 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7.]

Our Lord's coming is as sure as the death, which is ever in our midst; [Note: Hebrews 9:27, Hebrews 9:28.] is "at hand," [Note: James 5:7-8; 1 Peter 4:7.] only a very little way off. [Note: Hebrews 10:35-37.] It may be hastened or brought nearer, or sooner, by our faithfulness. [Note: 2 Peter 3:12.] And the expectancy in our hearts is but an echo of the intense desire in our Lord's heart to return. [Note: Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 10:13.] How fully are our hearts echoing what is in that great heart, that once broke under the weight of our sin?

Following the Trail Back Into the Older Pages

Following the Trail Back Into the Older Pages

Open Door Into Prophecy

Open Door Into Prophecy

In the Olivet Talk Jesus makes a quotation from the book of Daniel. He does it in a simple way as though He expected it to be familiar to the little group of Jewish young men with whom He was talking. And then He adds, "Let him that readeth (the book of Daniel) understand." He evidently thought that any one reading the Daniel prophecies—such people as these plain, unlettered fishermen—could understand them, and therefore if they could, should.

The remark stands out in sharp contrast with the common thought among almost all Christian people today, that it is impossible to make head or tail of these prophetic parts of Daniel. There are the simpler parts of the book, like the biographical part in chapter one, that are used. But these parts referring to future events are almost always passed over as beyond understanding, or as not being of any practical use. They are very rarely read at all, except verses taken out of their setting which in themselves express some helpful truth. No doubt the strangely fanciful interpretations that have sometimes been taught have had influence in turning people away. Our Lord's words make one feel that the book should be read, and if read thoughtfully and prayerfully, looking for the light of the Holy Spirit upon the page, there may come a simple practical understanding, that will help us be true to our Lord's purpose, as well as to Himself.

The personal character of Daniel helps us here very much. He was a man of uncompromising devotion to right, in the midst of circumstances when compromise was the very moral atmosphere of his surroundings, and further when it would seem that if ever compromise in so-called details was excusable it surely was there. [Note: Daniel 1:8-13.] But to him compromise was never excusable, and there were no details or small things when it came to a question of right and wrong, of simple obedience to what the Book teaches, or, of taking a wabby course. He was a man of unflinching trust in God, of sturdy, steady courage in the midst of most depressing circumstances, [Note: Daniel 2:13.] with prayer and a thoughtful study of his Bible, as fixed habits and real things in his life.

God could count on this young Jew, who determined by His grace to be true, first of all, whatever it might mean or cost. He was "greatly beloved" just because of the simple heart-traits which he kept dominant in his life. It was to such a man that the wonderful yet simple revelation came, of the future of his people and of the world through them. Not to scholarliness, invaluable in itself when held true, but to a spirit of earnest, prayerful devotion to God, and of study of His Word, came the understanding of God's future purposes. And so it still is, and will be. The thing that makes the door open into the meaning of these pages and truths is the humble, prayerful spirit, with a life held true in purpose, in the midst of any and all circumstances.

Four Prophetic Pictures

Four Prophetic Pictures

The twelve chapters of the book of Daniel run through more than seventy years, from the time he was taken captive as a youth, until after the period of captivity was ended. It falls naturally into two parts, of six chapters each; the first six chapters tell of six incidents in the experience of himself, and his companions. The second six contain four visions. These came to him toward the close of his life.

The first of these [Note: Daniel 7.] is a sweeping vision of the four great world-powers that were successively to rule in the world, from the Babylonian then present through Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman, up until the end of all these, when the Hebrew Kingdom was again to become the dominant world-power. Special emphasis is given to the fourth of these, and to its ruler, at the very end, a blasphemous, revolutionary prince, who would persecute the Jewish people, and who would be allowed to rule for a certain limited time, designated as "time, times, and half a time." There is good reason for taking this to be an Oriental customary way of expressing "a year, two years, and half a year," namely three years and a half. These, with the other prophetic portions of Daniel, both Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and Daniel's vision, fit so exactly into the succession of Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman periods, that critical scholars, who do not accept the divine element in the Bible, have supposed that they must have been written after the events described, instead of beforehand.

The second vision [Note: Daniel 8.] begins with symbolic references to the Medo-Persian power, and then swiftly moves to events to occur at "the time of the end," "the latter time of the indignation." It is in this part that occurs the first reference to the "abomination of desolation" which our Lord's words put as the beginning of the time of awful tribulation, and so yet future.

The third vision [Note: Daniel 9.] is introduced with the long prayer Daniel made for the deliverance of his people. The answer to the prayer speaks of seventy "weeks" allotted to the Jewish nation, in the midst of the last seven of which occurs the "abomination of desolation" of which our Lord spoke. The fourth vision [Note: Daniel 10-12.] begins with time then present, as they all do, then makes a rapid movement to the very end of all, going into much detail of events at the end, and speaks twice of the "abomination that maketh desolate."

One striking thing about these four visions alike is that they each begin with the time then present, touch briefly succeeding events, and then by a quick movement go at once to the very end-events, when the central event in the last three is this strange event called the "abomination that maketh desolate." Our Lord's reference to this as the beginning of a time of tribulation, at the close of which He will come, would push all of this latter portion distinctly into the future not only for then, but still so.

In these four visions there is a passing over of much history occurring between these events named and the future end-events. There is an omission of a long period of history, and one

wonders why. The explanation is that the prophet is shown the events as they occur in relation to the history of Israel as a nation, the captivity period being included. They still existed as a separate though subject nation after the return from captivity until the destruction of their capital under Titus. After that they are a race, a distinct people, but scattered, no longer a nation. These prophecies see them brought together again as a nation in their own land. The visions carry the events on from the time then present up to their dissolution as a nation, and pick up the thread of events when they are again a nation, omitting entirely the long Gentile gap. Naturally the whole point of view is Hebrew, other nations being seen only in relation to the Hebrew nation.

It is very interesting to note that in each vision there is some plain indication of when the Gentile gap is past and the Hebrew thread picked up again. In the first vision the events spoken of last are clearly final events. [Note: Daniel 7:24-27.] The interpretation of the second explains that the vision is chiefly concerned with the time of the end, "the latter time of the indignation," "the appointed time of the end." [Note: Daniel 8:17-19.] In the answer of Gabriel there is a distinct break between the cutting off of the anointed one, and the events of the last period. [Note: Daniel 9:26-27.] And in the last the phrases "at the end of the times," "even to the time of the end," "till the time of the end," [Note: Daniel 11:13, Daniel 11:35; Daniel 12:4, Daniel 12:9.] indicate plainly that the great portion of the vision belongs to a time yet future.

Seventy Sevens

Seventy Sevens

We want to look now a little more closely at the three in which occurs the phrase "the abomination of desolation," which our Lord wants us to understand. The phrase occurs three times in the last two of these, and in another form in the second also. These passages are of intense interest, and take much prayerful, meditative study to get a broad grasp of just what is meant to be told to us. But a few of the simpler surface things may be noted here.

In the third vision, the ninth chapter, Daniel had been brooding over his Jeremiah roll, especially its prophecy of a restoration in seventy years. [Note: Daniel 9:2.] This sets him to a bit of special praying. The prayer is a remarkable bit of confession and pleading. It runs through verses three to nineteen. Then Gabriel gives the answer. Note his opening sentence, after explaining why he had come. Remember Daniel is thinking about two things, a restoration of the Jewish Kingdom, and "seventy years" as the time set before that restoration would take place.

In his reply Gabriel goes back to the Jeremiah promise about seventy years. He says "seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people" and so on. We must stop a moment to look at the translation here. Both the old version and the revisions use the translation "seventy weeks." The word "weeks" is not inaccurate in itself. But in translation as in interpretation there is frequently a choice of words which may accurately be used in one language for a given word in another language. And so it is always needful for good work that the general sense of the whole passage be gotten, to decide which one of two or more words will more accurately express that sense. Here the word underneath "weeks" means literally "seven" or the plural "sevens." It is accurately translated "week" where a week of seven days is the plain meaning of the general text. Here the word stands in contrast with the word "years" in verse two of the chapter. The general sense of the passage, with other related passages, seems to indicate that it means seven years rather than seven days.

Gabriel says "seventy sevens are decreed upon thy people," and so on. That is to say his answer goes beyond Daniel's thought, and Jeremiah's phrase, of "seventy years," to something beyond, still dealing however with the same general subject of the restoration of the Jewish Kingdom. This period of seventy sevens is "to finish (or put a restraint upon) transgression, and to make an end of sins (or to put an end to its power for a time), and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy one." It is a remarkable sentence;—transgression and sin are to be restrained, reconciliation made for iniquity, everlasting righteousness brought to the front, all prophetic vision and utterance fulfilled, and the most Holy One anointed to reign. Daniel must have listened with throbbing heart as he is told of such a climax for his dearly-loved race.

Then Gabriel gives some general details. This period called seventy sevens of years is broken up into three parts, a seven, a sixty-two, and a final seven. These first two periods, covering sixty-nine sevens of years, come to a close at the time when the "Anointed One" is cut off. This would seem

plainly to refer to the crucifixion of Christ. [Note: "the anointed one," as the Hebrew word, "Messiah," and the later Greek word, "Christ," signify.] At this point there comes a break in the reckoning; and then after this break, there is a final seven of years.

This final seven years is marked by several things. There is an agreement, or compact, by the Jewish national leaders with the leader, or prince, of the people through whom the city of Jerusalem was later destroyed. This compact is to be for seven years. During that period the old-time sacrifices are being offered in the temple at Jerusalem. It is in the midst of this period of seven years that this compact is broken, the sacrifices are stopped, and the event of which Jesus speaks takes place, namely, the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place.

Going back for a moment to our Lord's Olivet Talk, we remember that this is the opening event of the time of great tribulation, that this time was connected there with His coming, which would occur at the close of the period of tribulation, and be for the purpose of setting up the Kingdom. That Coming not having yet taken place, all this group of events is thus placed somewhere still future.

Thus there would be a re-setting up of the Jewish nation at Jerusalem, and a rebuilding of the temple. But this Jewish movement would not be in dependence upon God, or by faith in Him, for the nation thus re-made, or its leader, makes a compact with an ungodly leader who proves to be a treacherous enemy, and through whom the abomination which begins the time of tribulation is set up. Here, then, is a period of Jewish nationalization, on a worldly, unbelieving basis, before the real Kingdom is set up.

One interesting thing about this passage is that it fixes a date, that is, not an absolute calendar date, but a date in relation to the Coming, and so of the Kingdom. The abomination that maketh desolate is set up here in the middle of the period called a seven of years. There will be an additional item to note on this in the last part of the last vision. [Note: Daniel 11.]

The Real Beginning of the Olivet Talk

The Real Beginning of the Olivet Talk

We turn now to the last vision. [Note: Daniel 10-12.] There is a good deal of detail difficult to get a clear grasp of here. These events when they occur will prove the best explanation of many passages. In the midst of the mass of details, an outstanding feature is the broken "covenant" or "league" referred to in chapter nine, and the setting up of "the abomination that maketh desolate." [Note: Daniel 11:31.] After this is a period of sore testing, [Note: Daniel 11:32-35.] and a "time of trouble" [Note: Daniel 12:1.] unprecedented, which would seem to be the same as the tribulation spoken of in the Olivet Talk. [Note: Compare Matthew 24:21-22, and parallels.]

At that time the Jewish people are to be delivered, [Note: Daniel 12:1.] and there is to be a resurrection of many, that is, a partial, not a full resurrection. [Note: Daniel 12:2.] Tregelles, the well-known English scholar, translates chapter twelve, verse two, as follows: "these (that awake at this time) to eternal life, and those (the others) to shame and everlasting contempt." At the close of the vision, [Note: Daniel 12:11, Daniel 12:12.] Daniel is being instructed about the meaning of what he is being told. From the time that the "abomination that maketh desolate" is set up, twelve hundred and ninety days will run out, with a further period of forty-five days more. That is to say, some event of a sort opposed to the abomination of desolation will occur at the close of twelve hundred and ninety days, and some further event of a happy sort for the believing waiter, forty-five days later.

The vision in chapter eight speaks of the "transgression that maketh desolate," which would seem to be the same thing, as it is connected with the cessation of the continual offering named in each of the other passages. It likewise gives a period of time to run from this point, namely twenty-three hundred "evenings and mornings." The common-sense way of interpreting this would be twenty-three hundred days. The Hebrews reckoned their day from evening to morning, just as we Westerners reckon it from morning to evening. The word "day" is used many times in Scripture for a period of time longer than twenty-four hours. So that the use of the phrase "evenings and mornings" would seem to make it clear that ordinary days are meant. Twenty-three hundred days would be six years and about four months, a little more or less as the lunar year used then, or the modern, commonly used year of three hundred and sixty-five days, is reckoned. At the close of this time "the sanctuary" is to "be cleansed."

Three of the four passages give a portion of time. In all of them the central thing, or starting point for this portion of time named, is the stopping of the daily sacrifice and the setting up of the abomination of desolation. From this starting point they reach out to four separate events; three years and a half will end the time of the broken covenant. [Note: Daniel 9:27.] At the end of three years and seven months some glad event would happen, another at the expiration of forty-five days more, and still another, the final one, "the cleansing of the sanctuary," about two years and a half later. [Note: Daniel 12:11-12; Daniel 8:14.]

Some time in the future the Jewish nation will be re-constituted through a seven-year arrangement with some great world leader, and will rebuild the temple and commence again the daily sacrifices. That leader will treacherously break the covenant, stop the daily sacrifices, and set up some blasphemous, God-defying thing, or person, in the place of worship in the temple. Then will ensue a time of terrible trouble unprecedented, and unparalleled, even for the Jews. This will continue for apparently three years and a half. Then will come a time of judgment, [Note: Daniel 9:27, Daniel 9:1.] c.] the Jewish people will be delivered, a partial resurrection of the dead will occur, and a cleansing of the polluted temple. Then, recalling the first sentence in Gabriel's answer, [Note: Daniel 9:24.] will come the anointing of the most Holy One. Such is a brief summary of Daniel. It will be seen at once how this fits into our Lord's Olivet Talk.

It is of great interest to notice the persons who explain these visions, and the effect upon Daniel of what he saw and heard. In the first, [Note: Daniel 7:16.] Daniel asks "one of them that stood near," and he gives the explanation of the vision. And what he has been hearing has the effect of troubling or grieving him, as if the sense of awe over the terrible things coming, cast a spell over his spirit. [Note: Daniel 7:28.] In the second and third, the angel Gabriel explains. His presence overawes greatly Daniel, who must be strengthened before he can listen to the explanation.

In the fourth there is a step farther on and up. [Note: Daniel 10.] There is at the beginning a vision of some glorious being whose presence completely overwhelms Daniel. The description of this person tallies so fully and exactly with the description of the glorified Lord Jesus in the opening of Revelation as to make the conclusion irresistible that it is He, who afterwards laid aside His glory and walked among us as a man, who is here talking with Daniel. With greatest tenderness He speaks to Daniel and strengthens him, and then speaks of these things.

This is of intensest interest. It would seem to be the same person talking here as was sitting on Olivet with the little group of four. On Olivet He is referring them back to His own words in Daniel's prophecy. We shall find Him once again talking, yet more fully, of these things before we get through. This is what our Lord wants us to understand. The Olivet Talk is a continuation of the Daniel talk. Both are on the same absorbing theme.

Chapter 31

The Last Word,—A Message Sent Back From the Upper Glory

The Last Word,—A Message Sent Back From the Upper Glory

The Patmos Message

The Patmos Message

There are two last messages from our Lord Jesus; the one from a hill top—Olivet—the second from an island—Patmos. It seems a little contradictory to speak of two last messages; one would be last, the other the next to the last. Yet it is not contradictory, but correct, and in being correct lies the reason why.

A last message by a leader to his followers has in it a keynote, command, program, and a personal plea. Such was our Lord's last message on Olivet. It sounded the keynote of witnessing, that is of taking Jesus as a Saviour to all men,—this was to be the program; it was a command; and it came to His followers with all the power of a personal plea from One who had voluntarily given His life for them, and to whom they were supremely devoted. It was His last message to them. It came with all the authority and tender, personal plea of a last, a good-bye, message.

Then there came another message. It too has proved to be a last message, the very last. Fifty or sixty years or so, has gone since the Olivet message. It is practically two generations of time. The generation to which He spoke has gone, and another is moving pretty well along its course. The silence of the upper world, to which our Lord returned, is broken; He speaks again. This is significant. What is said now will have much meaning. It may have in it a note of approval that the Olivet last-message has been so well followed. It may have reproach. It may touch some weak spot where danger lurks. It may give fresh emphasis to something needing it.

It proves to do all of these. The Olivet message is about taking the Gospel to the whole creation. The Patmos message is about the messenger who is to carry that message to all the world. The first concerns the service of the Church; the second concerns the life of the Church. It is as if a father had sent his son on an errand, and finding that he is loitering on the way with some companions, calls earnestly after him to remind him of the errand, and that he is depending upon his faithfulness.

This Patmos message is contained in the book of the Revelation of John. It is the only one of the New Testament books not yet searched in this study for teaching about our Lord's return. We want to learn now what it gives us on this. As we turn to it we remember that there are some positive and peculiar views held by our generation of Christian people regarding it. The chief one is that it is practically impossible for any one to understand its meaning. There are many precious passages and verses, but it is written in such a strangely symbolical language that it is quite impossible to get a simple, clear grasp of the book as a whole. This is the general impression, which seems sometimes to amount to an obsession.

Yet it strikes one at once in reading it as significant that there is special blessing attached, not only to reading it, but to obeying it. [Note: Revelation 1:3; Revelation 22:7.] And in Scripture obeying always implies something that may be understood so as to be obeyed. This would seem to suggest that the same humility, and teachableness of spirit, and diligent, open-minded reading,

and reverent, earnest praying and waiting, that characterized Daniel, will open up these as all pages of this Book. But it seems necessary, first, in this case, for some of us, at least, to do a bit of thorough mental house-cleaning, and insist on turning out the secondhand book-furniture with which our minds may have been stored about this book of Revelation. Then we can bring that rare, but necessary thing,—an open mind, as well as a teachable spirit.

A New Language

A New Language

One or two plain things about the book may be noted. The language in which it was originally written, of course, was Greek. But scholars note that while the words are Greek, the thought is Hebrew. It is as if a Jew immersed in his own Hebrew is trying to express himself in Greek, but in doing so is gripped more by the Hebrew than by the Greek. And that he does this to the degree of seeming to disregard the grammatical laws of Greek, and to make new adjustments of the Greek language in expressing what he is thinking in Hebrew. This seems a bit puzzling to the scholars, yet the explanation seems to have a significance which is both simple and helpful.

The truth would seem to be that the book of Revelation is a gathering up, or summarizing, of the whole Bible, both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. Sometimes a very homely illustration helps. This book of Revelation is like nothing so much as a big knot tied in the end of a long hank of yarn, or bundle of threads; every thread in the long hank of yarn is in the knot. And every thread in the knot is in the bundle of threads. Every principal thread in the whole Bible fabric comes into this Revelation knot, and every thread in this Revelation knot can be traced back into the rest of the Bible.

This serves as a key to the symbolism of the book. Its symbolic language has seemed like another language to which we had no grammar, and so we have spent our time chiefly guessing what it meant. But this symbolic language instead of being a hindrance and a puzzle is really meant to make it an open book, easily understood. For every bit of symbolism, and every strange allusion or phrase, can be found somewhere back in the pages of the Old, in such a way as to make the meaning clear, or else it is plainly said in so many words just what it means. The language of symbolism is meant to make the book more easily understood, but,—there's a "but" here—but understood by one who is familiar with the Old Testament. But then every Jew, and every Christian, is supposed to be that. The use of symbolical language in writing the Bible has very rare wisdom in it. There will be more said about that in the talk about "The Written Word."

Turning now to dip into this book, the first most striking thing to note is that the book is given to John directly by our Lord Jesus. It stands by itself in this regard. Its inspiration is directly by the Lord Jesus, instead of being directly through the Holy Spirit. There must be meaning here. Our Lord would have John, and especially the whole Church through the generations, know and feel how intensely concerned He is about what is being told here.

And kindly note further, that the speaker is the same one identically as spoke to Daniel in his last long vision, and to the four young men on Olivet's top. The description of our Lord in chapter one should be compared with the description of Him who is talking with Daniel. [Note: Revelation 1:13-16; Daniel 10:5, Daniel 10:6.] Seeing Him in His dazzling glory produces the same effect alike upon Daniel and John.

This is of immense interest. These three talks, by the Tigris River, on the Olivet Mount, and on the Patmos Isle, are by the same person, and, more striking still, are upon the same subject. All three are woven with the very same warp and shuttle-threads. At the close of the old Hebrew period of the Old Testament, at the close of the Gospel period just as our Lord is entering the inky shadows of the cross, and now once again out of the heavens, He speaks, and each time about the same thing. How intense must be His interest in that particular thing! How tremendously important that we get some simple, working idea of what He is so eager for us to know! Now it is still further significant that this after-revelation, this entire book, is concerned wholly about our Lord's return, and the occurrences that group about it. It is the only subject talked of here.

A Sight of Jesus

A Sight of Jesus

We have become familiar, in all the utterances thus far in the New Testament, with a certain intensity of expectation of our Lord's speedy return. This seems, if possible, made still more intense here. There is a sort of thrill of expectancy, as if now it—He—is just coming. The opening sentences speak of it five times, [Note: Revelation 1:1, Revelation 1:3-4, Revelation 1:7, Revelation 1:8.] and the messages to the Churches, four times in the two short chapters. [Note: Revelation 2:16, Revelation 2:25; Revelation 3:3, Revelation 3:11.] In the heart of the book, right in the midst of a passage about demons at work in the coming awful time of crisis, [Note: Revelation 16:12-16.] as unexpectedly as the Coming itself, there breaks in a voice, as if one standing just in the background, eagerly interrupts with an earnest plea which in His intensity and love He can no longer restrain,—"Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." In the nineteenth chapter and the twentieth, there are shouts of exultation; He has come! At last He has come! The enemy is put away! Christ is reigning on the earth with His own!

And in the concluding personal talk with John, thrice the Master Himself speaks out again,—"Behold, I come quickly." [Note: Revelation 22:7, Revelation 22:12, Revelation 22:20.] And John fervently breathes out the prayer of his own full heart, "Amen: come, Lord Jesus." So the very last word of the whole Bible is a prayer for His return. This is the atmosphere with which the book is a-thrill, as well as being the special subject of its teaching.

The broad outline of the book is simple. After the introductory bit, there is first a vision of the glorified Jesus; [Note: Revelation 1:9-20.] then His message to the group of His followers on the earth; [Note: Revelation 2, Revelation 3.] then the group of coming events fills up the bulk of the book; [Note: Revelation 4:1 to Revelation 22:5.] and then come the closing personal paragraphs. [Note: Revelation 22:6-21.]

The sight of the Lord Jesus, in that dazzling glory which is a bit of His natural self, is John's preparation for what is to follow. The sight of Jesus was the thing that gripped John early on that river road to Bethsaida; [Note: John 1:35-51.] it filled his vision on the Transfiguration Mount; it flooded his eyes, and coloured his ink, as he penned the Gospel. [Note: John 1:1-18.] He is like the child who has been gazing intently at the brightly shining sun, and then turns away to find that sun everywhere, tingeing everything with its halo. So this look at the glorified Jesus, aye! at the glorified Jesus Himself, takes possession of his heart and faculties and pen and tongue.

This is an immensely suggestive fact for us who want to understand this book, and, beyond that, those plans of our Lord which He is so eager to have us understand. There needs to be a vision of the glorified Jesus, a fresh vision, a continual vision, that utterly transforms life, and activity, and the hold upon us of wealth, of inheritance, of old, honoured traditions of family and Church and social class, even as with the startled man on the Damascus road. This will give the open eye to

see, and the hot heart to receive impressions, the cool, steady purpose to follow, and the will that scorns opposition and hindrance alike.

Following the vision comes the sevenfold message of our Lord to His group of followers. Was it this chiefly that makes Him break the silence and come back to plead with them? It looks not unlikely. The boy sent on the errand has forgotten the errand, and is loitering with evil companions, and the father is earnestly calling out after him. The messenger sent out to tell the world of the crucified Jesus is being wheedled over by the world. Instead of taking the Saviour to the world he is being swung away from the Saviour, and so being untrue to His last command. It is not wholly so, but largely so. The candlestick would be moved out of its place, simply because it had already itself moved away from the light, and so was useless as a candlestick. The message to the Church is an intense, yearning plea for overcomers. They were in the midst of the very sort of time His Olivet Talk spoke of. They must either overcome or be overcome. The forces of evil were making a tremendous effort to overcome them. His coming is intimately connected with their overcoming.

It is a tremendous plea, mingling sternness with great tenderness, even as of a loving father to his son who is beginning to yield to the world's down-tug. It is an intense plea to His followers today to be overcomers in the midst of evil overcomers, and those being overcome. So His coming will be influenced and hastened.

The Sealed Roll

The Sealed Roll

The third portion of the book deals with coming events. It will help us, to recall the way in which Daniel's vision came to him. There are four visions there; yet all four cover the same space of time, each beginning with the time then present, and each running to the same ending, but each presenting, or emphasizing, some special feature. Now this is the plan on which these succeeding chapters of Revelation are written. It is the same plan as in the four Gospels, where the same period of time, and the same general facts are given, but with distinct differences in each. It is much the same plan as is followed in looking at a painting, where you change position repeatedly to get a different view, and so a better understanding of the whole. It is impossible to see all sides of a building at one view. Now this is the general plan followed by John in these pages.

It is difficult to dip into this book for just a little of what it holds. The constant temptation is to run out into detail. This, of course, is not possible in this brief space. Those interested in more are referred to "Quiet Talks about the Revelation Message" when it gets into its type clothes. But we want now to get something of a clear, simple, brief idea of what is here.

There are here seven different views of the same period of time, and of the same run of events, or of some particular portion included therein. That time is the time of the great tribulation, already found in Daniel, and in the Olivet Talk. Let us turn now to these. It should be noted that in the whole book things are given as they are looked at from above. It's a great thing to get into the way of looking at our lives, and at all events on the earth, as they are looked at from above.

The beginning of all is a wondrous scene in heaven, There is a scene of great, dazzling glory, in which John sees a throne set, a wondrous Being on the throne, and worship and praise being offered continually to Him. [Note: Chapter 4.] In the right hand of Him on the throne is a book, or sealed roll. An angel calls for whoever is able or qualified to take this sealed roll and break the seals.

No one can be found qualified, until there comes forward One who bears the scars of death, a lion in strength and leadership, a lamb in character, whom we quickly recognize as our Lord Jesus. He comes forward and takes the book, so indicating that He is qualified to break open the sealed roll; and His right is acknowledged by Him on the throne, who permits Him to take the book. At this act of His a wonderful burst of praise and worship breaks out from those before the throne, and from countless thousands of angels, and the whole creation. This is the scene which introduces the sevenfold vision following. [Note: Chapter 5.]

It is of interest to stop and find out a little, if we can, about what this taking of the sealed roll by our Lord Jesus means. Following the rule that the key to everything in this Revelation book lies back in the Old Testament, we turn there now to get the key to this bit, if we can find it. That key seems to be in Jeremiah, thirty-second chapter. There is found an allusion to a simple, primitive custom of the Hebrew people in the exchange of real estate, and the claiming of property to which one is

entitled. This allusion is a bit of the Hebrew clothed in Greek, which marks the book of Revelation.

The old Hebrew primitive custom was as follows:—when property was purchased the deed to the new owner was made out in duplicate, an open copy and a sealed copy. The open copy was clearly for public information, open to all; the sealed copy as clearly belonged only to the owner of the property as his evidence of ownership. If a new heir came to take possession of an estate, or in case of a dispute over ownership, the claimant who was adjudged the rightful heir or owner would be given the possession of the sealed roll, or deed. And, as so attested by the judge, he only would be properly qualified to "take" the sealed roll, break the seal, read its contents, and formally take possession of the property.

Now it is under the symbolism of this old bit of Hebrew custom that our Lord Jesus is here represented as stepping forward to take possession of the earth, and begin His reign over it. A Hebrew, immersed in the old primitive customs prevailing among his people in Palestine, would understand this allusion at once, however startled or sceptical he might be as to its significance in this connection.

The language used in the song of praise when Jesus takes the roll is significant. They say "Worthy (i.e., qualified) art thou to take the roll, and to break open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe," and so on. Man had been given dominion of the earth. He had by obedience to the evil one transferred his right to him who is repeatedly called "the prince of this world." Jesus purchased them out of their slavery "unto God," back to their original owner.

Now He is about to take possession of the earth on behalf of men. This is the initial point from which begin the scenes successively depicted in these visions. There will come a time when He who is now sitting at the Father's right hand, will rise and step into action on the earth, the time of patient endurance at an end. When will that time be? No man knows; only He on the throne. But it will be a tremendous time when it comes.

But before He can take possession there must be dispossession of the claimants in possession. The events here depicted are those connected with the dispossession of the evil powers, and the taking possession of the earth by our Lord Jesus. This is the opening event in heaven of the period of time covered by these visions. The closing event in four of the seven—first, second, third, and fifth—is the same thing, a terrible earthquake, so bringing them together at that point. A fifth (the fourth) does not speak of the earthquake, but closes with what is clearly a final event, told in rhetorical figure, which fits in with the earthquake. [Note: John 14:14-20.] The last two give details of certain things named in the others.

Let us now look a little at each of these seven outlooks into the terrible tribulation to come.

First Full View

First Full View

The One who has taken the sealed roll begins breaking the seals, and with the going forth of a Conquering One, [Note: John 6:1-2.] there follows down on the earth a time of war, [Note: John 6:3-4.] famine, [Note: John 6:5-6.] death, [Note: John 6:7-8.] and persecution and killing of Christ's followers. [Note: John 6:9-11.] This is followed by a great earthquake, and a terrific disturbance of the heavenly bodies, which bring utmost consternation to men of all classes on the earth. [Note: John 6:12-17.] This is clearly a final scene, and coincides with the closing event of the tribulation in the Olivet Talk. Working backwards from this final event, as characterized in the Olivet Talk, this whole thing is seen to be a general description of the tribulation period.

Then there is a parenthesis of great interest that clearly belongs with these. [Note: Chapter 7.] It begins with a command that the earth and the sea be not "hurt" until certain things have occurred. This fits the parenthesis in just before where the hurting of both earth and the heavenly bodies occurs, that is between verses eleven and twelve of chapter six. It is put thus by itself afterwards, following the general plan of the book, that keeps by itself or together each thing, or group of similar things, a simple teaching rule to give clearness.

There are two items in this parenthesis. The first describes the sealing of a certain number of the Hebrew tribes. Twelve thousand of each tribe are sealed, making a total of one hundred and forty-four thousand. The word "seal" is used in two senses in the Bible, as the means of fastening up a roll or writing; and, in the New Testament, for the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers. The seal in this latter sense was a mark of ownership. Paul tells us that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, [Note: 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30.] which means that the Holy Spirit given to us is the Lord Jesus' seal that we belong to Him. If this simple, natural meaning be taken here it means that at this time the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the Hebrew people.

The numbers used are significant. Twelve is commonly used in Scripture as the number of corporate completeness. Twelve times twelve thousand would simply represent a fully completed corporate number. Upon the whole body of Jews then living on the earth the Holy Spirit is poured, thus sealing them once again as God's own peculiar people, restored fully to favour after the long rejection.

The second item is of equal interest. From his place of observation up in the heavens in view of the throne of God, John is suddenly startled to see there vast multitudes of people, literally countless, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, a great world-company, clothed in white, and with the conqueror's palm in their hands, and singing joyous praise. They suddenly appear standing before the throne in heaven. John is gazing spellbound, wondering who these are, and whence they have come, and what it means. Then he is told, "these are they that came up out of the tribulation—the great one, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Then is described in a few heart-touching words their longed-for bliss in

the presence of God. Note that this scene likewise is a final one, a scene of final blessedness.

These two items in the parenthesis occur in connection with the earthquake and the shaking of the heavens. In connection with the closing of the tribulation time occurs this double event, the conversion of the Jews down upon the earth, and the catching away from earth to heaven of the followers of our Lord Jesus. In the account of Paul's conversion, the change in him was effected by the appearance to him of the glorified Jesus in the heavens. In the Olivet Talk the gathering of His followers to Himself in the heavens occurs at the time of our Lord's coming. These two events taking place here indicate that at this point the Lord Jesus' coming has taken place on the earth. In the vision, John being in the heavens sees things as they appear there, not as seen on the earth.

Thus the first vision or view begins with the moment up in heaven when our Lord begins to act, describes the general run of the tribulation on the earth, and closes with the national conversion of Israel, and the catching away from the earth of Christ's true followers.

Loosening Out of Evil

Loosening Out of Evil

The second view runs through chapters eight and nine, then a parenthesis occurs from Revelation 10:1 to Revelation 11:14, and then the main thread is picked up at Revelation 11:15 and runs to the close of that chapter. But the principal part of the view is in chapters eight and nine, the final bit in Revelation 11:15-19, being merely added to make the connection of events quite clear. Let us look a moment at this second view. It closes with an earthquake, so connecting it with the final event in the first view. It begins with a period of silence, which would seem to answer to the hush in the great volume of praise in chapters four and five, when the Lamb takes the sealed roll, so carrying us back to the same starting point as there.

The prayers of the saints are as incense on the golden altar of intercession before the throne. This, increased, is cast into the earth and produces a great storm there. The storms of this book are significant. A physical storm is the coming together and equalizing of two areas of different temperatures and other atmospheric conditions. A storm symbolically is a coming into contact of two differing antagonistic elements. Here something represented by the earnest prayers of God's people becomes a disturbing element in the earth causing a great disturbance there. This is the starting point of this vision, and makes a connection between the influence of God's praying people and the Lord Jesus beginning His work of taking possession of the earth. There follows a fourfold description of distressing events on the earth. [Note: Revelation 8:7-12.] There will be something said in a later talk about the principle of God's action in judgment, which will apply here.

In a brief parenthesis, [Note: Revelation 3:13.] a warning cry comes of the terrible character of what is to follow these distressing events. Then there follows a letting loose of "the pit of the abyss" of a vast host of demon spirits. [Note: Revelation 9:1-11.] They come swarming up on the earth viciously attacking men. They come as an unseen foe. Spirits cannot be seen by ordinary eyesight. Things are being shown here as seen from heaven. The awful character of these beings is so utterly beyond human experience up to that time, that there is no adequate human language to describe these unloosed hordes of horrible demons from the lower pit. Language seems poor to tell the agony they inflict. They have over them as head one called the angel of the abyss, whose name means the destroyer. They are allowed to continue their terrible torment for a brief period, five months, which must seem as ages to those being tormented by them. This is called the first woe. [Note: Revelation 9:12.] Following this comes the loosing out of another terrible, immense horde of demons as difficult to describe as the others, and even more terrible, having the power of death as well as of torment. [Note: Revelation 9:13-21.] It is noted that these experiences do not have any influence toward making men penitent.

This practically sums up the second view of this period of time, though after a parenthetical break, the last item of this series is merely added briefly, to make the connection quite clear. [Note: Revelation 11:14-19.] This second view of the tribulation period describes the loosing of the powers of evil which have hitherto been under restraint.

The parenthetical break in this series [Note: Revelation 10:1 to Revelation 11:13.] contains two things. The first is a little group of three items. There are seven thunders which John is not allowed to write up. [Note: Revelation 10:1-4.] The experiences of these awful, unprecedented days of evil's undisputed reign will be far more and far worse than can be told. Then there comes a solemn declaration that there will be no further respite, but that now at once shall be finished up this terrible time of judgment. [Note: Revelation 10:5-7.] Then there is a personal word for John. [Note: Revelation 10:8-11.] These three items make chapter ten.

Then follows what proves to be the third view of this tribulation time. It lets us see what is going on in Jerusalem, the Jew centre, during this time. The view begins with a treading underfoot of Jerusalem by the nations. This continues for a given period of time, forty-two months. One might think that it has been so trodden underfoot, that is, from a Jewish standpoint desecrated, all these centuries. But the prophetic passages never give any reckoning of time except when Israel is a nation. It is concerned with telling Jewish national events. For forty-two months of Jewish national existence at this time Jerusalem shall be profaned by the nations. This view ends with a great earthquake, the closing event of the great tribulation, which begins with the supreme profaning of the temple by the desolating abomination. This view runs through the entire time of the great tribulation.

The one distinctive thing it tells is that during the tribulation, in the midst of all the blasphemous reign of unrestrained evil, there will be an unbroken witness to the truth of God. These witnesses are divinely protected and empowered during their witness. They continue their witness twelve hundred and sixty days, the same time as the forty-two months. The time is probably thus stated in two different ways to make quite clear just what length of time is meant. At the very end evil is allowed to have full swing, even over them,—they are killed. Then, before the astonished, terror-stricken multitudes, they are restored to life, and caught up to heaven. Then comes the earthquake which closes the period. During all these awful times the multitudes will be listening to the preaching of the truth. How patient God is! He never leaves Himself nor man without a true, faithful witness, on the earth, of His great love.

The character of this view seems to explain why it comes as a break, or parenthesis, in the view that shows the swing of unloosed evil. During all this time, in the very worst of it, there will be continually going on this work of faithful witnessing. The special work of God's people in this present time, that of witnessing to the truth of the Gospel, is continued clear up to the very end.

The Lawless One

The Lawless One

The fourth view runs through chapters twelve to fourteen. It gives a full swing of events for the same period, but especially a sort of sketch of the career of the leader of evil, called by Paul "the lawless one," and by John "the Antichrist." The symbolism is intensely Jewish, and so should be clear to the reader of the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament. It may be put briefly thus: the Jewish nation gave birth to Jesus, who ascended to heaven. [Note: Revelation 12:1-5.] Ignoring the long Gentile gap, the Jew, again a nation, is persecuted for twelve hundred and sixty days, but divinely guarded. [Note: Revelation 12:6.]

Meanwhile there is a conflict up in the heavens, where the evil one during all these years, and up to this moment, has his headquarters. [Note: Ephesians 6:12.] The archangel leads the hosts of God, routs the evil one, whose identity is specially emphasized, and casts him down to the earth. [Note: Revelation 12:7-12.]

Then begins the persecution of the Jewish nation already spoken of. This continues "time, times, and half a time," which thus becomes an equivalent phrase for twelve hundred and sixty days, or forty-two months. Thus in three different ways the time is stated, that it may be quite clearly understood. The arch-demon persecutes not only the woman—the Jew—but also "the rest of her seed,"—the Church of course was given birth by the Jewish nation. [Note: Revelation 12:13-17.]

Then follows the sketch of the Antichrist, and of his brief reign. [Note: Revelation 13:1-18.] The casting down of the evil one out of his present position in the heavens, is the point at which there appears on this earth a strange being called a "beast," an awful, uncanny, nondescript beast. It is noticeable throughout the prophecies, and here, that the governments and kingdoms of earth, and the evil one himself, are represented by beasts.. This evil leader is, in his character, so unlike anything thus far known that it is difficult for John to describe him. He combines in himself all the evil traits known. He is empowered with all the authority of the evil one himself, and draws out the worship of the wondering, befooled multitudes.

He has an assistant who becomes a sort of court-preacher, having great influence over the crowds, doing strangely miraculous things. The multitudes are required under penalty of death to worship an image set up in honour of the lawless leader; so the terrible description goes on. It is the most complete we have yet had of the time of tribulation. In the midst of it all comes a solemn, tender voice calling to God's people to be steadfast. [Note: Revelation 13:10.] Every man must follow the bent of his own free choice; must be made morally captive by yielding to evil, or use force in fighting, or use the other, mightier weapons, and steadfastly endure. Here is the great testing time for the saints. The chapter ends with the blasphemous worship, and the persecution at its height and in full swing.

Then as John is noting all this from his point of vision in heaven, he is suddenly startled with a new sight before the throne [Note: Revelation 14:1-5.] (just as he was in the first view). "Behold,"

suddenly, unexpectedly, he sees a great multitude before the throne surrounding the Lord Jesus. They are singing the sweetest music, whose volume is as a great thunder. The description of them is very winsome, their faces reflect the likeness of the Lord Jesus and the Father. They are pure as purest virgins, and obey the Lord Jesus perfectly. [Note: Revelation 7:9.] The description tells us at once what has taken place. When things are at their devilish worst on earth, the Lord Jesus has caught away His believing followers, and they have become like Him, when they see Him as He is. [Note: 1 John 3:2.]

This company is unlike those suddenly seen in like manner before the throne in the first vision [Note: Revelation 7:9.] in one particular. There the multitude is uncountable by man's reckoning. Here an exact number is given. It is a symbolical number, the number of full corporate completeness, as with the Spirit-baptized Jews in chapter seven. The believers caught up have been joined with those of all time, awaiting this day up in the Father's presence. The number is complete of all in every century, from Creation's earliest dawn, who have by grace followed fully regardless of circumstance or opposition.

But things are not quite cleared up yet down on the earth. [Note: Revelation 14:6-20.] An angel solemnly calls on the multitudes of frightened men remaining on the earth to give their worship to the true God. Another angel warns the earth of the fall of the vast system of evil in which they are enmeshed. A third angel warns against the worship of the beast which is still going on. Then is heard on the earth a strengthening voice to those who are heeding these warnings, and are being persecuted and killed. It is blessed to die when it is a death for the Lord, in the midst of such blasphemy and persecution. And the end is quickly told in the language of a harvest. This is the fourth view of the tribulation, describing chiefly the coming and rule of the lawless one.

The fifth view makes up chapter sixteen, with chapter fifteen as an explanatory introduction. This is a view not of the whole period but of events near and at its close. It connects back with some martyrs before the throne, who have come up out of the tribulation experiences. This is to make clear that it is at this point in the tribulation that there occurs what is now described in the fifth view. [Note: Revelation 15:1-4.] It connects back also with the completing event in the second view in chapter eleven, verses fifteen to nineteen. That event is merely named there to complete the record. Now it is given here in detail. [Note: Cp.] Revelation 11:19 with Revelation 15:5-8.]

Then follows the account of final events in the tribulation, ending in the great earthquake. [Note: Revelation 16.] It tells of the final judgment upon earth, sea, rivers, and sun; then upon the throne of the lawless one; then the special demon activity preparatory to the final supreme measuring of the power of evil against God. Then the great final earthquake closes the scene, as in views one and two, with terrible accompaniments. This is the fifth view, describing the final part of the tribulation.

Heart-Breaking

Heart-Breaking

The sixth view is a description of the system of iniquity which has been thus judged and destroyed. [Note: Revelation 17.] In the symbolical language there is a strange woman; she is sitting on an equally strange beast, seven headed and ten horned. The beast is explained as being the kingdoms or civil governments of earth. [Note: Revelation 17:9-13.] The woman is being carried by the beast, that is, what she represents is supported by these governments or kingdoms.

What is represented by this woman? The name on her forehead is "Babylon." The next chapter speaks of the city of Babylon, this of a system called Babylon, having its seat or centre in the city. The answer to the question is a most distressing one, that well-nigh breaks one's heart to make. What is the system that has for the past sixteen hundred years been supported by the civil governments of the earth, and has been drunken with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus? There is but one answer to one only a little familiar with history. It is the outer organization known historically as "the Church." This word "church" must be taken at its simplest, fullest, broadest meaning. The Roman Catholic is the great main stem; the Greek Orthodox is the earliest great split-off, the Church of England a later split-off; and the varying split-offs date from the Reformation time up to the present. These all, with certain small primitive bodies, historically group themselves as the Church.

The two symbolical characteristics of this woman are the two dominant characteristics of all branches of this historic church, i.e., supported by civil powers, which has meant dominance by these powers; and, intolerance by each of all the others, and of the hated Jew, intolerance to the point not merely of blood, but of a riot of blood. The exceptional periods and branches only emphasize these two, as the dominant characteristics of this historical Church. The branches that have been organized "free" of civil support, though large in themselves, make up a small part of the whole, and have at some time or other shown the same spirit of intolerance toward each other, and have been supported more or less by the money of those who confessedly are not Christ's followers.

This is both startling and heartbreaking. John is startled terrifically. The shock to him would naturally be greater because, while he was conscious of evil in the Church then, it had not developed yet to the point of these two named characteristics. A little change in the translation will make plainer how terribly John was shaken.

The old version says "when I saw her I wondered with a great admiration;" [Note: Revelation 17:6.] the revisions, "I wondered with a great wonder." A little more accurate and full translation would be, "I was so stupefied with astonishment that my brain reeled and seemed about to lose its balance." So great was the terrible shock to both brain and heart of what is here shown to him.

It breaks one's heart today to read it, realizing even so little of just how much it means. Yet we have been prepared for it a little by Paul's word about the restraining One being withdrawn. This is

the picture of the climax reached in the time of unrestrained evil during the tribulation. But at the last the beast throws the woman off. The governments will throw aside the Church so long supported and used, and give all their strength to the new leader, who wants all worship to be of himself openly as well as secretly. This is the sixth view, the description of the system, Babylon, as seen from above.

The last look is at the city of Babylon, [Note: Revelation 18.] and its destruction. This is the centre and capital of the system. The natural question is, what city is meant here? The seven mountains "on which the woman sitteth" has naturally led many to think of the seven-hilled City of Rome. But the fact already noted that this book of Revelation is a gathering up of all the Bible, and only that, gives the sure clue to the correct answer. From the time of the forming of the Hebrew nation, the Bible never touches history except such as occurs during the time of Israel's history as a nation. A thoughtful review of the Book makes this clear.

What is the city in the Bible answering to the description of Babylon given here:—"the great city which reigneth over the Kings of the earth," "Babylon the great"? [Note: Revelation 17:18; Revelation 16:19; Revelation 18:10, Revelation 18:18-21.] Let one begin back in Genesis, [Note: Genesis 11:1-9.] with the attempt by the whole race to build a great city, then think through the books of Kings and Chronicles, the captivity, and especially the prophetic books, and then ask what city in this Book is "the great city"? There is but one answer—Babylon, the city on the Euphrates.

And again comes the almost irresistible impulse to begin to study out improbabilities and probabilities. We say, "Babylon rebuilt! do you believe that?" But our purpose in this little series of talks is not to study present conditions, but only to find out what the Book seems to teach. This word may however be added. In the many passages regarding Babylon in the prophecies, one is often quoted as indicating that in the purpose of God, the ruined capital on the Euphrates will never be rebuilt. [Note: Isaiah 13:19-22.] Let it be simply, thoughtfully noted, that a rather careful examination of the present conditions at the old Babylon ruins, and then of the detailed language in this Isaiah passage, makes it quite clear that the conditions there, while evidently a fulfilment thus far of this passage, yet do not satisfy fully the language. It looks rather like another evidence of that marvellous mastery in the use of language in Scripture which adjusts itself to different events with long intervals between.

This is the seventh of these views. All seven views must be taken together, to get an understanding of what will take place during this terrible three years and a half.

In a Nutshell

In a Nutshell

The remainder of the book of Revelation can be quickly, briefly gathered up. Chapter nineteen begins with a great burst of praise by the multitudes in heaven. [Note: Revelation 9:1-10.] The Lord Jesus comes out of the opened heavens, riding to war against the assembled hosts of evil on the earth. A word from His lips decides the conflict, the lawless one and his court-preacher are taken captive, [Note: Revelation 9:11-21.] Satan himself bound, the resurrection of dead believers takes place, and Christ's own people reign with Him a thousand years. [Note: Revelation 20:1-6.]

At its end there is a final supreme test between Satan and God, that every one's free choice may be freely made. The one thing God insists upon is utter freedom of choice by every man, as the determining factor in his character, and his future. The test results in God being supreme. Then comes the final judgment of those not included in the first resurrection, and of all living on the earth. [Note: Revelation 20:7-15.] Then the present earth and heavens pass away, and there is a new heaven and earth. [Note: Revelation 21:1-2.] And the picture closes with a scene of wondrous winsomeness,—the redeemed race, living on the earth, in the presence of the Lord Jesus, with all pain and sin gone. [Note: Revelation 21:3 to Revelation 22:5.]

Let us try to summarize briefly the book's teachings about the Coming. There is a time coming when our Lord Jesus will take some step in heaven, which will precipitate the tribulation on the earth. That tribulation will run for three years and a half, from the time of the coming to his full power of the lawless one, and the profaning by him of Jerusalem as then held again by the Jew nation, up until the end comes in radical earthly and heavenly disturbances.

Then the Lord Jesus will appear, the Jew nation then living on the earth is changed spiritually by the power of the Holy Spirit; the believing Church is caught up out of the tribulation into the Lord's presence; the lawless one is destroyed and the reign of terror is ended; the Kingdom is set up; Christ's own who have died, are raised, and together with the living changed ones, reign with Him over the earth for a thousand years.

Then comes a final crisis of evil, a final triumph over it, a final judgment, a passing away of heavens and earth, the making of a new heavens and earth, and then the redeemed race restored to Eden conditions, and more, on the new earth.

The item of special note is the seven views, from different angles, of the terrible tribulation; first is the general description of the tribulation as seen on earth; [Note: Chapters Revelation 6-7.] second, a description of the unloosing of evil in the earth as seen from heaven; [Note: Revelation 8-9.] third, the pure witness maintained to the truth of God in Jerusalem; [Note: Revelation 11.] fourth, the sketch of the rule of the lawless one; [Note: Revelation 12-14.] fifth, the final group of judgments ending the tribulation; [Note: Revelation 16.] sixth, the system of iniquity called Babylon; [Note: Revelation 17.] and seventh, the destruction of the city of Babylon. [Note: Revelation 18.]

3. A Gathering Up in Simple Shape of what the Book Teaches About His Return

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[Note: This talk is a simpler, briefer statement of Section II. It does not give references, with one exception. Those wanting the more exact, studious statement, and the method of study by which these results are gotten, will find them in Section II.]

A World Event

A World Event

I am frequently asked some question about the Lord's return. There is usually an eagerness in eye and tone when the question is asked. I can feel the longing of the heart for Him, and His promised coming back again. And yet with it, frequently—not always—there is a vague feeling as though there were so much uncertainty about the matter. And if we talk a while there is oft-times—not always—a lack of familiarity with what the Book teaches about it. I always feel deeply sympathetic. I have been in just that position so long, eagerly longing, yet confused, and not familiar with just exactly what the Book teaches. And now all I can do is to bring what I have been getting out of the Book.

I want to gather up in this talk, in a very simple way, for busy people whose leisure is limited, what is given in the talks that have just gone before. In the preceding section, "On the Knees," the method of getting at the teaching is given, as well as the result. It involves a good deal of detailed study for which all may not have opportunity. This present talk gives simply the results, grouped in such a way that one may get something of a clear, simple grasp of the teaching. It will be an immense advantage, even for those whose time is crowded, to go through the more detailed study, bit by bit, after having read through this chapter.

I think it will be well to be reminded that these talks do not take up the discussion of whether any of these things seem likely or unlikely to us. They are not a study of conditions now in the world, but only of what the Bible itself teaches about our Lord's return.

The answer found here to questions about our Lord's return is apt to seem startling, at least that is the way it came to me. It includes so much more than we are apt to suppose. But then there is a good deal bigger sweep to the whole subject than most of us have thought about. We are apt to think of its personal meaning for ourselves, "with a general sort of hazy thought that it means a righting of things that are wrong. It includes these, but it includes much more. This is because of Who it is that is to return. The arrival or return of some one takes on the size of the one coming.

It's because it is Jesus who is to return that the event sweeps in so many other things. He is the one through Whom our world and all its life were created, and through Whom its affairs are administered for the Father. His coming again, therefore, is to be a world-event, even as His first coming was, and gradually came to be so recognized. When He wrapped Himself in the garb of our humanity, and walked amongst us, it was a garb of Jewish weave. Humanly He became a man, and a Jewish man. It is because He is the centre of all, and touches each of these things so vitally, that His return takes in such a broad swing of events.

It concerns the whole world movement. It concerns the system of evil which is dominant in the world. It concerns the Jew, the Jew nation, its capital—Jerusalem, and the centre of its national life—the temple. It concerns the whole race, which is His child creatively, and for which He died. And it concerns future affairs on the earth. It is quite possible, and not difficult, to get a simple but

clear and firm grasp of the group of events concerned. And as we do, it clears our vision, steadies our steps, and gives new strength to our praying, and new simplicity to our faith. We can pray more intelligently and earnestly "Thy Kingdom come."

When the Gospels and Epistles were written the Jews were still a nation, though a subject-nation. Jerusalem was standing, and the daily sacrifices were being offered in the temple. This is the standpoint from which things are looked at. We should keep this in mind.

A Terrible Forerunner

A Terrible Forerunner

One day, four of our Lord's disciples came to Him and asked a question. He had spoken to them frequently of coming back again to set up the Kingdom. Now they ask Him when He is coming back. In His reply He tells them the things that will happen before He comes, and just at the time, and tells them they may know when He is coming by watching for these events. So that the answer to the question "When will Jesus come again?" includes a little group of happenings.

There are three points around which we can gather what has been found. The first of these is called the "great tribulation." When those disciples asked about the Coming, Jesus began talking about this. The city of Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The Jews were to be scattered among all nations. Instead of the world-leadership which the Jew of that day fondly hoped for, the nations called Gentiles were to have the world-leadership. We know, of course, that this has all taken place so completely that we are apt to forget the past of the Jew, think of him chiefly either to pity, or despise, or both, and to imagine that we Gentiles will always rule the world. Now we begin to listen to something different. The leading part played by the non-Jewish nations is to come to an end. This present time of Gentile leadership is to end in a time of great disturbance and distress, called the great tribulation.

The general characteristics marking the interval of time preceding this tribulation, and up until it begins, will be wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. Before it begins, the Jews will have re-constituted their nation in Palestine, built again the temple in Jerusalem, and begun offering sacrifices again as they used to do. This will be done by an arrangement, or treaty, with the nations concerned. Then this agreement will be broken, the sacrifices will be stopped, and a time of terrible persecution of the Jew will begin. The opening event of this great tribulation, by which our Lord tells us it may be recognized, is some act blasphemously profaning the temple. During this time the Jews will be persecuted in a more terrible manner than ever before. This is saying much, for no people has suffered such persecutions through so many centuries as has the Jew. The Old Testament is very full of allusions to this coming worst of all persecutions.

But the Jew will not be alone in his sufferings this time. The followers of Christ will be subjected to persecution also to a terrible extent. It will be a time of sore sifting and testing of one's faith. Then there will be many false religious teachers, whose teachings will add to the confusion and perplexity of those wanting to be true but not clear as to what to do. As a result many professing believers will prove untrue, and many will grow cold in their devotion.

There will be a great leader, a world-leader, during this reign of evil. He is called the "lawless one," the "man of sin," and the "Antichrist." Not only will he persecute Jew and Christian, but as he comes to the climax of his power, he will blasphemously require that men worship himself as God. He will sit in the temple in Jerusalem claiming to be the only one who should be worshipped.

He will have a religious leader who will seek to influence the multitudes to this blasphemous worship. This religious leader will be enabled to do many strange, supernatural things which will deceive the crowds. But the power back of all this is Satan's power. There will be a strict system of coercion, or boycotting, to compel the people to worship this blasphemous leader. Whoever refuses will be unable to buy or sell, and will be liable to be killed. Many will be martyred. During this period there will be terrible activity by countless demon spirits, who, unseen of course by ordinary eyesight, will be actively at work tormenting and killing men. The vast multitude will fit in with the new order of things, engaging in a riot of pleasure-seeking, and be utterly unprepared for the coming of the Lord, which will put an end to all of this.

At the very end, there will be a terrible earthquake affecting all parts of the earth, clear beyond what has ever been experienced. It will cause the greatest consternation among the careless, thoughtless, surprised multitudes, and among the leaders of all sorts. Men in highest position, politically, socially, and financially, will be down on their knees in the dust, in pitiable distress. Social prestige, vast wealth, political power, will crumble in a moment into worthlessness. With the earthquake will also be a heaven-quake, all the powers that hold our solar system in place being as rudely shaken as the earth itself. This new reign of tribulation-terror will continue for the same length of time as our Lord's ministry of love, three and a half years.

During all of this time there will be two men in Jerusalem openly and publicly preaching to the multitudes the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, in the midst of ridicule and opposition. They will be empowered to withhold the rain at will, and to call down fire from heaven, as did Elijah, and to bring plagues, as did Moses, in evidence of the truth of their message. There will be repeated but unsuccessful attempts to kill them. Then they will be killed but not buried, their bodies will be left lying in the street for three days, to be gazed at by the jeering crowds. Then suddenly the startled crowds will see them rise up, and then caught up into the heavens. This tribulation is the first thing to get clearly fixed in mind in connection with our Lord's return.

The second thing is the coming of our Lord Himself. In the midst of this reign of unrestrained evil and cruelty, as things are at their hellish worst, something will happen. Suddenly there will be a shining of a wondrous light in the sky. It will be so bright as to make the sun's light throw a shadow. And on a cloud will be seen openly the glorified Jesus Himself coming down, just as He went up.

Fourfold Effect of the Coming

Fourfold Effect of the Coming

In connection with His coming four things will occur, to the Jew, to the Church, to the Antichrist, and to the multitudes. The Jewish nation and people will be born again as a people by the power of the Holy Spirit. The greater part of them will probably be gathered in Palestine. As they suddenly recognize the Jesus whom they crucified, and have so bitterly hated, as they now see Him coming down out of the sky in such dazzling glory, and realize that they killed their Messiah, they will be seized with great penitence. That will be the moment of the conversion of the nation of Jews, by the conversion of its individual members, in precisely the same way as Paul was converted on that Damascus road. This is the Jew event.

Something will happen for the followers of the Lord Jesus. The presence of the Lord Jesus so near will be as a great spirit-magnet drawing up to Himself those belonging to Him. First of all, the bodies of those followers who have died will be raised up, their old tenants taking up their abode again in these raised, changed, glorified bodies. Then those who are living will experience an instantaneous change in their bodies, and will rise into the air, up to where the Lord Jesus is, meeting Him and their own loved ones in His presence. It will all be done more quickly, probably, than the time it takes to tell the story here. The coming into His presence will work a wondrous change. Before those eyes of flame every blemish shall be revealed, and as quickly purged away as we are purified by the fire of His presence. The purifying will be blessed. Will some have a feeling of bareness?

One day I was walking down a main street in Christiania with a Norwegian friend. He called my attention to a large business concern, and then told me this story of its wealthy founder and head. He had been a poor boy in a country district tending cattle. One day he wanted to be away, and asked his sister to tend the cattle for the day, promising to let her hold for the day a small coin, current there, worth less than three cents of our money, to be returned at night. She consented. The very sight of money was a great rarity to her. So she spent a long, hard day tending his cattle, and holding the little bright coin, and returned it again at night, quite content with her day's pay.

Long years afterwards the brother was telling the story. He had grown very wealthy. He had allowed love of money to crowd out the Christ passion to which he was not a stranger. He told the story to my friend with great glee, laughing at his sister's childish simplicity. My friend, who knew him well, said very quietly, "That is all you get; you hold your wealth to the end of the day of your life, then you give it up and have as little as before, and the whole of your life is gone." And the man's startled face showed that he quite understood. In our Lord's presence everything not from Him, and not held for Him, will disappear before the flame of His eyes. This is the Church event.

And something will happen to the blasphemous leader of the tribulation time. He will be at the height of his infamous career, accepting the worship of the deceived multitudes. But at the appearance of the Lord Jesus, and at a word from His lips, this awful leader will be slain, and his

hosts scattered. With his death the reign of terror ceases, and a new order begins on the earth. Still another result must be noted. At the sight of the glorified Jesus, the multitudes on earth, so long befooled by the leader of lawlessness, will be grieved over their conduct and become deeply penitent. These four things occur in connection with our Lord's return. This is the second thing, the Lord's return, to hold clear in its place.

Blessed Kingdom Days

Blessed Kingdom Days

The third thing is the Kingdom. Our Lord Jesus will begin reigning upon and over the whole earth. The Jewish nation, now a radically changed people, will become the first nation of the earth. The Kingdom will be a time of Jew leadership in all the earth. All the wealth of glowing promises which fills up so much of Isaiah and the other prophets, will find fulfilment. The new Israel will be a nation of radiant faces and thrilled hearts. All other nations will gladly do them homage, and be wondrously blest through them.

The central city of the world will be Jerusalem, the Jew capital. Over it will be continually the pillar of fire and cloud, as in the wilderness days, the open evidence to all of the presence of God. Jerusalem will then be the joy of all the earth. The great mission of this new Jew nation will be the same as in the beginning. It was created to be a messenger-nation, God's messenger-nation, to all the peoples of the earth. That mission will become the passion of the Jew-heart. Through their ministry the Gospel of the grace of God will be taken into every corner and nook of the earth, until everybody everywhere has heard the blessed news. It will be a time of worldwide evangelization beyond what has ever been dreamed of.

Meanwhile there will be another blessed ministry at work. Those who have been raised, and, with the living, caught up into the Lord's presence will become partners with the Jew in their blessed work. They will reign over the earth, and over the Jew, while the Jew reigns upon the earth, each reigning at the word of the same Lord. These will be the great body of redeemed ones who have followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. It will be made up, not only of those included in the Church, but of all, since creation's natal day, who have followed fully, and walked faith's narrow way. What a wonderful fellowship in service that will be, with the worthies of these Old Testament pages, and many an unknown saint of God, true to Him in some hidden-away corner.

We will have our resurrection bodies in those days. Our Lord Jesus' life on earth after His resurrection gives us the illustration of what that means. He was in a place simply by willing to be there, regardless of space, or of material obstructions like a wall. In our glorified resurrection bodies we shall be able to be wherever our Lord sends us, on sweet errands of service among men. Some morning He may say to some one, "Do this errand for me in Boston, minister to this group, or this needy child of mine." And instantly you will be in Boston in the midst of the exquisite delight of service; then back into His presence; then maybe off for an errand in Calcutta; then back to His side again. What blessed days of service those will be!

Sometimes I have wondered if we shall be allowed to help in old, loved fields, where we worked until our tired-out bodies had to be taken away for rest, or where they refused to work longer, and were laid away in the dust. Here, say, is an Englishwoman, who has been pouring her life out in tireless service among the Arabs of northern Africa. There has come into her heart a burning love for Africa such as comes only from touch with it, and with the Master Himself. But the "earthly

tabernacle" is weak and has to be taken off to a different climate. And so the whole life plan changes, and service is taken up for the wondrous Lord of the harvest elsewhere, where He has plainly appointed, while the old passionate love for the left-behind African field still burns. Will she now be allowed, in the new wondrous body, to minister in the old place, and visit the old blessed haunts?

I do not know. But I think it likely. It is not contrary to anything in the Book. It would seem the natural thing. Would not William Carey love to pick up the thread again in India, and Hudson Taylor in China, and Judson in Burmah, and Keith Falconer in Arabia, and Sam Hadley in Water Street, and dear old Booth and Moody everywhere, with headquarters up with the Master in the heavens, and blessed service among men wherever He appoints? What a time we shall have reigning with Him!

The Kingdom is to continue on the earth for a thousand years. But some will render only a "feigned allegiance" to our Lord Jesus. It will be the popular thing to be good. So a testing time will come again to the earth. Satan, chained during these Kingdom days, will be loosened out again. Why? That those preferring him may. so choose. God hungers for our love, but only for a freely given love. The one thing He regards most is the free choice of each one's will. This final testing time of evil will end in the destroying of evil forever.

Then will come a final gathering of all people living on the earth into God's presence. Those who have not been raised at Christ's coming, are raised now, and, with the living, judged by the Judge of love and purity. Then this old earth and the heavens surrounding it shall be burned up, and in their place shall be a new heavens and new earth. And then all the race shall live on terms of sweetest intimacy with the Lord Jesus, even as in early Eden days. And our Lord's Eden plan will at last be realized.

Love's Warnings

Love's Warnings

Now there are two things that should be added here. They are about the present time, before the tribulation, and the Coming, and the Kingdom. The first is about something of a heartbreaking sort that one would much rather not speak of, because of the pain it gives. Paul is careful to tell us that we are not to look for our Lord Himself at any moment; and our Lord warns us not to follow those who will say that "the time (of His coming) is at hand." [Note: Luke 21:8.] There are certain things that will occur first. Our Lord says, "When ye see these things then lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

There will come a falling away from the faith among God's people. This is emphasized very solemnly as a warning. That falling away will continue and intensify until there comes upon the scene the one called the lawless one, who is to be destroyed by the Lord's appearance. The spirit of lawlessness, which will head up in this leader, was already in the world when Paul was writing, and has been, and is now in the world. But it is under restraint, and cannot do as it wants to because of this restraint. When that restraint is withdrawn the spirit of lawlessness, unrestrained, will run riot under its awful leader.

What is this restraint? It is distressing to think of the falling away, but here is something far more painful. The present restraint is the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is in every believer, and peculiarly He is in the Church. The being in each believer is not peculiar to the present time, it has been true of every time since creation. The distinctive thing of Pentecost was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon a body of people, forming it into the Church. There will come a time when, because of the conditions dominant in the Church, the Holy Spirit will withdraw from it.

By the Church, here, is meant, not the true body of believers, but the outer, historical organization known among men as the Church. Its main stem historically is the Roman Catholic Church; the Greek Orthodox, the Churches of England and Scotland, the Reformation Churches of Europe, the free Church bodies, and some others,—these all together make up what is termed the outer Church. This is the Church body, taken all together, from which some day the Holy Spirit will withdraw. Some of us may think that He clearly has withdrawn from certain portions of it already. Some day that withdrawal will be complete. When that sad day comes then the terrible end will swiftly be here. This is the first thing to note.

The second thing is about the true mission of the Church, and about our personal attitude to the coming of our Lord. There will be more to say about the Church in a later talk. Just now we want to note this: the one supreme mission of the Church is to be a witness, carrying the Gospel of Christ to the whole creation. It is to be a moving body, never settling comfortably down in any place, but, with the holy restlessness of a heart aflame, to be carrying the message of a crucified Christ to every bit and part of the creation. Whatever there is connected with the Church that cannot be so described is a part of that which some day will compel the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit, the

Church's life.

That witness, be it keenly marked, is to be first of all, in every place and at every time, first of all to the Jew. Because the Jew is God's first messenger to the nation, and is to be the last great messenger. The great blessing to the world will be through the Jew. And the chief object ever in mind in this worldwide witnessing of the Church is to bring Christ back to the earth that He may set up His Kingdom. This is the great purpose of the Church's existence since its Pentecost birthday. Only as it is true to that is it true to Him who died, and who is surely coming back.

Our personal attitude toward our Lord's coming is continually spoken of, and emphasized, throughout the Book. We are not to be concerned with counting dates, nor figuring out probable times. Our one concern is to witness with our lives to Jesus Christ. We are to be watching and waiting for His return, and to be doing His will while watching and waiting.

Watching practically means that we live so that when He comes He will be pleased that, through His wondrous grace so freely given, we have been faithful; maybe not skilled nor reckoned successful, but faithful. And this faithfulness, in heart and purpose and life, to Him, hastens the day of His return.

This attitude of expectancy on our part is an echo. It is an echo of what is in His great heart. Our Lord Jesus is now sitting at the Father's right hand, looking forward with eager expectancy to the day of His return to earth; yet He waits patiently, that men may have the fullest opportunity at this present time. His eye, and the eye of His follower who is in close intelligent touch with Him and His plans, look forward together expectantly to the same day and event. And the expectant heart on earth prays, "Come, Lord Jesus."

4. Some Difficulties and Questions

4. Some Difficulties and Questions

Tiptoe of Expectancy

Tiptoe of Expectancy

A difficulty always shows that somebody is trying to do something. Action brings out the difficulties in the way. A question is an evidence of an awakening or awakened mind. Sleeping persons ask no questions, though often the question, or the way it is asked, tells how much awake, or how little, is the questioner's mind. There is nothing that gives such a good index to one's mental condition as the questions he asks, and the way he asks them. There is nothing commoner than asking questions, but nothing more uncommon or difficult than asking them skilfully and wisely.

As one comes to this Book of God, and studies carefully and prayerfully, his mind begins to bristle with questions. There are two sorts of questions, those implying doubt or criticism; and those seeking for information. When Gabriel told Zacharias of the birth of John, the startled priest practically said, "How can this be?" implying doubt, or rather, sheer unbelief. When Gabriel told Mary in Nazareth of God's plan for her, she practically said, "How shall this be?" asking for the method. It was a woman's natural question seeking more light as to how the thing would be done. [Note: Luke 1:18-20, Luke 1:34-36.] We want to be careful that our questions are always made, with an open mind, for information, never as expressing our doubt, or criticism, or rejection of what is said, when it concerns God's love or God's revelation.

And we should remember that our questions will never all be answered, at least not before our Lord returns. As quickly as a question is answered to our satisfaction a half dozen more take its place. And that process goes on endlessly. The questions will never all be answered. Questions are simply sign-boards on the road, marking our pathway up into the light. Some questions are best kept lying on the table for more light. Some day the gleam of light will come, leading the way out of every bit of bewildering thicket or woods. An honest question is a knock at the door for entrance into light. And it will always be true that "to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But one must learn persistence in knocking, and not go away simply because his knuckles get sore.

Now there is one question which has been a sore difficulty to many of us regarding our Lord Jesus' return. Some knuckles have become both sore and then hard through much knocking at this door. Yet the door opens. There is an answer. And it is full of soft light for one's heart. The question is this: How can the Book speak of the Coming being "near," when it is now nineteen centuries since the word was spoken?

The whole impression made by our run through the New Testament is that of eager expectancy. These men speaking and writing seem to be teetering upon the tiptoe of expectancy, and wanting us to be the same. Yet that was centuries ago. How can you keep on tiptoe that long, even supposing you were to live so long? Paul's letters are a-thrill with an expectancy which stays him and his followers up in the midst of sore suffering. Was he unduly swayed in his enthusiasm on this point? Some have thought so. Yet the Holy Spirit, who, without any doubt, was dominating Paul as he wrote, the Holy Spirit knew, of course.

In the beginning of the Patmos Revelation our Lord says, "The things which must shortly come to pass." [Note: Revelation 1:1.] At the very end of it He says three times, "I come quickly." [Note: Revelation 22:7, Revelation 22:12, Revelation 22:20.] And midway a voice comes breaking abruptly in between the sentences, "Behold, I come." [Note: Revelation 16:15.] And you almost look up thinking to see some one. Our Lord Jesus is speaking from the glory-side here, and of course He knew that these centuries would run out before He did come. How do you explain it? It seems an unanswerable puzzle.

Some kind friends have tried to relieve the tension by telling us that a thousand years is as one day to the Lord, and two thousand years would be only two days. But the man in earnest feels that this is only playing with an honest question. A thousand years is not as one day to us. And this old message is for us. The Bible is a human book, put in human language, and into the human way of thinking, so that we humans can understand what God is trying to tell us.

Well, there is an answer to this question. It's a simple answer. Yet it is one that goes into one's heart, and makes it hush a bit, and then beat faster, and then send up a quick, yearning prayer. It was our Lord's purpose to return "quickly," and that these things "should shortly come to pass," in the plainest meaning which ordinary men see in these words. It was the burning desire of His heart that it should be so. If He could have had His way without hindrance, they would have come to pass, and He have returned long since. It was a possible thing that those early generations would have witnessed His return. It has always been a possible thing in every generation since, that these things would occur in that generation.

The Patience of God

The Patience of God

But there has been a hindrance to the working out of God's plan. That hindrance, sad to say, has been in our Lord's followers. They have failed to do the part assigned to them. We must remember that God's plan for men and the earth is always dependent upon human cooperation. God never coerces any man. He never crowds a thing through by sheer force. That is man's way, but not God's. Everything with God is through the sweet, glad consent and cooperation of the human will. His reign is one of unflinching love.

And He always touches men through men. There is a light that lighteth directly every man that cometh into the world. But through sin it has become a sadly bedimmed and mixed light, and so He has graciously been sending more light. When He would give fuller light He always sends some messenger. When He would win man back home to Himself, He Himself came as a man. God's pathway to a human heart is always a human pathway. If there be exceptions, they are so rare as to emphasize the rule. This is the natural law of our human life. And God always works along the pathways He has made.

Our Lord Jesus was acting strictly on our behalf when He came down here, and lived His life of perfect obedience, and then died His death of suffering, and rose in power. He was, in all this, fighting our foe, doing what we had failed to do. He conquered our enemy on our behalf. He was acting as a substitute for us, acting on our behalf throughout. Then He gave us His power and His victory as our own, through which to have victory at every step in the battle with our enemy. Then—then He bade us as His followers to go out to the whole creation and preach this wonderful deliverance and victory through His blood. We are each of us to be His new pathway for this blessed truth out to all the world.

Such witnessing and preaching to all men, fully done as He planned, would have brought two results. It always does bring two results. It wins human hearts, and it arouses the evil one. If it had been persistently done, those two things would have quickly reached the climax which brings the end. The whole body of believers would have been taken out from among all the peoples of the earth,—the purpose of this time of Church witnessing. And that would have meant the coming up to its final, awful head of the terrible power of evil. Good always arouses evil. That double climax has always been an impending possibility in every generation of men since our Bible was closed.

With utmost patience, quite beyond our conception of what "patience" means, God has waited. The long delay spells out the infinite patience and longsuffering [Note: 2 Peter 3:9.] of God. Patience is love at its best. The group of events which gathers about the coming of our Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit withdrawn from His Church, the awful reign of lawlessness and so on, are no part of God's own plan. It is simply a faithful revealing to us of what He plainly foresees will work out of the utter freedom of choice and action with which every man is endowed. God never interferes for a moment by so much as a hair's breadth with man's full freedom of choice. This

explains the long delay. This delay tells of the marvellous, inconceivable patience of God.

There is an instructive living picture of this in the Israelites' journey out of Egypt into Canaan. They expected to go in at once as rapidly as they could get there; God planned that they should do so. Yet they did not; the plan was broken; the entrance into Canaan was delayed; and the reason is most significant, because of their failure to believe and obey. Even after they expressed a willingness to go in, the keeping of them forty years in the desert was not an arbitrary punishment by God. They lacked the spirit of faith through which God must work in giving them victory over the inhabitants.

But there will come a time when there shall be delay no longer. The fullest opportunity will have been given to man, and to the Church. The patient waiting of God will have reached its maturity. The course of events on the earth, and in the Church, will mark that end. Then will come the fulfilment of the great love-purpose of God. Some day our Lord Jesus, up yonder at the Father's right hand, will quietly rise up, and begin the work of dispossessing evil, and taking possession of the earth. God's patience will have come to its full perfection. God's purpose will tarry no longer. This is a very searching bit of truth. It should send us to our knees in the inner chamber to review motives and life and possessions, and ask,—"Does it all spell out the passion for Him, and His purpose, and His return? Is everything His for the taking of His blessed Gospel to all men?"

What Watching Means

What Watching Means

Another question that asks itself a good many times is this: How can you be watching expectantly when you know it has been so long? We are continually urged in the Bible to "watch," but how can we? The very fact that so much time—centuries—has gone by, and that there were those who were eagerly expectant in Paul's day, and yet were disappointed,—this seems to make it difficult to be really expectant in one's heart. I remember a dear old retired clergyman, in a Bible class where the subject was up, asking earnestly, "How can you be watching and expecting for a thousand years?"

Well, there are some simple things that can be noted that help toward answering this question. The Coming might have occurred in any generation since our Lord went away. The expectation of every one in any generation whose heart burned with this hope was well founded. It was a possible thing that the expectation would have been satisfied. It has always been a possible thing that every expectant heart might have seen the lighting of the skies above the sun's shining. Another thing for us people living in this generation to keep warm in our hearts is, that it is certainly nearer now than ever before. Those two thousand years—nearly—that have gone by without the expectancy being satisfied, make it emphatic that it is nearer than ever, and likelier than ever to occur in our generation.

Still another thing to mark keenly is this; every expectant heart increases the probability of the blessed hope being realized in our generation. Every one who is being true in life to our absent Lord, every one who rings true in the foggy atmosphere of compromise and doubt and worldliness, with no hint of a flatted note in the tone of the bell, and does it lovingly, every such one is hastening the day, no matter how hidden away the corner in which he lived. And if a bit of light about the Coming has sifted in, and with the life being lived goes up a bit of definite praying, "Thy Kingdom come," "Lord Jesus, come quickly," that adds to the volume of spirit-magnetism that draws nearer the day, and the Man.

Then it helps to note just what "watch" means. It does not mean counting dates. It does not mean standing gazing up into the sky. The disciples quickly quit that when the two men spoke to them. Yet there may be many a glance up toward the shining sun and the vaulted blue, as you go about your daily task, thinking how wondrous it will be when some fleecy white cloud like that one yonder does bring Him. But "watching" means being ready, ready to meet Him. It means that you are living your life, and going your rounds, in the way you would be glad to be doing when He does come.

In our Lord's parable about the faithful and wise steward, [Note: Luke 12:41-44.] watching means doing the task assigned, having everything in the shape you would like to have it when our Lord comes, and the shape He would like to have it. Watching means obeying; it means doing His sweet will with all your heart. It means doing it to please Him who is coming. And all the while the

task is sweetened and eased by the warm and warming feeling within,—“He is coming! maybe I shall see Him when He does.”

And one more answer may be added,—Jesus Himself puts in the heart a longing for Himself. There may be very little instruction in, or knowledge of, His Word. But where the heart is in simple warm touch, kept warm and made warmer by brooding times over the Word, and by being alone with Him, there comes a yearning for Himself, that can be satisfied only by Himself, and will be fully satisfied only when we see Him.

When He Will Come

When He Will Come

There is another question of great interest, and of practical help, too. It is this: What determines the time of our Lord's return? We are so accustomed to thinking of events being fixed by fixed dates, that it seems very difficult to get hold of the fact that this event is not fixed by a date. There has been quite a good deal of studying of dates, and of trying to fix a probable date at which He may come. And this sort of thing continues, undiscouraged by the long list of wrong dates. It is perfectly natural that there should be a curiosity to know. And yet that curiosity should be reverently suppressed. If some one does fix a day, there is one thing of which we can be sure;—it won't be that date, "for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh." [Note: Luke 12:40.]

We want to get rid of the idea that there is a date fixed by our Lord for His coming. Without doubt God knows the exact time when it will happen. But the thing for us to mark is that it will not occur because a certain fixed date has arrived. That is the way we adjust all our human affairs, fixing dates, and then doing the things on those dates, unless it prove impossible. This is not the way here. And the more clearly this is fixed in our minds the better we shall understand God's plannings. The time of the Coming is fixed as the harvest is fixed, that is, it will come when things are ripe for it. This is the principle determining the time.

The Book is full of statements of this. A few may be taken as illustrations of many. The third chapter of Joel is taken up with events at the very end,—"Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehosaphat: for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put ye in the sickle; for the harvest or vintage is ripe; come, tread ye; for the wine press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great." [Note: Joel 3:12, Joel 3:13.] This points to the harvest of evil having come to the point of being dead ripe.

At the close of one of the views of the tribulation time in Revelation, [Note: Revelation 14:14-20.] the closing scene represented is a harvest. The One coming in the white cloud has a sharp sickle. An angel calls to him, "Send forth thy sickle and reap; for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is dead ripe." And the same is repeated in the verses following. This sort of language is frequent and familiar in this Book of God.

This is the principle underlying all of God's faithful, patient dealings with men. There will doubtless be a time of ripe harvest reached among God's true people on the earth at that time, and of the whole true Church body, those who have gone before, and those still remaining. But the thing that will immediately determine the time of our Lord's intervention in the affairs of men by coming in person, will be the dead ripeness of evil. Evil will have come to such a pitch as to endanger Christ's followers. For their sakes our Lord intervenes, and makes quick work of the harvest. [Note: Matthew 24:22.] Evil is now under restraint. Some day that restraint will be withdrawn in answer to the tacit prayer of the outer Church. Then evil unloosed, unrestrained, will run riot, a horrible unspeakable riot. When things have come to the full pitch there will be intervention. Then our Lord

will appear, and by His mere appearance put an end to the reign of unrestrained iniquity. The harvest of evil will have reached its reaping time.

Meanwhile every true life lived for God hastens the day, for it hastens the ripeness of the harvest of good. And it likewise hastens the harvest of evil. A true life lived truly for God always rouses and intensifies the opposition. So we may indeed hasten the glad day of His blessed appearing to put an end to evil.

The Decisive Sign

The Decisive Sign

Is there any way by which we may be able to judge that the time is drawing nigh? Is it right to be looking for "signs" of His coming? It certainly is very natural to do so. It's especially so if you are working in some quarter of a city, like the Tenderloin district of New York, or the East End of London, or out in the heart of heathenism, or moving among professing Christian people whose resemblance to out-and-out worldly people seems perfect at every point. You get a bit wearied, perhaps, in your work, or witnessing, and wonder if He won't come soon and end it all. Is it right to be scanning the sky for weather signs? It is true that we are plainly taught that we are not to be figuring out times, [Note: Acts 4.] 6-8.] but are to give our strength to witnessing and watching.

Yet our Lord also tells us that certain things will be signs of His approach being near. [Note: Matthew 24:32-33; Luke 21:28.] The red glowering in the sky tells of the storm coming, and affects one's plans. The night watcher in the sick-room is cheered by the grey or rosy dawn gleaming up the east; at last the night is over; day has come. There are some things which will precede the great event. In the Olivet Talk our Lord spoke of wars, rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, as coming before the tribulation itself. But these have marked every generation since the words were spoken. We may think that some of these signs are intensifying. But it is not possible to prove this, even measurably, by careful comparative statements. These do not make a decisive sign indicating a near approach of the event.

The growth of evil in the world will clearly be a sign. There will be at least two marked characteristics of the tribulation itself, namely combination or organization, and a spirit of lawlessness. The awful leader of that time will clearly be at the head of some colossal, well-compacted organization, and he is the Lawless one. Any marked tendency in the spirit of our time toward these two things would seem to be a natural indication of what will later come. Yet this cannot be taken as decisive in itself of an immediate event, for it is impossible to tell how much time will be needful for these to reach the full maturity of the tribulation time. One can look back in history to times of most remarkable organizations on a colossal scale, such as the empire of Babylon at its height, and the later Roman empire, and to a spirit of lawlessness that seemed rampant. The thing that is near at hand always looks bigger. Distance or detachment is essential to true perspective.

A spirit of formalism and deadness in the outer Church would seem one of the sure indications of the approaching end. Yet it does not take a very good memory to recall the awful conditions of the Church of the generations preceding the great Reformation. And this period is not alone in such characteristics. If Church-deadness were a sure sign by itself, the middle centuries of Europe would seem fully to have satisfied that indication.

Is there, then, any decisive sign by which one may really know that the end is drawing near? There remains yet one significant quarter to which to turn, a most significant quarter. Before the

tribulation begins the Jew is to be back in his own land, the temple is to be rebuilt, and the old routine of daily sacrifices being offered. When that event actually takes place, it will be a decisive indication of the end within well-defined limits of time. And so any movement among the Jews toward nationalization becomes of intensest interest. The recent Zionist movement among the Jews has been the most distinctive, most advanced, move in that direction since the scattering under Titus. It makes one prick up his ears and begin to pray a bit more earnestly.

But—but, it must be remembered that racial movements like this, indeed all movements working out the fulfilment of prophetic foresight, are a good bit like the rising tide upon the seashore. The waters come up, then go back; they come up a little higher, and again go back. It is by this process repeated many times that full tide is reached at last. This is a good thing to remember in thinking of present events as fulfilling prophecy.

The present rising Jew tide may recede. It did recede toward Africa for a while, only to rise again on the Palestine beach, and then seemed to recede toward the plains of Babylon. Some day it will reach flood-tide. The decisive thing will be the actual Jew nationalization again in Jerusalem. Then "look up, and lift up your heads," for the storm is at hand, and beyond it the wondrous calm of His presence in control.

5. A Small Group of Allied Subjects Which Help to a Clearer Understanding of His Plans

5. A Small Group of Allied Subjects Which Help to a Clearer Understanding of His Plans

The Broader Look

The Broader Look

It is intensely interesting, oftentimes, to have a copy, or reproduction, of a small part of some work of art reproduced on a large scale. So you can see better the fine beauty of detail in the workmanship. But the small bit is yet better appreciated when it is looked at as a part of the whole. The little cherub faces in the Sistine Madonna at Dresden are very beautiful in themselves, but have a greatly added beauty when you see that they are looking at the Christ-child and His mother.

In Bible study we have gone almost wholly to the study of small bits. It is a good way, especially for young Christians. It has in it great blessing, making the truths seem very personal. It is really the child method, though never to be laid aside by the most mature. But we have largely lost two things thereby,—the broad grasp of the truth of the Book, and the additional beauty and meaning which the small bit gets when seen in its setting, its relation to the whole swing of truth. This small group of allied subjects is added to help a little in getting, afresh, the broader outlines of God's plan.

The one thing in which the whole heart and thought of God has centred from the first is the whole race. He gave Himself to the whole race in giving His breath in Eden; He gave Himself for the whole race in giving His blood on Calvary. Both things are parts of one act. In giving Himself in Eden there was the tacit giving of Himself further when the need would come. It was the race He was thinking about throughout.

There are four great messengers to the race, to meet its need, and carry through God's great plan. The first great human messenger was a corporate one, a nation, the Hebrew nation. It brought a fresh statement of that message of God which was being lost by man. When it failed, there was already in preparation a second messenger, likewise human and corporate, the Church. Through both of these there came gradually a third messenger,—a Book, with the heart-throb of human life in it; with the direct controlling touch of God, at the first in its writing, continuous in its pages, and in its preservation and translations.

And from the first breath of human life in Eden, on through all the successive links, there has been the great divine Messenger, the Holy Spirit, the messenger of power. It was His presence that became the breath of life at the first, and has so continued with the coming of each new life throughout the earth. He is in every human life from birth to grave, though His great work of redeeming and making holy can be done only through the human choice, and consent, and sweet yielding to His sway. These four great messengers to the race reveal the patience and persistence and tenderness of the Father's great love for all the race.

The Kingdom is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. It comes into view first in connection with Israel, the first messenger. It was to be the medium through which Israel's mission would be performed. Through the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises, that medium of service is to

be used, until the great mission of Israel is accomplished, under its true King, our Lord Jesus. When the Kingdom's work is accomplished it will drop out of view. It is a means to an end, an end of blessing to all the race; not an end in itself.

From first to last, from Eden to the new Jerusalem, the question of God's way of dealing with sin has been one of the sore questions. It has been much misunderstood by godly people, and much misrepresented by unbelievers, especially unbelievers of the ugly, aggressive type. And so a little is added about judgment to reveal the great love of God dominant here as everywhere.

Chapter 55

The Whole Race—The Real Object of All His Tender Love and Planning

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God so Loved the World

God so Loved the World

God so loved the whole race that He gave the only Son He had, to win it back home to Himself. It was the whole race the Father was thinking of when He sent His Son down through that very low doorway in Bethlehem. It was the whole race Jesus came to, and lived for, and died for. He did not come to the Jew merely; He came through the Jew; that was the doorway; He was reaching in after the whole race. He didn't love Palestine more than the rest of the earth. It was simply used as a footing for His human feet, whence He could reach out strong arms, and clinging hands, and warm heart, to get hold of a world.

The Church is not a favourite of God's above all other men. It is simply chosen as His messenger to all men. He needed to use some messenger, and so it has been tenderly loved, and carefully trained and patiently dealt with, that it might be a true, faithful messenger. But it was a race the Master was thinking about in all this. So far as personal salvation is concerned, He did not think of the Jew differently from other men, nor does He think differently of the people of the Church. The only difference is that He thought of the Jew, and thinks of the Church, as means through which all might be reached.

It might be good to speak of some of the common impressions about this, so we can get rid of them. It has been quite commonly taken for granted that, of the ancient peoples, only the Jew had the knowledge of the true God. Without thinking into the matter at all, this is the common impression among most Christian people.

The Jew himself came to feel so, and felt it to the point of despising all others, as today he is despised. Even when the Gospel commenced its softening work, it was still supposed that certainly these poor, ignorant outsiders must become Jews as well as Christians in order to be saved. It took a thrice-repeated vision to awaken Peter up to the real truth. And then he was sharply taken to task by the members of the Jewish Christian Church at Jerusalem for being brotherly with Christian men who had not become Jews also.

It has been the general impression in the Christian Church, that there is no light at all among the non-Christian nations, except what has been taken by the Christian missionary. It is not long since the strongest missionary plea, that stirred most tremendously, was that so many tens or hundreds of thousands of heathen were daily going down into eternal night, implying thereby that all who had not heard of Christ were therefore necessarily lost. And that plea is not yet wholly gone. And the motive of fear and pity mingled has played a big part in response to these appeals.

Now the case with the heathen world is bad enough, desperate in its awful need. But it does not help matters to get the truth twisted out of shape. The non-Christian nations would be in terrible shape indeed, if their only chance of salvation, through the centuries, depended upon the response of the Church to their need of light.

If you think back through the last nineteen centuries, it does not take much thinking to conclude that if only those who have heard of Christ and accepted Him, have been saved, then heaven would be a very small place, and hell the biggest place in the universe. Some of us can remember hearing preaching that made us feel it was so, and wonder why. It is not surprising that the pendulum has swung clear over to the belief which is so common today, in the Church and outside, that there is no such place as hell. It brings the sorest grief to one's heart to remember that there must be a hell, not made by God, but made against His will, by sin and by man's choice. It must break the great heart of God with grief that it is so.

Now a bit of quiet prayerful study of God's Word will help to clear the air of inaccurate impressions. And it will, I think, help tremendously, if we yield to its tug upon our hearts, to make us more concerned than ever to take the light of the Gospel of Christ to all men.

The Light of God Inside and Outside

The Light of God Inside and Outside

God dealt directly with all men at the first. They had the light of His own direct touch. For two thousand years, this direct touch was the one and only means of communication used. God revealed Himself, in all His tender love and power, directly to all men. Eden serves as a picture of God coming into closest personal touch with men. Blessed old Enoch, who walked habitually with God, had no light that his generation did not have, or could not have had, by using what they had. They might all have been Enochs, so far as the light available from God was concerned. A thoughtful reading of these early Genesis chapters makes it clear that this was just as true of faithful, steadfast Noah.

If you think into the meaning of the Flood, you find it spells out the abundant light those people had. For God is love. And God acting in judgment always means that He is so acting as a very last resort. It always means light, pleading patience, and then more patience on His part, and continued incorrigible resistance to light and love on man's part. That's one invariable principle in judgment. The mere fact of a flood as judgment tells the man who knows God that there was first light and abundance of it, and great patience in waiting. Melchizedek's brief biography in Genesis shows how abundant was the direct light in his day. Sodom and the judgment on Egypt spell out the same truth as the Flood, These all come within the two thousand years before Israel became the light-holder for the nations.

That direct touch of God's own presence did not decrease with the choosing of Israel as His special messenger nation. The touch of God's own hand is upon every life born into the world, in the city slums of New York and Chicago and London, in African jungle, Indian and Chinese village, and South Sea island, and everywhere else. He has never left His world. His soft, warm breath is over it constantly, His brooding presence never absent. Paul reminds the Athenians, that they and he were alike in this, that "in Him we live and move and have our being." [Note: Acts 17:26-28.] It was as true of the Athenian listening as of Paul speaking. John tells us plainly that every man is lighted directly by the true light. [Note: John 1:9.]

One reading that wondrous One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Psalm, [Note: Psalms 139:1-16.] might think that it certainly is true because it is speaking of David, the man after God's own heart. "Thou... art acquainted with all my ways... Thou hast pressed in to be near me behind and before, and laid thy warm hand down over me." But the same thought that breathes through these first sixteen verses is in the message to the King of Babylon, "the God in whose Hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways." [Note: Daniel 5:23.] The difference is not in God, but in the man; one recognizing and appreciating and opening for more, the other utterly ignoring.

When God sent Cornelius to Peter He had been getting Peter ready for Cornelius. The Holy Spirit was guiding Peter in the very language he used to Cornelius and the little company gathered,—"In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." [Note: Acts

10:35.] That meant, by simple inference, that in every nation there was enough known of God to lead to a reverent heart and a clean consistent life.

In his masterly summary of the Gospel, in Romans, Paul puts the same thing as plainly. He is speaking of the simple principle by which all men will be judged, as they appear before God. He says, "To them that by steadfastness in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption (he will give) eternal life." [Note: Romans 2:6-7.] Clearly it is a possible thing for a man anywhere to do this, for it is here given as the principle of judgment, by a God of love and of perfect justice. And it could be possible only by the light coming, at least enough light to make one know about "glory, honour, and incorruption," and to yearn after them, and to have this as the controlling thing in the life.

That wondrous Twenty-second Psalm strikes the same note in a significant way. The first part is all a-quiver with the sobs of intensest suffering; the latter part full of the joy that comes with great victory after great suffering. Speaking of the wondrous Kingdom time to come, it breaks out, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto Jehovah." [Note: Psalms 22:27.] "Remember" is the significant word. They knew; they had forgotten, or not done as they knew. Now, under the gracious Kingdom influences they "remember, and turn unto Jehovah." The word has in it both memory and consciousness of obligation, of what should have been done, and should be done now. In every age, and in every part of the world God has been revealing Himself directly to men. [Note: Romans 1:19-20.]

In addition to this direct dealing of God with men throughout the world, and throughout the ages, there is another source of clear light. The heavens above us are telling, or proclaiming, the glory of God to every child of the race. [Note: Psalms 19:1-6; Psalms 89:5; Psalms 97:6.] Glory is the character of goodness. God's glory is the outshining of Himself, His power, and love, and patience, and purity. [Note: Exodus 33:18-19, with Exodus 34:5-7.] Men's treatment of God has never for one moment affected His tender care for them. The rain and dew and sun come as surely to the vile as to the pure; and are a continual faithful witness of His tender, patient love as well as of His power. [Note: Matthew 5:43-45.] The unfailing return of the seasons, and the faithful answer of the soil to our needs, are a bit of God's witness to men of Himself and His love for them. [Note: Acts 14:17.] And so it has been understood by men in all parts of the earth. The invisible things of God, His Godlike love and power, have been clearly seen, since creation, through the things we see with our outer eyes and experience in our common life. [Note: Romans 1:20 And men have seen and recognized. It is because men have known God that their condemnation will be so great. [Note: Romans 1:32.]

There Is No Other Name

There Is No Other Name

Well, then, if this is so, what about Israel and the Church? What distinctive place have they? What peculiar part do they play? Why have they had so much more light? And the answer is both simple, and full of suggestion. The light that lighteth every man has been awfully dimmed through sin. That is the common way of saying it. The truth would be put more accurately that through wilful sin men's eyes were dulled and confused and almost shut. The light has never shone a whit less. But continual refusal to walk in it dimmed and dulled the eyes, and weakened the will. And this increased and intensified.

There was a twofold need. And to meet that the nation of Israel was chosen; and when it failed and was set aside, the Church was chosen. The first need was that the light be kept among men, in its purity and clearness and fulness; not lost. Israel, and later the Church, became a repository for keeping the light in the midst of the deepening darkness. The second need was that the light be taken, in its purity and clearness and fulness, out to men in the gathering darkness.

But another question has been waiting eagerly a chance to be asked, and asked loudly. If there be this direct light in every man, where do Christ's suffering and blood-shedding come in? Are these multitudes,—the greater part of the race,—which never heard about Christ, are they, can they be, saved without Christ? And the answer brings out all afresh the wonders of redeeming Love, and the sweep of Christ's death.

All of this light is through Christ, and only through Him. Everything the earth has is through Christ. No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten God in the bosom of the Father, He hath always been the Spokesman, the revealer of the Father-God. [Note: John 1:18.] It was He whose breath in Eden gave life to the race. It is He by whom all things pertaining to the life of the earth hold together. [Note: Colossians 1:16, Colossians 1:17.] He is our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer.

It may well be doubted if any of us has yet taken in the immense sweep of the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus on the cross. It availed, by anticipation, for all the multitudes who came, and moved along, and passed out and up and in, to the future life, before the day when He died. It holds off the time of judgment. And it holds in abeyance the fact of judgment for all the earth. Sin left to itself would have long since burned itself out, and all held in its clutches. In the wondrous patience of God there is a stay of proceedings. He is longsuffering, permitting things to go on, because He is not willing that any should perish, but has done, and is doing, His utmost that none may perish. [Note: 2 Peter 3:9.] Our Lord Jesus is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe. [Note: 1 Timothy 4:10.] None can escape the saving power of His blood, in this limited temporary sense, at least for a time. Because on this account the course of judgment is held in abeyance, that men may come to repentance.

And there's something more wondrous yet. It reveals yet more the patience—unspeakable patience—of God. He who died on the cross keeps life creatively in all men. He is their life in this limited sense. In Him was life and in Him is life. [Note: John 1:4.] The blasphemous man who lives in defiance of God, is being kept alive constantly by the gracious power of Him who died. So He gives the man fullest opportunity to accept the sweet light. Not only is the light a gift, coloured blood-red, but the opportunity—lengthened out—of accepting it, is likewise a bit of the gracious gift. In this limited temporary sense, "He is the Saviour of all men." But "specially" is He the Saviour, in the fullest sense that His heart longs to be, of those who humbly, penitently come for cleansing through His blood, and who yield fully to the mastery of His Holy Spirit.

Clearly the passages of Scripture that speak of believing on Christ, with condemnation for those not believing,—these can concern only those who have heard of Christ, and so had the opportunity of believing on Him. It could not be otherwise. God would not condemn a man for what he had never known about, and so could not do. Such a man may be condemned, but not on this ground.

It must be thoughtfully noted that all this has to do with the light these non-Christian peoples have. It concerns only God's part,—His faithfulness to the whole race. The fact of men's sin is not changed one whit thereby, except that it becomes greater, because it is against the light that has come. "Dead in trespasses and sins" is sadly true of the whole race. The terrific arraignment of the first chapter of Romans [Note: Romans 1:18-32.] is true, awfully, sadly, true of all the world, West and East, North and South.

The great difference between non-Christian lands and Christian lands is this,—we in Christian lands have the added floodlight of the Gospel of Christ. And we have the commonly accepted standards of morality that have grown up through that light. These standards compel sin to hide its head, though it is becoming more and more brazen in defying standards. They have no such standards of morality. With them sin is open. That makes a tremendous difference. It gives sin a terrible advantage. And sin never fails to use its advantage. Underneath the surface with us in Christian lands is the same sin, the same in kind, and only restrained from being the same in degree, not by the better morality of the human heart, but only by these outer conventions of society, commonly accepted, and ruling our common life.

There is just one Gospel for all the race. Every one of its notes needs sounding out clearly, and never uncertainly, nor indistinctly. It tells of sin, and its terrible rebellion against a loving, just God, and its inevitable, awful consequences here and eternally; it tells of the desperate evil of the human heart, our utter powerlessness of ourselves unaided to save ourselves; then of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, that cleanseth wholly from all sin; and of the blessed power of the Holy Spirit, that gives victory over every sin. This is the one Gospel alike for Occident and Orient, for Southern hemisphere and for Northern, for heathen land, and Mohammedan, as for those lands favoured with the floodlight.

The Greatest Motive Power

The Greatest Motive Power

Does any one think that this takes away, or makes a whit less, the motive in missionary service? Rather it makes it more intelligent, and so steadier and stronger. But it does immensely more. It adds tremendously to the responsibility of the Christian man. Added light means added responsibility. There is as much responsibility as there is light. This is almost a terrible thing for the light-flooded Church.

Here is a man coming up into the presence of God, out of an African or Indian jungle, where no ray of the light of the Gospel has been carried. In the midst of superstition and prejudice, ignorance and iron-bound tradition, he has lived, yet with a longing in his heart for something, he knew not just what, a yearning upward, and a trying to respond. Here is another man likewise coming up into that same presence, out of the heart of Christendom. He has been reared in the Church and all its privileges; he has even given, what is reckoned liberally, to foreign missions perhaps, but his life has been lived for himself; the great bulk of what money he controls he keeps for himself; he has kept pretty much hand-in-glove with the circles that have ruled his world, he has never permitted the passionate fire of God to sweep his life as a consuming flame. He has lived for himself. The greater part of the stream of his life has turned in.

These two men come up before those eyes of flame. If you must choose, which of the two would you rather be so far as the Judge's decision is concerned? The one had some light, greatly darkened; the other had the floodlight, but shut it out so far as letting it be the controlling thing in his life. Which would you choose to be, if you had to choose?

The man who has given the hearthstone of his heart to the fires kindled and kept hot by the Saviour's own love, doesn't try to figure out that if these people have this light, that this relieves him of the matter. That love is an impelling force. It makes an intense longing that men should know personally this wondrous Lord Jesus. There is a passion that the fuller light of Christ be taken out to them. If they but knew Him, and what He has done, and His burning love, there would come a new impulse toward acceptance of the light, a new peace to those eager for light, and there would be something more yet, a something never found anywhere except in Jesus. That is the power to walk in the light that has come with His coming.

And with this goes the command of our Lord, His last request and command,—“Go ye.” That's quite enough. His Olivet word forever settles the missionary question. To do the thing He wants done, because He wants it done, is the sweetest pleasure, and becomes the ruling passion of one who really knows Him. Then the motive power in this service becomes not fear, but love. The most tremendous motive power known, except one, is fear. Fear actually controls most action. But there's a greater; there's an exception noted in the sentence just repeated; that greater is love. The supreme motive power is love,—His love burning in our hearts. That lavishes out the utmost we have and control. It laughs at sacrifices, even while the jagging knife cuts. That love constrains;

it burns as a sweet fever. It drives, with a joyous compulsion, to the sound of the music of His heart beating rhythmically with one's own.

For two thousand years God dealt directly with the race. For two thousand years more He spake through the Hebrew nation, while still speaking directly. It has been almost as long that the Church has been His spokesman to the race, while the direct touch has never been lost. There will come a time when these two messengers will have completed their work, and be once more merged into the whole race.

In the Revelation of St. John, there is no mention of the Church after chapter three. Israel is mentioned because its mission is not yet accomplished. But at the close both disappear from view, except as a memory. Once again the dwelling-place of God is with men. The new redeemed life of the race is represented under the symbol of a wondrous city. The gates and the foundation stones contain memorials of Israel's, and of the Church's, service in the past. But the whole race is gathered in the presence of Him the light of whose face floods all with glory. His name, that is, His likeness, shines out of their redeemed, purified faces.

Chapter 60

The Hebrew Nation,—The First Messenger-Body, and to Be the Last

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The Hebrew Nation,—The First Messenger-Body, and to Be the Last

Eden is God's picture of His plan for man. He gave Himself that the man might be in His image, of the same spirit; so they had sweet fellowship. They walked and worked and lived together, before the sad break came. The record of the next two thousand years is packed into four or five leaves of the Bible. It is a wondrous story of the patient, infinitely patient, working of God to preserve the race. Left to itself sin would have quickly burned the life of the race quite out. The problem was to fight sin, and yet preserve man and his freedom of action.

Five steps toward the solution of that problem are noted. There is a restraint put upon the man, first. He is turned out of the Eden life. That which is his is kept from him. It must not be tainted by the sin he has allowed into his life. It will be kept for his enjoyment in a future day. Then when the first man born gave vent to his passion of sin he is removed from the others. It was a bit of moral quarantine against contagion. But personal attractiveness blurred moral distinctions, the quarantine was disregarded, and again sin was rampant. [Note: Genesis 6:1-5.]

Then the Flood came. It was a measure of preservation. By removing all, except a seed of good, the race might still be preserved in spite of its sinfulness. Being left alone would mean self-destruction in time. So sin always works. When again sin was heading up, in a great God-ignoring, self-magnifying effort, again a restraint was placed upon man's ability to combine, and he was scattered. [Note: Genesis 11:1-9.]

About two hundred years later an additional step was taken by God. Little by little, but very surely, the light of God, that lighteth every man, was being obscured. Man was shutting his eyes. His hold on light was loosing more and more. The next step was a wondrous one in its wisdom and patience. Special provision was made for keeping the light in its purity and fulness among men. A man is led away from his kinsfolk to a life of utter isolation, living among people but utterly separate from them. This man is wooed away and encouraged by great promises. His seed is builded into a nation.

The rest of the Old Testament is occupied with the story of this national preserver and holder of the light. The Book is not concerned directly with the story of the race, but with the story of the light,—man's efforts to shut it out, God's patience and faithfulness in preserving it, and yet never interfering with man's full freedom of action. The action of the Book from the call of Abraham swings almost wholly, if not wholly, about the Hebrew nation, until its utter failure, in killing its Messiah; after that, it swings about its successor—the Church.

Amidst the Encircling Gloom

Amidst the Encircling Gloom

The making and training of the Hebrew nation was a stupendous task, taking long generations of time, and the infinite patience of God. This is the subject of the first five books. There is given the statement of the light with which they were being entrusted. The books following are concerned wholly with tracing the dimming, and the reviving, of that light. This is the warp into which the whole story is woven. We have often wondered at the use of men so full of failure as were some of the leaders in this national movement. But that use of them does not spell out God's approval, nor even His passing over lightly their evil traits. It spells out His need of men in His great task. These were the best there were of the group that must be used.

The nation reached its greatest extent, and wealth, and national glory, in Solomon. And the same hour revealed its saddest failure in the person of its king. The wisest man by God's gracious gift became in his life the greatest moral fool. Here is revealed afresh the tremendous task to which God had set Himself. The point of greatest gift and opportunity became the point of saddest—up to this time, saddest failure. From that time the going down is steady, with breaks enough to make one see more sharply what a sharp slant down it was.

But as kings failed, prophets came, and amid severest persecution, and with greatest difficulty, held up the light. When the traitor nation lay dismembered in the Babylonian plain, the greatest glory of the light shined out through prophetic torch. The nation's pedigree might be put thus,—a man, tribes, a nation,—yet only in numbers, otherwise an unruly mob; a disciplined nation, ragged remnants of a nation, a Book, an ideal revealed afresh in that Book; such an ideal as could not be found elsewhere, so far had man's fingers loosened their hold on the light.

The nation had failed, yet even in its failure God's wondrous loving wisdom had succeeded in doing measurably what He was aiming at from the first;—the light was preserved in the midst of the gathering gloom. It was not preserved as He had planned. It was not being lived by the nation; so He planned, even as He plans. The greatest light-holder is not a word but a life; not a message, but a message lived.

The Hebrew nation was meant to preserve the light, and give it out to all men; it was meant to walk in the light, and so become in its very life the messenger of light. It was meant to be the doorway through which the Light should come in among men in such a way that they could not fail to understand. Such was God's plan for the Hebrew nation. Its failure reveals anew His matchless wisdom and unailing faithfulness to His purpose, and His race of men. The utmost that seems outwardly to have been gotten, as they were scattered, was an insufferable egotism that they were God's peculiar people. So their dominant spirit revealed the very absence of the likeness to the God whose favourites they supposed themselves to be.

Yet, in the forbearance of God, the witness was borne. Wherever the Jew went, there was found the synagogue, the Book, the witness to the true God, the shining of the Light of the world. And

about these centres, there came to be grouped many drawn out from the surrounding nations by the shining of the clearer light.

The Barred Door

The Barred Door

Then the King came, came to the door He had been making for getting into His world. And,—strange beyond compare!—He finds it shut, and barred, cross-bared, up and down and across, and all grown over with thorny growths, and poison ivy, and deadly nightshade. But He could not be stopped by this. He pushed His way, gently, steadily, in through the door, carrying the cross-bars as He went, terribly torn by the thorns, giving out His life, and wearing to this hour the scars; [Note: Revelation 5:6.] but—but, He came through the door, and reached His race of men anew.

The nation had failed utterly at the critical point. It rejected its King, and so it was rejected by the King. Yet it was a self-rejection. The act of rejection was its own act. And so has followed their long rejection, from the time our Lord was crucified up to this hour. But it is not an utter rejection. God has not utterly cast off His messenger-people, nor forgotten His covenant with His friend Abraham.

God's purposes move steadily onward. The scattered parts of the nation will come together again. At the first it will be in reliance on their own efforts, still leaving God out. The city of Jerusalem will become their recognized capital again, the temple be rebuilt, the old round Of sacrifices begun again. Then will come their most terrible persecution. Then the King comes to them the second time, in their most awful need, as their Saviour.

This time He is recognized; then comes a national regeneration through the Holy Spirit. Again the Jew will be the premier nation of the earth, and Jerusalem the central capital of the world. And then will come the kingdom period of worldwide evangelization. At last, through God's patience, the steadfastness of His purpose, and by His wondrous grace, they will become the messenger-nation again to all the earth. At last their mission is accomplished.

Then the Kingdom having achieved its purpose, the Jew is merged into the race again. And all redeemed men, without distinction of nation or race, are gathered into the wondrous city, lighted by the glory of the King.

Chapter 64

The Church,—God's Messenger to the First, Traitor-Messenger, and to All Men

The Church,—God's Messenger to the First, Traitor-Messenger, and to All Men

New Messenger

New Messenger

"Love never faileth." Men may fail; means may fail; love, never. Patience is love at its best. Difficulties that conquer all other foes are conquered by patience. It waits its opportunity, it bides its time; it uses whatever is at hand to be used, but never force, save love's sweet coercion. It never loses sight of its object, and is never swerved by so much as a half hair-breadth from its object. It never fails to get what it is after. Patience is love at its best in the midst of difficulties. "Love never faileth."

God is love. He never fails, and His purposes never fail. Through the tangled network of proud, stubborn human wills, He patiently works and waits, waits and works, and never fails to accomplish the object, and to bring untold blessing to the owners of the human wills through which He has been working.

The Hebrew nation failed in its greatest crisis and opportunity. The King, walking in the guise of human garb, saw clearly ahead the coming rejection. He would not openly anticipate it. They would have the fullest opportunity up to the last half-moment. But He begins to prepare for their successor. The world would not be left without a Light-holder. So the disciples were chosen, and trained. And so the human corner-stone of the Church was being prepared, before the Jewish structure had quite toppled off its base.

The Church was to be the successor to the mission of the Hebrew nation. It was to be a messenger-body to all the race. Its bond of union was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It was a body of men redeemed by Him, owing life itself to Him. Love for Him, loyalty to Him,—this personal bond to Himself was its bond of union. Its principle of organization was the presence of the Holy Spirit. He in each was the uniting of all together. His presence made the organization. There were outer forms of organization, leaders, agreements, customs, and so on. These were needful, but incidental. He within was the vital principle of organization, holding all together, and relating each part to each other, and to the whole.

Its composition was peculiar. There was no racial, nor national, nor any other such line drawn. They were a body of people taken out from all nations. Hebrew and Gentile, who had before hated each other bitterly, were drawn together on one footing, by the person of the Lord Jesus, and by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Its mission was identical with that of the Hebrew nation. It was to be the witness of God to all the world. It was the light-holder in the gathering gloom. The fingers of the first holder of the torch had paralyzed through stubborn sinful rejection of the light. The torch fell from their grasp. It was picked up, ere it fell, by the new light-holder.

A Threefold Mission

A Threefold Mission

The new witness had a threefold mission. It was always, first of all, to be a witness to the first messenger that had failed. It was through this first messenger that the fullest blessing was yet to come to all the families of the earth. So ran the promise to Abraham. The first witnessing was to be to the traitor-messenger. It was to be through the Jew, finally, that the full witness would be borne out to all. Then the Church's witness was to be to all the race. Into every corner and cranny, every tribe and people and tongue, the message of the crucified Christ was to be carried. But this was not an end in itself. It would be greatly blest in itself and would of itself bring great blessing wherever the witnessing went. But the great purpose of all this was to bring back the Christ Himself. He Himself in person was to reign over men. So only could the full blessing come. So only could the whole plan of God for His darling race of men be carried out. This was the constant object in mind, witnessing to all men in order to the return of the Lord Jesus, and, with Him, the full blessing.

There came to be in many places a self-sus-taining, self-propagating Church, each one a new radiating centre of the light. In more recent times, the long-time failure of the Church has made the task much more difficult, and newer methods have been used, greatest prominence being given to educational work. But the standard of the Church's faithfulness to its Lord would not be good organizations, superb architecture, beautiful ritual, eloquent preaching, classical music, and the like, in some lands; nor the building up of Christian institutions in others,—transplanting the type of Church life of one part of the earth into another part; it would not be the doing of humanitarian work for the needy, blessed as such gracious work is in itself; but, that men were brought face-to-face with the Christ who died. These things would all be blest in so far as they proved to be the best way of witnessing and bringing men personally to Christ. Whatever could not so be described, whatever did not tell of a Christ, whose blood cleanseth from sin, whose power frees from sin, and who is to come back for a yet more blessed ministry, would become fuel for the consuming fire of "the day."

Its witnessing was to be of the same sort as that of the Hebrews was meant to be. Witnessing means knowing, experiencing, telling, being. There must be the direct blessed knowledge, knowledge of the cleansing power of the blood. There needs to be the telling out to others what has been experienced. But the third thing was yet more; it was the chiefest thing. They were to live the message. The life was to tell first, and most, and most convincingly.

A friend told me of a kinsman of his, in a small middle-west community in the United States. In this town lived a lawyer, a scholarly, refined gentleman, who was a confirmed sceptic, lecturing against Christianity with great ability. One evening this gentleman came to the meeting of the officers of the Presbyterian Church, and asked to be received into membership. They were greatly astonished, but courteously concealing their astonishment, asked him the usual questions regarding his faith and experience. He made a full, hearty confession of faith in Christ, which left

no doubt of his utter sincerity and perfect understanding of the essential truths. Then the pastor said, "You must know how astonished we are; would you kindly tell us what has led to this change of conviction?" The gentleman very quietly said, "It was Judge Tate's face." "Judge Tate's face!" they all exclaimed in astonishment; "what do you mean?" Then the simple explanation followed.

Judge Tate, my friend's kinsman, was widely known in the community as a lawyer, and an earnest Christian. The sceptical lawyer had occasion to consult him on a legal matter. "And," he said, "I was struck with a something in his face, which I couldn't comprehend, nor account for; it was a light, or a peace, or an intangible but very real something, I could not tell just what. But it caught me tremendously. I went to see him repeatedly, ostensibly for legal consultation. We never talked about religious things. I studied his face, as I would any bit of evidence, and the conviction became irresistible that the thing that so affected his face was his faith in Christ. I sifted the thing through. There was a fact; it was a new thing to me; I had never run across it in my study of Christian evidences. It convinced me of the truth of Christianity. I wanted to be honest; so I have gladly accepted Christ."

This reveals our Lord's plan of witnessing. We are to be witnesses by what we are, far more than by what we say.

The Church Within the Church

The Church Within the Church

So this new great messenger-body was formed, and sent out. And right well it understood its sweet, sacred task. The Book of Acts tells how the first Church-generations understood, and strove to be true. Good tradition tells how the fires were kept burning during the early centuries, even though the clogging ashes, and faulty draughts, were already a hindrance to the best burning. Then came the alliance with civil power, then the centralizing of Church authority in the city of Rome, then the great division into East and West, then the great Reformation movement, and so up to the present time.

It should be noted that the word "Church" has had two distinct meanings in this connection. It stands for all who are outwardly joined together as the Church. And it stands, in the first principle of the Church organization, for all who are joined to the Lord Jesus by a living faith, and are joined together by the presence of the Holy Spirit. These have been the two meanings from the first. On Pentecost, the Church's birthday, the two were the same. The outer and inner, the visible and invisible, were identical.

A distinction between the two grew up early. Already in Paul's day, he speaks of "wolves" entering in, and warns the Ephesian leaders against these within the Church leading disciples astray. [Note: Acts 20:29-30.] And later, John speaks of those within the Church who lacked the vital thing. [Note: 1 John 2:18, 1 John 2:19.] That distinction has continued up to this hour, and will to the end. In many Church circles it is quite a commonplace thing to speak of "the Church within the Church." The phrase recognizes that there is a body of true, faithful ones within the larger, formal organization, which is not so described.

Has this Church of Christ failed as a messenger-body? And the answer that instinctively comes at once is an emphatic "no." Broadly speaking, the light of the Gospel of Christ is in all parts of the world today. Every bit of Gospel light, every good moral standard of society, which has such enormous influence on common life in the western half of the world, every printed Bible in the hundreds of languages, the thousands of missionaries scattered throughout the world,—all these, and very much more of the same sort, would give an emphatic "no" to the question.

Yet while this is true so far, it is not all of the truth; it needs qualification. A thousand millions of the race, two-thirds of our generation, have not heard the Name of Jesus. The overwhelming majority of those who have come and gone since Christ have never heard. The present generation is witnessing the greatest missionary activity, in bulk, ever known, and the greatest otherwise, for long centuries. But it is noticeable that it is by a small minority of the Church; it is through the utmost exertion. And no small part of the missionary propaganda is directed toward the Church itself, with pleas for support piteous to hear.

And, strange to say, the original objective—the bringing back of Christ—has largely slipped out of view. The most remarkable missionary gatherings are marked by an utter absence of this note. An

attendant at a recent great missionary conference afterwards wrote these lines:

"The King went forth a kingdom to obtain,
With promise to His own to come again;
The long, long years have passed, the years of pain:
And yet He cometh not—
Have we forgot?

"He bade us keep our hearts forever pure,
And, following Him, to suffer and endure.
That we to Him might weary souls allure
And He might tarry not—
Have we forgot?

"He asked us for Himself to wait and long,
To turn our faces from the worldly throng
Upward to Him, to whom our lives belong.
And yet He hasteneth not—
Have we forgot?

"And thus the days pass by; we joy and sing,
We take His gifts—yet little to Him bring,
And speak no word of bringing back the King;
And so He cometh not—
We have forgot." [Note: Henry W.] Frost.]

It is further a remarkable thing that every forward movement in the Church has been by individual initiative, has been frowned upon and fought by the Church, then endured, and then endorsed—sometimes, but still left to individual effort, to prosper or—die. That "no" must be joined by a "yes" before the full truth is gotten at. And the "yes" overbalances the "no." All the witnessing to the truth has come from within the Church, but has been for centuries, in large measure, in spite of the Church. God has kept the light burning through the medium He provided, but the light-holder has not been faithful to its sacred trust.

Heart-Breaking

Heart-Breaking

This is a sad story to be telling. It costs keenest pain to get the words of truth out at the pen-point. The heart pulls the hand back, while the quiet, inner, insistent Voice speaks clearly, and the will holds the hand to its reluctant task. The saddest part is yet to be put down. There will come a time when the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the Church. He is its life, its principle of organization. But He is in large measure ignored. The ignoring amounts to a prayer. That prayer is being heard and answered. The withdrawal from the corporate body known historically as the Church has been going on gradually for a long time. Some sad day it will be complete. A sad day? Yet it will point to the near coming of the King. "When ye see these things... look up, and lift up your heads." [Note: Luke 21:28.] The very darkness cheers. The bursting of the new sunlight follows the night's blackest hour.

A picture of an individual Church from which the Holy Spirit has withdrawn might be sadly instructive. Its membership is large, its seats all engaged, its income assured, its organization perfected. Men of good business judgment manage its affairs, in the same shrewd way that they manage their business affairs. The services are made impressive with eloquence and music and well-appointed classical ritual. Its Sunday-school prides itself on its thorough, "up-to-date" organization and large attendance. It may support some missionaries in the foreign field, for that is the modern thing to do. It contains many true children of God. As a corporate body it merits high praise from the best human standpoint.

But—there is something absent. The Holy Spirit is named in hymn and possibly in prayer and sermon, but He is absent. The crucified Lord, so long practically ignored in the sermons and active life of the Church, has withdrawn His Spirit. It has a name to live, but—! Would to God, the description were overdrawn, or true of only a few! All through this time up to the very last there will be "the Church within the Church," little groups, and faithful lonely ones, scattered everywhere.

There will come a time when the governmental support, which carries the greater part of the whole Church, will be withdrawn. And the Church will be persecuted by the civil governments. This will come at the very last. With our Lord's return the inner Church, the body of believers, will be caught up into His presence. These will be joined with the whole body of redeemed ones from creation's morn. And this body of the redeemed shall reign with Christ, over the earth, during the Kingdom period. They will have fellowship in service with the Jew in evangelizing the whole race. It will be a blessed ministry, with the wondrous liberty and powers of their resurrection bodies. The identity of the Church as a distinct body is thus merged into the whole body of the redeemed.

After the Kingdom period is over, when the wondrous city is lighted with the glory of our Lord's presence, there will be a memorial on the foundation stones, of the Church's service of witnessing. But they will not be thinking of that. Their gaze is centred on the King's shining face.

Chapter 69

The Written Word,—An Oriental Message to Both Orient and Occident

The Written Word,—An Oriental Message to Both Orient and Occident

A Simple Universal Language

A Simple Universal Language

There is still another messenger,—a Book. It came gradually, growing as it came. It came through the other three messengers, the two already named, and the fourth one, yet to be spoken of. It has some great advantages over the two named,—it could go where they could not. It is a good traveller, going great distances, into remote places, and finding entrance into homes and inner secret chambers, and lone hours, where none other could go.

It has proved a better messenger. It has remained steady and true to its mission. It has been immune to moral diseases, to changes of moral atmosphere and climate, which have proved fatal to both of the other messengers. It has gone through fierce fire. But the actual fires could not burn it up. It still survived. It has, more lately, been going through yet subtler fires, but itself remains without the smell of fire upon its pages.

It came to its birth with the birthing of the Hebrew nation. Like every child it gathered up into itself preceding generations, even as that nation did. It grew with the growth of the nation, some of its brightest pages coming out of the deepening shadows of the nation's decline. But it remains true and steady, while the family in which it found its first home went to pieces.

It came into a new increase of life and power with the new Church-messenger, which received it out of the failing hand of the old one, and took it into the new family life. It took on the life of Him whose earthly steps it traces, whose Spirit was the Teacher of the new Church messenger, and who gave to it the final seal of His own last message from out the upper glory. It is a Book like any other book; it is a Book wholly unlike every other; because it is more than a book,—it is a medium of the Holy Spirit's ministry. He is in it. There's a living Voice and Presence in these simple quiet pages.

There's a simple, rare wisdom in the language used in this silent, eloquent Book-messenger. The messenger was sent to all men, so its language must be one that all could understand. I am not thinking of the shape of its characters, and their sounds, but of what is a yet more difficult thing, its way of saying things. There is no more difficult task than to find a way of saying a thing that everybody can understand. One must always try to suit his way of saying things to the group he is talking with. What fits into the polished drawing-room gathering, or the university audience does not suit the slum mission or the street-corner crowd. The truth is the same; the way of saying and illustrating it is as really different as with different national languages.

Now to write a book that will find the mind and heart and conscience, alike of polished courtier, street peddler, university teacher and student, young child, farm labourer,—what a task! And to make its message come home alike to Westerner as to Oriental, to the astute, metaphysical Indian, the picture-speaking Arab and Chinese, as to the matter-of-fact aggressive Britisher and American,—this adds immensely to the task. Yet the Book must do just this if it is to fulfil its mission as a messenger to all men, and to be recognized by all men. What sort of language would

do?

It may help us to appreciate the simple, rare wisdom in this Book's language to refresh our minds on a few points. There are certain differences of language quite familiar. We speak to the young child in the simplest language, using short words and short sentences. And especially we talk to a child in pictures, and talk with hands and face as well as with lips. Something that is a picture to the child's eye is used to convey an idea to its mind. As mature years are reached, this is gradually replaced with what we think of as maturer language, bigger words, longer sentences, fewer pictures, ideas presented abstractly. This has become so much the trained habit that it is much more difficult to speak acceptably in public to children. And when a public speaker with matured thought uses the simplicity of child-language, yet without childish-ness, it always brings a sense of pleasure and refreshment to his hearers. It takes much more study.

There is again a sharp difference between written and spoken language, between book-speech and common talk. The written is more formal, and proper, ruled by exacting rules, the sentences longer, more involved and more polished. The spoken is more free, the sentences shorter, the words crisper, with more fire and snap to them. The book language becomes highly conventionalized by generations of scholarly polishing. It is spoken by the few, even in our day when print is so common. The crowd talks in the shorter, crisper, less conventionalized speech. The written Latin of the middle ages was elaborate and eloquent, and unknown to the masses. The speech of the soldier, the merchant, the crowd on the street or road, was simpler and more pictorial. It was the spoken Latin, pronounced differently in different parts, that grew into French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese in the South of Europe, even as the common barbarian German grew into modern German, Swedish, English, and so on, in the North.

There is still another difference to be noted. The child language and the spoken language being picture languages have more to do with things as they look to the eye, less with how they came to look so; more with results; less, or not at all, with the processes and methods and analysis by which results are reached.

Now the world has divided itself up broadly into East and West, Orient and Occident. Each stands for an utterly distinct type of civilization, temperament, custom, and so on. The difference is so great as to seem without any point of contact. That difference is sharply marked in the way of expressing one's thoughts. The language of the Orient is a picture language; it sees results, not processes. The language of the Western World is less pictorial; it goes more to abstract ideas, and immeasurably more, almost wholly to processes. It dissects, and analyzes methods by which results are reached, and revels in logic. This is typical of the language of the West in contrast with the East, while what has been said of the language of childhood and the common mass remains true.

The Oriental language is not concerned with the analysis or method, but with the result, as given at the moment the picture is taken. The parable is an Eastern mode of teaching, and is at once intelligible to the Easterner. The Westerner commonly will try to hang some teaching on each minor point, and so get the parable tangled and confused. The Oriental grasps at once the one view of the picture, with its one main teaching or meaning.

So the Oriental language, this simpler picture language, is the common speech, not simply of the Orient but of the great mass of humanity. Of course it is adapted to the Orient, but it is adapted as well to the child-primitive peoples of Africa and other undeveloped races; to the children and the great mass of people of the whole world, and of course to the minority of book-trained people of the whole world as well.

And this is the language of this rare, Spirit-breathed Book of God. It can be a messenger to all, for it speaks the language of all. It comes as an open book, in this regard, not only to the Orient, but to the childhood, and the great mass of the people, of the Western World, and of all the world. It talks in the speech of common life, the street corner, the market place, and the social gathering. It speaks to Occident and Orient alike; for the Occidental can understand the language of the Orient, while the Oriental can only rarely, and even then with great difficulty, understand the language of the Occident.

There's still more and deeper here. Symbolical or pictorial language gives principles rather than details. Details change with the change of generations, and are different in different countries. Principles remain the same through all generations, and in all lands. There is extreme difficulty in writing a book that after thousands of years, or even hundreds of years, will not be out of date, and antiquated. Here is one secret, on the human side, of the freshness, most remarkable unparalleled freshness, of this Book. It is as fresh today, it takes hold of heart and mind and imagination today, just the same as when Ezra penned that One-hundred-and-nine-teenth Psalm, with its constant expression of delight over the Book that he had. The pictorial language, held true to itself, is peculiarly adapted to give just such freshness.

Our Western Church-world is full of a westernized system of interpretation of this Eastern Book. Its symbols, parables, and picture teachings have given rise to fanciful interpretation quite foreign to the Book itself. Its pictorial language is often taken with a painful literalness of meaning quite out of touch with the simple genius of picture language. If we would recognize this it would help greatly in reading this great simple Book.

God's Future Plans

God's Future Plans

Now this Oriental Book is intensely Jewish. It leads a man to Christ as a personal Saviour. It has everything of instruction he needs for the building of his Christian character. It does this regardless of his race or place. But its setting and atmosphere are wholly Jewish. The Jew is an Oriental. There is food for all men, everywhere, through all time, but it is served up on Jewish plates. Everything is woven into the Jew warp. The Jew colouring is never out of the pattern being woven. We proud Gentiles have a hard time getting this straight. Maybe we're a bit jealous of the prominence here of the Jew, whom we've commonly—not all of us, but many of us—come to despise so intensely.

The Old Testament is directly concerned wholly with this people. From the twelfth of Genesis to the close of Deuteronomy it is taken up with the making of the nation. The book of Joshua and through to the close of the Chronicles, traces its growth in its homeland, its greatest glory, its decline and captivity; Ezra and Nehemiah trace the return of some of the captives. Esther is a stirring incident among the people in captivity. This covers the historical part.

Certain poetical and literary portions, that grew up during this history, are grouped by themselves;—the Psalms of David's time and earlier and later, the Song of Solomon, with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,—marking three distinct periods in that king's experience; and the patriarchal book of Job, probably belonging to a very early time, with its wonderful study of the problem of suffering.

Then there is the other group of books that grew up during the latter history, the prophetic books. There has come to be a common feeling, that it is impossible to understand these prophetic books, so far as the prophetic part of them is concerned. Portions of them are dearly loved and used. But there's a vague feeling of something mysterious about prophecy. Scholarly folk may possibly fish in these waters, but we common folk seek shallow, safer waters, and look a bit askance here,—that's the common feeling, though not always so expressed. It might help if we dropped that word "prophecy" altogether, only because of that very common feeling, and simply talked about "God's plans." The wise gentle Father has graciously told us a bit about His plans for coming days.

And there's a simple, practical purpose here. He wants us children down here in the shadows, to have something of an understanding, both of His future plans, and of how certain things will work out. It helps greatly to know a bit ahead how things are working out. It steadies our steps when the clouds gather and the weather threatens to be a bit dirty. We know ahead about this squall, and the sun's shining after. It strengthens our faith while travelling through the deep valleys. And it makes our praying more intelligent and steadier when the winds blow so rough. We needn't be so afraid of prophecy. There's a prophetic element in every simple promise of God's Word. For a promise is a prophecy of what He means to do, if we will but work believably with Him.

It's good to remember how these prophetic books grew up. The prophets were preachers. One day the people are going up to the temple in Jerusalem at the appointed time. Yonder's a little knot standing at a corner listening to a man talking earnestly. Some one passing along says curiously, "What's that?" "Oh," some one replies, "it's only Isaiah talking to the people again. I confess I think he is too intense, too much of an enthusiast, a well-meaning man, no doubt, but a bit excitable, I fear." And they pass on to the temple service talking. Isaiah, fresh from the presence of God, is talking in burning words while the crowd listens. By and by he stops, the moving congregation disperses, he slips quietly down to his home, and under the Spirit's holy spell writes down some of what he has been saying. So there grew up the rolls to which his name is attached.

In some such way these prophetic books grew up, in the main, under the Holy Spirit's guidance and control. They are full of the intense fire, the vivid action, the homely colloquialism of just such intercourse, and circumstance. There were two sorts of these prophets, the speaking or preaching prophets of which Elijah and Elisha are the best known, and those who wrote as well as spoke, whose names are preserved for the most part by their writings. It is not so difficult as it seems to get a simple grasp and understanding of the prophetic books. Of course there is work here for the most scholarly, profound minds. But we common ordinary folk can get something of a simple, clear grasp of them, if we go at it simply and habitually and prayerfully. One can make a picture of the time and try to see these men as they talked.

These seventeen small books fall easily into four groups. The first group is of those belonging in the time before the nation was exiled. It was a period, roughly, of about one hundred and fifty years, beginning with the prosperous record-reign of Uzziah, and running up until the nation went to pieces. Isaiah is the principal prophet of this period, and with him are Hosea, Micah, Amos, all of whom may have been personally acquainted; and also Zephaniah and Habakkuk. Then there is the exile group, Jeremiah preaching in the land of Judah, both before and during the siege and the captivity following; and Ezekiel and Daniel bearing their witness among the exiles in the foreign country.

Then there is the group that witnessed during the time of return to Jerusalem. The second Isaiah probably preached to the people as the opportunity came to go back to Jerusalem. [Note: The book of Isaiah naturally divides into two parts, chapters 1-39 and 40-66. The historical allusions of each make it quite clear that the two parts belong in two periods, far apart. One hundred and eighty years intervene between the close of the time stated in Isaiah's first chapter as his period of prophesying, and the beginning of the return from exile into which the second part fits.] But the full inspiration of the second part is in no wise affected by the modesty of this rarely Spirit-swayed man, who withholds his own name, and, after the manner of his time, attaches his writings to those of a well-known man of his nation.] Haggai and Zechariah stirred the returned people up to build the temple. Joel and Malachi witnessed probably a little later in the same period. And then there is the small foreign group,—Obadiah sends a message to Edom, and Jonah and Nahum bear their witness to Nineveh. Now to try and make a mental picture of the time, from the historical books, and then watch these prophets as they preach to the people, helps much to bring these prophetic books home to us.

The Prophetic Key

The Prophetic Key

There is a simple key that will help to unlock these doors to us. We need to use the knee-key, and the child-spirit-key constantly. These are the master-keys that open all doors. There's an individual key, however, to this particular prophetic door. The Book itself provides this key; and the bit of study we have been doing in the chapter, "On our Knees with the Book," puts that key into our hands. The central events connected with our Lord's return open these pages. Broadly, there is a group of six of these events,—(1) a Jew Kingdom, (2) a break in the Kingdom, (3) a Gentile leadership in the earth, and (4) a Church bearing witness during this break, (5) a time of terrible tribulation, (6) a restoration of the Kingdom in the earth in connection with the King's return, during which the Jew is the premier nation and a medium of marvellous blessing to all the nations, while the Church reigns over the earth with the King. This is the full group of events we have found.

Now it must be noted that three of these things are wholly omitted, or almost so, in the Old Testament. The Church is never mentioned. The break in the Kingdom, and the Gentile leadership is hardly included in the outlook, except in Daniel. These come later. As a rule, their coming is not anticipated.

Leaving out these items gives this main key to the prophetic books:—(1) A Jew-Kingdom then existing whose iniquities the preacher-prophet continually points out, (2) some terrible experience of suffering and judgment, (3) the Kingdom in great future glory, with all other nations tributary, and being wondrously blest. It is characteristic that everything is seen from the Jewish standpoint. The long period of history, from the break-up of the nation after Christ's death, until its restoration with His return,—the time we are so familiar with as making up the bulk of all our history books, is quite omitted.

And the reason is plain. It is the story of God's people—the Jew, and God's plan of a Kingdom, that is being told. This long Gentile period is like a great broad valley between two mountain ranges. Looked at from a distance, you see only the two tall ranges of mountains. You are not conscious of the great valley till you come to it. We are down in the valley, and have difficulty in seeing anything else. The Jew prophet is off where he sees only the two great mountain ranges, and not the valley at all.

It becomes a matter of intensest interest to trace the line between the near and the far mountain ranges in these books. Sometimes they seem as one in the prophets' outlook. The phrase, "the day of the Lord," is used to refer to the time of great tribulation and judgment, as well as to the time of glory following. Some phrase is usually used to indicate the second of the mountain range views, such as "the latter-days" in Isaiah; [Note: Isaiah 2:2.] "at that time" in Jeremiah; [Note: Jeremiah 31:1.] "in that day" in Amos; [Note: Amos 9:11.] "afterward" in Joel. [Note: Joel 2:28.] One prophet is more immersed in one of these events, another emphasizes another. Jeremiah is full of the awful condition of sinfulness among the people, but now and then lifts his eyes to the glory

beyond. The second Isaiah is full of the glory coming. Habakkuk is distressed over the wickedness of the nation, and then the wickedness of its coming conqueror, but has a wondrous closing vision of the glory.

One wants to read thoughtfully and broadly and prayerfully, key in hand, and so become skilled in getting each prophet's point of view, and looking through his eyes. This key opens up the rich meaning of many of the Psalms, such as the Second, the One Hundred-and-tenth, the Seventy-second, the Sixty-seventh, and many others. It likewise gives the explanation of those strange passages in some Psalms where the spirit of revenge seems to breathe so strongly. [Note: Psalms 55:15; Psalms 59; Psalms 69:22-28; Psalms 109; Psalms 139:19-22.] In the tribulation period the issue between right and wrong, between God and Satan, will be so sharply drawn as never before. Compromise of any sort is utterly out of the question. These Psalms express the recoil of God's people from the intensest form which outright hatred to God has ever openly taken. These Psalms doubtless had a local original meaning in circumstances where such conditions existed. They are prophetic; they will be found to fit in exactly to the awful conditions of the tribulation time.

It will be found that this full key, with its six wards, unlocks many passages in the New Testament. Look a moment at a few. The talk to the disciples in Matthew ten follows the old prophetic line. It is a bit of instruction to the seed-Church regarding its witnessing to the Jew. From verse five to the close of verse fifteen, has to do with the particular errand on hand at that time. Then the eye of our Lord looks beyond the long Gentile gap, and sees them as the Church witnessing again to the Jewish nation, as well as to the surrounding Gentiles, and says, "ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come," and then goes on to speak of the tribulation experiences coming at that time.

The Church is to be the administrative part of the Kingdom, from its position above the earth, ruling with Christ over the nation of Israel, and through Israel controlling the affairs of the earth. This gives the key to the binding and loosing passages in Matthew; [Note: Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; Matthew 19:28.] and to others, such as Luke, chapter twenty-two, verse thirty; and I Corinthians, chapter six, verse two.

These are, however, only a few of the parts and passages which yield fresh meaning and beauty under the light of this candle. Here is the master-key to God's plans through past and coming ages, and so the key to the Book unfolding those plans. And the great purpose of the true life is to find and fit into God's plans.

Chapter 73

The Holy Spirit,—A Brief Biography of His Entire Earth Mission

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Five Brief Chapters

Five Brief Chapters

He is the Messenger, the great Messenger, the Messenger of power. These others are human messengers which the divine Messenger used, and uses. Does a hesitancy come at the thought of calling the Holy Spirit a messenger merely? He is God Himself! Shall we call Him a Messenger? Well, the ambassadors of the nations to each other are messengers; they are from among the choicest men, and are clothed with full power to speak for the whole nation. The king of a nation becomes, at times, the messenger of his people in visiting another country. Even so, in this higher realm, God Himself, the Holy Spirit, comes as a Messenger to earth. These others are His special messengers for special purposes; He Himself is the Messenger to earth, using these others on His errands, while ever at work Himself.

There's a simple practical understanding of the trinity which we may miss in attempts at profound explanation. The oneness of the three in God is the oneness of love. The love is so real and full that they think and act in all things as one. We know that perfect love among us humans requires three for its full expression. Where love has its own free way, there is a deepening and enriching of the love between father and mother, through the new love drawn out by the babe. The affection between two is immensely affected by a third one drawing out to himself the love equally of the two. These human experiences are bits of the likeness of God in man. In the Master's Thursday night talk in the upper room it is striking how He speaks of the Father and the Spirit and Himself interchangeably. What is said of one is also true of the others. The Spirit's coming is His own coming, and includes the Father's presence as well. [Note: John 14:16-23.] They act together, so that the act of each is as the act of all three. Yet there is a plan to all their love-work for us men, as well as rhythm of action in the plan. The Son carries out the will of the Father, both in creation and in the continuation of life, and He does it through the Spirit. In everything the Holy Spirit is the one who actually does what has been agreed upon. He is the executive on earth of the divine will.

Is there a misty impression among some of us that the Holy Spirit first came to dwell in men at Pentecost? It seems so sometimes. There is a distinctive meaning to the tremendous event of Pentecost, as we shall see in a little. But it will help us to understand the Holy Spirit better, and reverence Him more, if we can get a simple biography of His whole earth mission. It can be put into five brief chapters.

There is the creation chapter. Creation was the direct work of His own hand. [Note: Job 26:13.] It was He that "brooded tremulous with love" over the waste of waters, [Note: Genesis 1:2.] and gave of His own breath to be man's life. [Note: Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7.] And it is by His own direct continuous touch that the life of the earth is sustained. The faithful return of sun and rain and dew, the answer of the soil to our needs, the life in beast and bird and in man everywhere, are all through His continuous touch, and are evidence of the Father's unending love. This has been the continuous thing from creation's morn up to this hour.

Seventeen centuries so intensified wickedness that the Flood became necessary as a measure of preserving the life of the race. The language used of the Spirit in this connection is instructive and significant. "Jehovah said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with (or "abide in") man forever,... yet shall his days be an hundred and twenty years.'" [Note: Genesis 6:3.] Clearly this is speaking of the whole race, as such, then on the earth. It would seem to point to the Spirit's abiding in the race corporately up to the Flood, in addition to His dealing with each man individually. It would seem to point further to His withdrawal from the race corporately; He did not withdraw from all men individually; He still remained as the life of those in the ark. We shall run across this thing of His dwelling in a body of men corporately twice again.

Then there is the Hebrew chapter. The Hebrew people came to national consciousness, and national action, with the exodus from Egypt. The Holy Spirit came to them as a nation, corporately, at this time. In common with all men on the earth, they had known His touch individually in sustaining their life, before this. The coming of the Holy Spirit was to them as a nation. His presence was most strikingly apparent in the Pillar of Cloud and Fire, ever present in their midst. That presence was again signally revealed when the Tabernacle was reared, [Note: Exodus 40:34.] and again, long after, when the temple was finished. [Note: 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14.]

Then the Holy Spirit withdrew from the nation as a nation. There are numerous passages, that do not mention the Holy Spirit which yet reveal this fact of a national withdrawal. There is a passage in Isaiah, where the Spirit is named, which will serve as an index to the whole group of similar passages where He is not named. [Note: Isaiah 63:10-14.] Verse eleven would better read, "then they remembered . . . where is He that brought us up out of the sea . . . that put His Holy Spirit in the midst of us. . . ." and so on through to the end of verse fourteen.] It is the people speaking regretfully of former experiences, He still remained in the individuals of the nation, sustaining life and speaking as the inner voice of conscience, as with all men; He endued such leaders as Ezekiel and Daniel, and without doubt, many many others in humble walks, who kept in touch. But He had withdrawn from the nation as a corporate nation. This is revealed afresh terribly when the nation's leaders called the Holy Spirit a devil! [Note: Matthew 12:24-32, and parallels.] And yet more terribly when they crucified their King; and yet again, when they stoned Stephen, the embodiment of the Holy Spirit.

Then comes the marvellous Jesus chapter in the biography of the Holy Spirit. That wondrous crucified King was in His human life subject to the Holy Spirit. The marvels of the Holy Spirit's power in personal life were wondrously revealed in Jesus. It was by His direct creative touch that the pure, gentle Hebrew maid of Nazareth conceived, and became the human mother of Him who was her divine Lord. And from birth on, through the Nazareth life, especially for the Kingly ministry, on to the terrible end when He "offered Himself," our Lord was under the dominance of the Holy Spirit.

How wondrous to us men is the sweet rhythm of action between these two! From creation on the Holy Spirit was acting constantly under the control and direction of the Jehovah-Son of God. From the time of His human birth on to the end, the Son of God in His human life was completely under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit. And then from the moment that Jesus returned to the upper glory, on through our time, the Holy Spirit has been under the control and direction of the

glorified Jesus. This is the sweet rhythm of action that was meant to mark us followers in our service together for our absent Lord.

Then comes the Church chapter. Pentecost was the birthday of the Church. Even as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary in Nazareth and Jesus was born, so He overshadowed the group of men and women in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and the new messenger, the Church, was born.

The Significance of Pentecost

The Significance of Pentecost

What is the distinctive significance of Pentecost? What is the difference between the Holy Spirit's work before Pentecost and after? If we note His work before Pentecost it will help to understand His work after. He was the principle of life in all creation,—the solar system, the vegetable and animal creation; and He was in every man as present life, and as the constant inner voice of God. This applies to all men. And this of course continues; there is no change here. He became a new spiritual life in every man anywhere who responded to His wooing presence.

This would include men outside of Israel, such as Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Jethro; [Note: Exodus 18.]Hebrews such as David and Ezra, Daniel, and the whole group of men, who reveal their inner heart experiences in the writings they have left us. The Psalms give a flood of light here. The experiences revealed there—hatred of sin, deep penitence for sin, longing for purity, power over sin, love for the Word of God, and for prayer, a passion to win men to God,—these we recognize as the gracious work of an indwelling Holy Spirit. These writers were the leaders. Their experience tells us of the humble ones hidden away from public note who had similar experiences with their leaders. All this is before Pentecost.

What then is the distinctive significance of the great Pentecostal day? Well, first of all, it was the most direct evidence that Jesus was glorified at the Father's right hand. The Jesus, who was denounced as demon-possessed, rejected, spit upon, nailed to a cross by the nation of Israel, was in glory again, in the bosom of the Father. This wondrous outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the act of this glorified Jesus. To the reprobate traitor Jew nation, to all the world, to the inner heart of every one who has opened to the Spirit's sweet sway, Pentecost says in loudest voice,—"Jesus is now glorified, sitting at the right hand of the Father on the throne of the universe." While men on earth are squabbling over His human birth, His deity or not, the meaning of His cross, He is looking down on us, from the upper glory, waiting for the moment when again He shall come out of the glory down to earth. That is one great meaning of Pentecost.

Then it spells out the victory of our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is peculiarly the Spirit of the victorious Jesus. Jesus is Victor. The great victory has actually been won. Satan has been met and overwhelmingly defeated; He is a vanquished foe. Sin has been worsted to death. The sin score has been forever settled. Sin's worst, and God's best, hate and purity's love, fought things out. Calvary was the great battlefield. Jesus took on Himself our humanity, met sin, met Satan's worst, and won the victory. Jesus is Victor. The Holy Spirit is a victorious Spirit. He is the Spirit of the victorious Jesus. All the eager anticipations of human hearts for four millenniums are now an accomplished fact. The Holy Spirit acts as Victor. We have in the Church, and in our hearts, the victor Spirit. Oh! if He but had His way and sway in both heart and Church.

And Pentecost means the flood light of noon after the dim light of early morn. We know so much more of the light than our brothers of earlier times. They walked in the dusk, we in the noon tide.

We have come into the maturity of manhood, they were as minor children. We can read more distinctly our title papers; they had the blessing but could not read the title papers so clearly as we. The Holy Spirit is always the executive of God. From creation to Calvary He did perfectly on the earth what had been agreed upon in heaven's councils. On Calvary something more was done,—a tremendous something more. He does in us what has been done for us. All the anticipations of former times have become realizations.

And there is still another most significant meaning to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He came down upon a body of men and women and formed them into a corporate body called the Church. So the Lord Jesus constituted the new messenger-body. It was a corporate act. The Church was made by the incoming of the Spirit of the victorious Jesus. It continues true to Him as a Church just in so far as the Holy Spirit sways all its life and worship and activities. The real Church is the company of those in whom He dwells. It is His messenger to all men. This is the purpose of its existence. Through it the Holy Spirit speaks to the world of Jesus;—of men's sin in crucifying and rejecting Him, of the perfect righteousness of the absent Jesus, of the judgment already passed upon the prince of this world, who is so generally worshipped, either openly or tacitly. [Note: John 16:8-11.]

The future chapter gathers up three items more in this earth-biography of the Holy Spirit,—future items. He Himself reveals to us that there will come a time when the conditions in the outer Church are such that He will withdraw from it corporately. It will be His third withdrawal from a corporate body. It will be for the same reason as the two previous withdrawals. It is a heartbreaking bit of truth. And yet not nearly as heartbreaking to us as to Him. The withdrawal will not be from individual men; it was not before; it will not be this time. In His faithfulness He continues His Creator-relation to all, and His full relation with every one in whose heart He is allowed His sway.

Not long after this third corporate withdrawal, there will be another corporate coming of His blessed presence. He will be poured out upon the Jews again as a nation. And again they will become His messenger to all men. And at some time in connection with this He will be poured out upon "all flesh." The famous Joel passage, quoted by Peter on Pentecost, will then have its full fulfilment. [Note: Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16 and on.] At Pentecost He was poured out upon all sorts of men. That prophecy will have its blessed full fulfilment when He is poured out upon all flesh. The Kingdom time will see the greatest revelation of His power.

Then will be realized the meaning of the old Hebrew Feast of Tabernacles. There were three great annual Hebrew feasts. They were like prophetic feasts of three great future events. The Passover had its fulfilment in the offering up of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Firstfruits had its fulfilment at Pentecost. The Feast of Tabernacles, or harvest-home, will have its wondrous fulfilment in the great Kingdom outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That will indeed be a blessed harvest-home feast-time for all the race.

Chapter 76

The Kingdom, and Worldwide Evangelization,—God's Plan for Winning the Race

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Purpose of the Kingdom

Purpose of the Kingdom

God's own ideal for man was not a kingdom, but a family. Eden was a prophecy in miniature. All the world was to be a garden of Eden. God and man were to live together in sweetest, most intimate fellowship. The family is God's ideal for us; not a kingdom but a family, with its home in a garden, and Himself as Father-mother in the midst; its atmosphere, love; its music the rhythm of our free wills with His. Sweeter music never filled human ear.

Things got so bad outside of God's garden that a messenger-nation to all the others was created. But it was not planned that it should be a kingdom on the common model of the nations. It was to be a God-Kingdom. That is the king, or ruler, was to be God Himself. The wilderness life was an illustration of it. He Himself was present in a form the people could understand, and was guiding and shaping all their life.

But the Hebrews were discontented, and wanted a king "like all the nations." God has always had such difficulty wooing us up to His level. The lure of common custom has tremendous hold upon us all. And with His infinite patience God comes to their level, where no principle is involved. An ordinary kingdom was granted. From this on all the plans and promises glow with the glory of the coming Kingdom. And with matchless wisdom and grace, God's own plan, and His promises to David concerning his royal house, are blended. The coming King is of the line of David, and yet He is the Son of God Himself ruling in the midst of His people. It will be a God-Kingdom on the original model.

But even this Kingdom is not God's original ideal. That was a family, not a Kingdom; the relationship is much more intimate and tender. The Kingdom is not the final thing. It is not an end; it is a means to an end. The plan of the Hebrew nation was that it should be the messenger of light to all the race. The coming Hebrew God-Kingdom is to be a messenger of the Light to all the race. When its work is fully accomplished, and every bit of darkness destroyed, the Kingdom will be turned over to the Father.

Then the first ideal, God's own heart ideal, will be realized. "He shall dwell with" men, as the Father in His family. The two ideals of human life shall be blended into one in the family home. The garden will become a city, but it is a garden-city, all the sweet simplicity and nature-life of the garden, and all the maturity of the city, shall be joined in that wondrous garden-city and city-garden.

This makes clear the purpose of the Kingdom; it is to be a means of worldwide evangelization, and of putting down all opposition. There are two periods of worldwide evangelization in our Lord's planning. The present is the period of world evangelization by the Church. This is the true objective of the Church, and the one main purpose of its existence. This Church evangelizing is preparatory to the Kingdom evangelizing. The witness is now to be borne out to all men, in order to bring in the Kingdom time of world evangelization, under wholly different conditions.

The purpose of the present time in missionary work is not to build up Western institutions on Oriental or other heathen soil; not merely the creating of a native Church, self-supporting and self-propagating; not the permeating of the common fabric of life among non-Christian peoples with Christian civilization ideals; not even in ministering to the bodily needs of men, unspeakably blessed as that is in itself.

These may be methods used by the Church in its wisdom, or may come as powerful but incidental results of the Gospel-witnessing. But the end in view is the carrying to all men, everywhere, of the message of a crucified and risen Christ, as the one means of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. The carrying is to be on the principle of "let him that heareth say 'come.'" The Church on heathen soil is to be first and chief a witnessing Church. In so far as these things named are means of taking Christ to men, and bringing Him living and warm into their personal lives, and sending them out to others beyond, they are indeed blessed. In so far as they do not, they are missing the prime aim, blessed as they may be in themselves. The taking of Christ to men everywhere prepares the way for the Kingdom evangelization.

The Kingdom witnessing and evangelizing will be under vastly different conditions. Then the evil one will be removed from the scene of earth activity. Our Lord Jesus Himself in open glory will be visibly present, and at work among men. The redeemed ones of earth, clothed in resurrection bodies, will be actively at work, with all present limitations gone. There will be the nation of the Jews—Pauls in spirit—with their familiarity with all the earth, their rare linguistic ability, their peculiar adaptation to all sorts of circumstances, their undiscourageable aggressiveness, at work under the guidance and sway of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself shall be poured out upon "all flesh." What vastly different conditions these are that will mark the Kingdom period of worldwide evangelization!

The Gospel days were sample days of the Kingdom. Our Lord was wooing the Jew nation to accept their King by revealing partly what the Kingdom would be like. Healing was common in the Gospel days. In the Church time, it has been a gift for some few who could be trusted with it; and a privilege for those accepting it for themselves by simple faith. It will again be a common thing when the Kingdom comes.

From the time when John the Herald began preaching until our Lord's death the Kingdom suffered violence by those who wanted to use it for their own purposes, and at length men of violence took it—in the person of the King—took it by force. [Note: Matthew 11:12.] Those who wanted to follow the King were obliged to face bitterest opposition. [Note: Luke 16:16.]

This will be all changed when the King is here in glory and power. Our Lord said that there had been no greater man than John the Baptist, but he who was reckoned little in the Kingdom would be greater than he. [Note: Matthew 11:11.] There are three sorts of true greatness, of character, of opportunity in service, and of privileges enjoyed. Clearly the greatness referred to here would not be that of character, but of privileges enjoyed, and of opportunities to serve. The least in the Kingdom will be greater in this regard than the Herald of the Kingdom, who was persecuted, imprisoned, and beheaded. So wondrous will be the Kingdom time in opportunity of service, and in its unparalleled privileges.

The Characteristics of the Kingdom

The Characteristics of the Kingdom

We are told much of the characteristics of the Kingdom time in our Lord's Kingdom parables. There is a group of parables that refer to the national rejection then taking place; [Note: Husbandmen: Matthew 21:33-46 with parallels.] a small group urging the disciples then and now to be wise [Note: Virgins: Matthew 25:1-13. Marriage of King's Son: Matthew 22:1-7. Vineyard: Luke 13:6-9.] and faithful [Note: Talents: Matthew 25:14-30. Two Sons: Matthew 21:28-32.] servants during His absence. Then there is a group of parables, teaching directly about the Kingdom time. Four of these are about the spread of the Kingdom after it has come. It must contend with the different sorts of soil men's hearts present; [Note: Matthew 13:3-9, Matthew 13:18-23.] there will be opposition, gradually though never fully overcome in the Kingdom time; [Note: Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:36-43.] the spread will be by the natural law of gradual growth; [Note: Matthew 13:31-32.] and it will be as an influence at work permeating everywhere. [Note: Matthew 13:33.]

Two of them tell how the blessed Kingdom message will come to men. To some it will be as a treasure stumbled upon, found, though they were not looking for it, and precious above all else. [Note: Matthew 13:44.] To others eagerly seeking for it, it will satisfy all the deepest longings. [Note: Matthew 13:45-46.] Two others tell that rewards in the Kingdom will not be earned as a matter of merit, but bestowed because of the great graciousness of the King; [Note: Matthew 20:1-16.] and that the reward will be the privilege of ministering to others, some more, some less. [Note: Luke 19:11-27.] And one other tells that the great test in the Kingdom will be obedience. [Note: Matthew 22:8-14.] All these parables would convey some personal meaning to those listening, even as they have their personal message to us now. But the first meaning of each is to illustrate the Kingdom time.

The true spirit of the Kingdom stands out in sharpest contrast with the dominant spirit of our day. The Kingdom will belong peculiarly to those who are "poor in spirit." [Note: Matthew 5:3.] All men are poor to the point of beggarly pauperism in everything else, in purity, in character, in life itself. Everything we are, and have, is received from Another. We are all, from throne to slum, beneficiaries dependent on the gracious bounty of Another. If God withdrew His hand for a single moment how we would realize our pauperism! But we are rich in our spirit of self-content and self-assertion.

The Kingdom will belong peculiarly to the man who is poor in his spirit as he is in everything else. The "meek" man, who uses all his strength in yielding to the King,—he will inherit the earth, and take down all the fences, for conditions on earth will be radically changed. [Note: Psalms 37:11; Matthew 5:5.] The penitent man or woman of the street will be received, while the modern pharisee will find the doorway too low for his proud head to enter. [Note: Matthew 21:31.] He who serves others most truly will be given preferment. [Note: Matthew 20:25-28.] Obedience to the King will be the thing most prized. [Note: Matthew 22:11-14.]

The spread of the Kingdom will be gradual in men's heart until it will seem to be universal. But there will be many who are simply carried along by the current of the time, as is always the case. Some will be opposed to the Kingdom, but secretly. Three of the Psalms speaking of the coming Kingdom time say that foreigners and enemies and haters "submit," or "yield feigned obedience." [Note: Psalms 18:44; Psalms 66:3; Psalms 81:15.] This may be taken as one of the index fingers.

Now the one thing that God longs for is our free choice. This is the image of God in which we were made. We are most like God in power in the right to choose freely, and most like Him in character when we choose as He would choose. And so there is to be a final sifting at the end of the Kingdom time. The evil one will be at work again. There will be the fullest opportunity for free choice. [Note: Revelation 20:7-8.]

Then will come the final gathering of men on the earth into the pure presence of God for final adjustment. [Note: Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15.] Then will come the blessed end, when all opposition to God and right shall be put down forever, and the Kingdom shall be turned over to the Father. [Note: 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.]

And then God's own ideal shall be realized. The race will be a family gathered about Himself. They shall see His face; His likeness will be in their faces. The family home will be in a wondrous garden-city. Its light shall be the glory of His presence; its atmosphere, love; its music, the sweet rhythm of their wills with His.

Chapter 79

Judgment,—Love's Surgery; The Tenderness and Awfulness of Our Lord's Fixed Principle in D...

Judgment,—Love's Surgery; The Tenderness and Awfulness of Our Lord's Fixed Principle in Dealing with Sin

The Purpose

The Purpose

Judgment is a sore subject. Teaching about it has swung to both extremes. It is popular today to believe that there is no hell. It has been preached in a most aggressive, ungodly way, and we have all felt the inner recoil against such teaching. I remember hearing Mr. Moody say to a group of Bible Institute students, "Well, whenever you do preach about hell, let it be with tears in your eyes." There is much confusion as to just what the truth is. It's a great relief to have a Book that speaks with authority, and not as do some of the modern scribes. The subject is intimately connected with our Lord's return. So we want to try to gather out what the Book teaches.

Judgment is God's way of dealing with sin. It is not directed against man, but against sin. It is true that man and sin get so desperately mixed up that only divine power can ever get them apart. And when they are not gotten apart, when the man insistently holds on to the sin, then the man is carried down in the judgment upon the sin. Yet the one thing aimed at in judgment is, not the man, but the sin. And yet judgment takes man into account in its action against sin. It comes upon some, at times, not only because of their own action, but for the sake of others. And it should be noted most keenly, that when God has acted in judgment, and when He will again, it is always and only with unutterable pain in His great heart.

There can be no question as to the fact of judgment. That fact is scarred into the earth's surface so deep that centuries have not worn away the scar. The Dead Sea is the great sin-scar in nature. The very earth itself mutely tells of the horrible clutch of sin. The bitterness of those waters tells of a yet more terrible bitterness. The fact of judgment is written plainly in the oldest traditions of the nations. The water mark of the Flood can be found among the oldest nations, as well as the youngest. That fact is woven into the fabric of common life everywhere. For pain is sin's index finger pointing faithfully to the results sure to come wherever there is a break in God's rhythm of life.

There is a purpose in judgment, and it is always a purpose of love. There is a deep, clear purpose in everything that God does. And His love for us, deep and tender, is the fire burning under that purpose. The character of God must be kept ever in mind. The leading trait in His character is expressed, not by the word "purity," nor "righteousness," nor "justice," but by the word "love." Though if we knew the real meaning of "love" we would find it includes these others, and more.

The purpose in judgment is twofold. It is a purpose toward sin, to get rid of it. And God's attitude here is relentlessly uncompromising. No exceptions are ever noted. And there is a purpose toward men. Now regarding the purpose toward men there are four items to note. It is disciplinary. The whole thought is to change the man. It is love working, love for the man. But this is true up to a certain point only. There does come a time when the line is crossed over into the incorrigible stage. A man may, if he will, stick so persistently to his sin that the uncompromising attitude toward it includes him. Yet we shall find even here that it is love that is at work, love for the others

involved.

The purpose is the same as the surgeon's. He thrusts in his keen-edged blade, not to destroy life, but to save it. He is driving hard against the disease. The knife that cuts and hurts is held steady by the kindly purpose in the heart. The little son of a friend of mine had one of his eyes seriously injured. The surgeon urged its removal, in order to save the other eye. But the hope of saving both eyes overruled his judgment. Now both eyes are quite gone. The surgeon was right. Severe treatment would have saved one eye.

The English word "hell," in the New Testament, usually stands for the word "gehenna" underneath. That was the word used for the place outside Jerusalem, where the refuse of the city was burned. Of course the gehenna fires of Jerusalem were for the health of the city, to burn up what would endanger health and life. Judgment is sometimes surgical in its purpose and character.

And it is meant to deter others. It is a kindly, gracious, warning signal to hold others back. It is a well-known fact in military records that the officer who is a stern disciplinarian executes fewer offenders than he who is more lax in his discipline. Apparently the lax man is kinder hearted. Actually the severe man is the kinder friend. The certainty of a just punishment coming deters men from wrong. Fear is actually the strongest motive with most men in regulating conduct.

But the fourth item already noticed should have the emphasis of repetition. Judgment goes past the disciplinary stage. There comes a time, when the man who utterly hardens himself against loving plea and warning, becomes as his sin. The relentlessness toward the sin comes to include the man. Yet the action that finally decides the case is his, not God's. These are the four words to put down under purpose,—disciplinary, surgical, warning, incorrigible stage.

The Process

The Process

The process in judgment is immensely significant and instructive. We must remember that the Oriental language of the Bible gives results rather than processes. It catches the picture at some one stage and so presents it. Yet even so, the process is clearly pointed out in this Book. The process in judgment is by withdrawal. It is not by God doing something, but by His ceasing to do something, and ceasing at the urgent plea of the one who suffers the judgment.

All creation and all life began through the touch of God. He breathed His own life into man. And He did not leave him. "In Him we live and move and have our being," was as true of the heathen Athenian listeners on Mars Hill as of the Christian Hebrew who was preaching it. [Note: Acts 17:28 God has never left His world. All things, are held together by the continual, direct action of our Lord Jesus. [Note: Colossians 1:17.] His very presence in the world, and in man creatively, is a most intense pleading.

Man's defiance and blaspheming and ignoring are likewise a most intense pleading, a pleading to be left alone; so great is man's wilful, foolish ignorance. His very attitude is a shutting of God out, so far as he can. Man's shutting of God out so far as possible always goes before God's withdrawal. There's a bit of light incidentally on prayer here. Prayer is a coming over voluntarily, and more fully, into the atmosphere of God's presence. Every faculty works better in that presence, for it is our native air.

Now judgment, when it comes, is merely God's granting of man's prayer by withdrawal. In his terrible arraignment of man's sin in the beginning of his Romans letter Paul tells us three times that "God gave them up." [Note: Romans 1:24, Romans 1:26, Romans 1:28.] Yet here clearly the withdrawal was only partial at this point. The ultimate had not yet come. The same or similar language is used by Asaph in reviewing Israel's history, [Note: Psalms 78:62.] by Stephen in his sermon before the Jewish Senate, [Note: Acts 7:42.] and by Jesus in His heartbroken farewell to Jerusalem. [Note: Matthew 23:38.] The withdrawal is gradual, very gradual, practically imperceptibly so. In actual completed judgment it becomes complete. Its completion makes the full judgment.

The result of the withdrawal is a hardening of the heart against God. But there are always two hardenings, first by the man in resisting God's gracious pleading; then a harder hardening through God's gradual withdrawal of His grace. The great illustration of this is Pharaoh, to be touched more fully in a few moments. It was in this way that the hindering of God's plan for Israel by the King of Heshbon, was removed, [Note: Deuteronomy 2:30.] and the opposition of the inhabitants of Canaan to Israel overcome. [Note: Joshua 11:20.]

There's the touch of a gentle irony in the words spoken to Isaiah about the fruitless ministry appointed him. "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes," and so on. It sounds as though Isaiah was to make their hearts hard. And he did, but not directly. It

was their continual refusal to hear the message he was continually to give that made dull ears, shut eyes, and slow heart-action. [Note: Isaiah 6:9-10.] The same thing took place with their descendants through Jesus' preaching, [Note: Matthew 13:10-15 with parallels. John 12:39-40.] and through Paul's. [Note: Acts 28:25-28.] It is the method of procedure underlying the treatment of David's enemies. [Note: Psalms 69:23.]

The steps down, in the first hardening by the man himself, are traced by Paul in his Ephesian letter. The hardening of the heart against God leads to ignorance of God, a cutting of one's self off from Him, a darkening of the understanding of Him, a being filled with vain, foolish thoughts about one's self, then hardening one's self past feeling, then giving one's self up to the worst. [Note: Ephesians 4:17-19.] This is the process in judgment. Man's withdrawal from God, so far as he can, is at length—at great length, when God's measureless patience has run its full course, followed by God's withdrawal, very gradual until at length complete. The man's urgent persistent plea is granted.

The Illustrations

The Illustrations

Now we want to turn to the illustrations in the Book. I have tried to make, first, these simple statements of the principles contained in the illustrations. Let us look a little more directly at the illustrations themselves. There are three groups of judgment incidents in the Bible. Certain historical events stand out big,—the Flood, the burning of Sodom, the judgments upon Egypt, and the wholesale destruction of the inhabitants of Caanan. Certain incidents stand out in Israel's history,—Nadab and Abihu consumed by fire, Miriam's leprosy, Korah's company swallowed up by the opening earth, twice a plague among the people; and long years after these, David's three days' pestilence. Then there is a group of personal experiences,—Job, Jacob's dislocated thigh-joint, Ananias, and Herod's terrible death by worms.

There are other incidents that have the element of judgment in, but these seem to be the chief. It is quite impossible, within our limits here, to go into each of these. Each is different from the others, yet the same essential principle lies under each. God is always the same in His unchanging love. The whole sun can be seen reflected in a single drop of water. One's general bodily condition is revealed in a single drop of blood.

Let us look a little at the first group, the outstanding historical events. The Flood was a judgment by water, and was complete, so far as animal life was concerned, over the inhabited earth. Sodom, with its sister cities, was a judgment by fire, and was complete concerning every form of life, within a very restricted area. Egypt was a graduated judgment, both in the means used, and in the degree of suffering; it was partial only; and affected the great political world-power of that time. The destruction of the Canaanites was meant to be general, and was accomplished by means of war, in which, however, the chief weapon was the supernatural power of God, exercised through a people wholly untrained in warfare. Each is preceded by a statement of the awful extreme to which iniquity had gone. In connection with the Flood, with Sodom, and with Canaan, sin had literally run riot. The judgment came at the extreme point of wickedness.

It would seem quite clear, in connection with the Flood, that the chief thing aimed at was the preservation of the race, while the result to those perishing was a logical result of their sin. Sin was burning the race out. Something radical must be done. The careful plans for preserving seed of every sort of animal life reveals the underlying purpose in the event. The actual coming of the vast deluge of water would, of course, be simply through a partial withdrawal of the controlling Hand upon the powers of nature. Those forces were, and are, being held in check constantly by God's act for our sake. A brief partial withdrawal let the waters loose.

The result that came to the crowds—death—would have come inevitably as a logical result of their sin. The Flood merely moved the clock forward a little, and changed the mode. These changes were controlled by a purpose of love toward the race thus preserved. The action was not arbitrary, except in restraining judgment up to this time. It was simply an answer to the tacit pleading that

God would leave them alone. He might have done so long before. In His patience He waits until this time, so prolonging their lives and their opportunity.

The Sodom story is essentially a repetition of all this. The unspeakable sinfulness, carried to the awful degree of attempting to use the divine visitors in their lust, the long-time patience, the gracious sustaining of life in these blasphemous, unclean people, the witness of Lot, then the partial withdrawal of the restraint upon nature.

The Egypt story is given more fully, but is no different in principle. It brings out the intense selfishness and cruelty of the Egyptians. The Israelites had been the benefactors of Egypt, through their kinsman, Joseph, who greatly increased the wealth and prestige of the nation. As the Israelites increased in numbers, the selfish fear of them led to a persecution that included horrible cruelties. Yet there was special grace extended to Pharaoh, which should have changed all this, and led him to right the wrong. God had graciously continued his life and power. [Note: Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17.] The riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering were meant to lead Pharaoh to repentance. [Note: Romans 2:4.]

God had graciously endured, with much longsuffering, this man, who was fitted by his own stubbornness in sin for the destruction that sin always carries in itself. [Note: Romans 9:22.] But he obstinately resisted every such effort of God to win him. Then the crisis came. The tracing of the process is not always an easy task. The direct positive action of God mingles in, as in the wind and the locusts. [Note: Exodus 10:12-19.] Yet careful study reveals that under all these events of judgment the dominant factor was a carefully graduated withdrawal.

The withdrawal was a long-delayed answer to the long-continued pleading-in-action of Pharaoh, to be left alone. He was left alone partially. God did nothing; that was the judgment. He had been doing everything for them despite their protest. Now He does nothing, yet only partly; that was all. This is the very essence of all judgment. So the grievous wrong to Israel of centuries was righted, and so Egypt, and through Egypt the world, was taught anew of God's power and gracious forbearance. [Note: Exodus 7:5; Exodus 14:4, Exodus 14:18.]

There was immensely more grace than judgment in the transaction. The king, his army, and the season's crops, and some of the livestock, were destroyed; and every family knew the great sorrow of its future head dying. All the rest was graciously left, the gift of life to the mass of the people, the land, the unfailing, abundant answer of the soil; and there came a new knowledge of the true God, His power and love. There was overwhelmingly more grace than judgment.

The story of the destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan may seem like a horrible butchery. A surgeon thrusting a knife into a man's vitals, and death actually resulting, may seem like murder. Yet no one who understands, ever thinks of using such a word in either case. The whole purpose is beneficent. When all the knowledge available regarding Canaan is gathered up, the gracious purpose of the divine Surgeon is seen. It is an effort to save the race by removing the horrible cancerous growth threatening its life. God's first thought was directed toward these people, whose sin had gone to such extremes; Israel getting into the land came in as the second consideration. [Note: Deuteronomy 9:5; Deuteronomy 18:12; Leviticus 18:24-25; Leviticus 20:23.]

Such is the story of judgment, told in this Book, by picture and word. It is directed against sin, not man. Its purpose is to change the man, to save the race, to serve as a danger signal, and more, a

sad, sad more. Its process is always by withdrawal, God ceasing to do His kindly work, at man's urgent request. And judgment brings immeasurable grief to the heart of God.

The heartbreaking part of the story is that there does come an ultimate withdrawal. It is heartbreaking to know about, more heartbreaking to talk about, immensely more heartbreaking to Him whose heart broke on Calvary, under the load of sin. Yet the initial act in that ultimate withdrawal is not God's; it is man's.

The Breaking Storm

The Breaking Storm

What determines the time of that ultimate withdrawal? Not a calendar but a condition. When God made the great covenant with lonely Abraham under the stars, He told him that several hundred years would run out before his seed should inherit Canaan, and then gave the dominant reason, "The iniquity of the Amorite (then in Caanan) is not yet full" [Note: Genesis 15:16.] The movement of the Israelites was fitted into another deeper movement, by the eye and hand of God.

It's the fulness of the clouds that determines the time when a storm bursts. When the atmosphere can no longer carry the increasing load of moisture gathering in the clouds, the load is discharged, the storm breaks, the atmospheric conditions readjust themselves. The storms of the Book of Revelation are peculiarly significant. What brings the time of harvest? The ripeness of the grain. The use of the harvest figure in the Scripture is likewise very significant.

It would not seem nearly so distressing if judgment were disciplinary, and surgical, and a danger-signal, and no more. But the Book of God clearly points out more, a terrible more. In the very same breath in which the wonders of the garden-city of God are described a lake of fire is likewise told of. [Note: Revelation 21:1-8.] The incorrigible stage has been reached. God's patience and pleading are persistently fought up to the very last. The unrighteous insist upon remaining unrighteous. [Note: Revelation 22:11.]

God answers the obstinately continued pleading. At last He consents to withdraw, to do nothing. This makes the lake of fire. Sin kindles the fire. Man at last left to himself—God shut out, and going out—that is the worst. Jesus' heartbreaking cry over Jerusalem lays bare the heart of God,—"I would... ye would not." [Note: Matthew 23:37.] Man's utter freedom has never been interfered with by so much as the lifting of a little finger. He is still in the image of God in power of choice, even in this ungodlike use of his free choice. There is an incorrigible minority at the end. Yet wise, tender love is still in control. The incorrigible quarantine ensures the safety of the race. That God is love, pure, just, wise, and tender, will never be so well understood and appreciated by all men as at the last.

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