

Matthew - Commentaries by Ebenezer John Thomas

Bible Treasury: Volume 1, One Predicted Re-Awakening, The

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"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom; &c.

Such is the one predicted re-awakening, and such are the foretold results. The cry ("Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him") shall effect it; and the result shall be the going in of all the wise unto the marriage supper, and the closing of the door of entrance thereunto.

The slumbering church, so called, shall itself be roused from the long slumber of its apostasy, as a whole, only by the cry announcing the bridegroom's immediate approach. There was time but for the trimming of the lamps. There was no oil obtained by the foolish, who had taken none with them at the first. They were all excluded from the marriage supper. The bridegroom "knew them not," and could not admit them into his joyous presence.

Whence, then, the notion of the world's previous conversion? The church itself sleeps until the bridegroom is coming. When once the tarrying of the bridegroom has furnished the "occasion to the flesh" for worldly sloth and self-indulgence, the church, so called, awakes no more until the cry, "The bridegroom cometh," effectually arouses it. Where can there be found the remotest possibility of any intervening thousand years of universal holiness and peace? Do we need further witnesses?

But let us contemplate this great awakening. Did not our hearts burn within us, when we heard, in days gone by, of great revivals, and effusions of the Holy Ghost? Do they not now burn within us, when true tidings of such sort salute our ears? Here is represented to us, then, a grand and veritable revival, or re-awakening—the grand one of the age—the final and decisive one of the dispensation. How is this wonderful prediction overlooked! How is this plain account of the consummation and conclusion of Christendom's apostasy passed over and neglected!

"THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." What may these words, "Kingdom of heaven," be intended to denote? and WHEN shall this kingdom be likened to ten virgins?

The term "Christendom" seems a contraction of the words, "Christ's kingdom"—the precise equivalent to the expression made use of in the parable. The nominally Christian portion of the population of the earth seems clearly that which the parable describes. The world's population, as a whole, enters not into the question here. Those only who "had taken the lamp" are spoken of. None but "virgins"—professed attendants on the Lord's return—are included. The condition and destiny of the earth's inhabitants form the subject of a hundred other scriptures. This scripture treats only of "the kingdom of heaven"; and that not of the kingdom formally established, but merely of its state whilst its sovereign is in banishment there from—rejected out of the earth. There are those who own their rejected and absent sovereign—some in reality, others in profession only. These constitute his kingdom now. But the kingdom formally set up—the kingdom of the thousand years—when, leaving the Father's throne, the Son of man shall ascend his own peculiar one, and glorify his saints together with himself, subduing to himself the nations of the universal earth, this kingdom is a distinct, and certainly a yet future one. This kingdom—the one only entirely real one—must assuredly come after the mixed and slumbering condition of affairs set forth in the parable before us. Before the state that the parable describes, it did not come. During the period therein depicted, it cannot come. In an age beyond the period of this parable, therefore, it will surely yet transpire.

The Christianized portions of the earth, during the present era, are the subject also of the parables of the thirteenth chapter of this gospel. It is not all the population of the earth, which is treated of therein. The whole world's population cannot be included. No millennium will ever arrive in such case. A mixed population is finally disposed of in these parables. The wheat is gathered home to the garner, and the tares are burned in the fire. The net cast into the sea is drawn ashore, only to be found filled with fish, both bad and good. The good only are gathered into vessels. The bad are cast away—"into a furnace of fire, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Not one word here of all the remainder of the fish, which the world's sea contains. Other scriptures treat of those.

These parables, we repeat it, speak of the "kingdom of heaven"—of Christendom only, or the (at the least nominally) Christianized portions of the earth's population. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed," &c. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed," &c. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven," &c. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field," &c. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman," &c. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net," &c. The first of these seven parables of Matt. 13—that of the Sower—also describes the same sphere. The chapter is a course of instruction, of seven-fold perfectness, not regarding the whole world, but such portion thereof only as shall be sown with wheat and tares previously to the end of the present age.

Such is the sphere which is treated of in the parable specially before us. "The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins." It is the virgin, or lamp bearing portion of the people of the earth, whose course is here described. Were it otherwise, and were the whole world included, there could be no millennium of universal knowledge of the Lord. For the foolish virgins doubtless are those who elsewhere as tares, or bad fish, or wicked and slothful servants, are cast into the fire. If then these are so removed from the earth, and the wise virgins, like the wheat, or good fish, or good and faithful servants, are taken up into the presence of their Lord in glory; and if these parties constitute the whole population of the globe, where shall there be found any nucleus or basis for a millennial race? Clearly, in such case, there could be no such element found.

But when shall the great event of this parable transpire “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps,” &c. The division into two chapters of the grand prophetic discourse which comprises this parable is unfortunate. Very much that is connected with a right apprehension of the parable depends upon an enlightened perception of the teaching of the discourse as a whole.

The period alluded to, in the use of the word, “Then” — “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins” — seems that which is immediately connected with the unequalled time of tribulation, rather than with the time of the execution of the foregoing judgment. The earlier portions of the discourse, and specially when the narration of Luke is collated with this of Matthew, seem sufficient to place this beyond dispute.

There should come a day when the nation of Israel, brought to a state of preparation for the reception of their true Messiah, should in sincerity exclaim, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” But until that day they should be favored with no further presentation of himself. “Your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth.” He then “went out, and departed from the temple.” He went therein no more. After two days was the passover, and he was betrayed to be crucified, chapter 26:1, 2. But to the disciples, as he at upon the Mount of Olives, whither he had gone from the temple, he had proceeded to deliver this, his grand prophetic utterance.

There should transpire a period of wars, delusions, disasters, and apostasy. This period should close with a crisis of yet far deeper sorrows. Only an elect remnant of disciples, whom it should not be possible to deceive, and for whose sake those days should be shortened, would be saved. Otherwise no flesh should have been saved; in which case no millennium could have taken place. But those days should be shortened, and a chosen remnant spared. God's purpose should be certainly secured.

Then shall the true Messiah once more present himself to his own nation. Immediately after this unequalled tribulation he shall return in glory. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,” Matt. 24:29-31. This is the period when the judgment of the quick is executed. This is the time referred to, proximately, at the least, in the word with which the parable commences. “THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.” But the precise order of events we seek not to determine now.

I. These “virgins” had previously gone forth. They had taken their lamps. They had assumed the position of expectants and attendants, They had given assent unto the truth that there should be a wedding—that a bridegroom would appear. They had faith; all of them possessed belief, such as it was. This they openly professed, by going forth all of them. Yet with very many this was but the excess of folly. “The foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

The oil denotes the Holy Ghost. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power.” “Ye have an unction from the Holy One.” Anointing ever signified the communication of divine power, whether for official or for private relationships or purposes—the power of the Holy Ghost. In this case, as in others, the oil was needed specially as the power and source of joy—well-founded joy. “The oil of joy for mourning” “God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” The virgins needed the joy of hope whilst waiting, and the power of joyful recognition and reception of the bridegroom, when he actually appeared.

Thus the flame would seem to denote this joy—this suited tribute of homage to the bridegroom. “Go forth with joy to meet him” is the well-known stanza of a well-known composition. To this day illuminations are the notorious commemoratives of joyous events. And the thought is scriptural. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” “The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.” So it was alas with that of the foolish virgins. Their hope began to vanish just at the period when it should have ripened into realization. It was ill-founded: there was no oil in the vessel—no Holy Ghost—no power of divine grace in the heart. Whilst the bridegroom tarried, and all things continued as they had been—whilst the sun shone, and the stars yet gave forth light, and the moon walked in her brightness, their hearts were the deluded subjects of a certain vain and shadowy hope, that somehow, at the last, all would prove well with them. But the fear of the righteous revelation of the Judge of quick and dead—the over-hanging hastening storm close behind the wedding supper—at once produced the piteous exclamation, “Our lamps are going out!” Their false hope died away. Their hearts became darkened by despair. They cried out, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.” (See margin.)

But let us now view the general instruction of this parable. There was a time when all those virgins “slumbered and slept”; this was “whilst the bridegroom tarried.” The church fell into this slumber at a very early period of its history. Three centuries had not rolled away before the disastrous change had set in almost universally. The servants had begun to say, “My Lord delayeth His coming,” and they had commenced to “beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken.” Cyprian (so early as A.D. 250), declared of the church generally, “All were set upon an immeasurable increase of gain, and forgetting how the first converts to our holy religion had behaved under the personal direction and care of the Lord's apostles, or how all ought in after times to carry themselves, the love of money was their darling passion.” Eusebius, who assuredly was no cynic or austere criticizer of the prevailing character of his day, did yet on one occasion pen the following passage— “We were almost upon the point of taking up arms against each other; prelates inveighing against prelates, and people rising against people; and hypocrisy and dissimulation had risen to the greatest height and malignity.” This was about A.D. 310. Cyril (the so-called bishop of Jerusalem, only about fifty years later) wrote as follows— “Formerly the heretics were manifest, but now the church is filled with heretics in disguise. For men have fallen away from the truth, and have itching ears. Is it a plausible theory? All listen to it gladly. Is it a word of correction? All turn away from it. Most have departed from right words, and rather choose the evil than desire the good. This therefore is the falling away; and the enemy (Antichrist) is soon to be looked for.” But why should we refer to the Fathers? The sacred canon was not closed too soon to record, for our instruction, the commencement of the predicted slumbering and sleeping. Read 2 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 3; specially the addresses to the churches, in the concluding book of the inspired volume. Yes, the apostasy and the slumber set in exceeding early! The papacy is indeed an old religion. The spirit of godly protestantism was evoked before the apostles died. The seeds of most of Rome's fundamental errors were sown and germinating eighteen hundred years ago. Why should this be controverted? Alas! how can it be denied?

Christendom, so called, is still "slumbering and sleeping." Some of the nations thereof have changed their creed, indeed, and their communion and name. The real work of God in the period of the Reformation resulted in this—many, very many—a noble army of martyrs and of confessors, with a yet greater multitude of believers, "little and unknown," were savingly converted. The alteration of several national professions followed. But the mass of each and every single population remained fast asleep. Returning torpor ere long befell most even of those who had been savingly awakened. Christendom still slumbers. The millions eat and drink, and are drunken with the cares of this life. "Where is the promise of his coming?" is the grand echo of all their doings. Alas, who shall arouse them! When shall they awake? What shall break in effectually upon this slumber of eighteen, or nearly eighteen, centuries? The church, it is affirmed, must convert the world; but, alas, who shall arouse, if not convert, the church? Who shall awaken it?

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. THEN all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." This solemn outcry, then, is that which effects the great awakening. The cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" —that only—will arouse the slumbering church. Clearly, then, the labors of those who seek to persuade the church that the millennium must first ensue will not accomplish this. Those who boast of the world's conversion by the institutions now existing will never succeed even in awakening the church. Will they bear plain dealing? They stand directly in the way of this desirable event. They impede it—nay, virtually labor to prevent it. They lend their energies to thwart it. They use their influence on the other side. They say, "The bridegroom cometh not till there transpire an intervening thousand years." A faint rumor has sped its way recently across our land, to the same purport as the formal midnight cry, and some of the sleepers have been already startled. Our friends who are of the notion that the grand institutions in existence must do this work sound forth immediately a counteracting cry: Hush! hush! he comes not yet! Shall these persons bring about the predicted universal "trimming of the lamps"? Assuredly they cannot. The cry which they ("in ignorance we wot,") oppose, the cry they would cry down, the cry—"Behold, the bridegroom cometh"—this only shall effect it. Mistaken brethren! when will ye cease to set yourself in array against the very object of your prayers and aspirations? You pray, you long for, you groan after general awakening and concern. You are hastening on by these the very cry which you seek to cry down. Your prayers war with your teaching. Your teachings war with your prayers. Ye fight against your own holiest aspirations. Pray on! The midnight cry shall drown all other cries. Every opposing voice shall shortly pass away, even as the idle murmurings of the wind. For so this solemn revelation reads: "AT MIDNIGHT THERE WAS A CRY MADE, BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH; GO YE OUT TO MEET HIM. THEN ALL THOSE VIRGINS AROSE, AND TRIMMED THEIR LAMPS."

The verse which next ensues appears to suggest very singular application. Its import seems remarkable indeed. "And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." Did they entertain the notion of their being in the possession of the wise some treasury of supererogatory grace? They were Papists, on this point at least. Not so the wise ones. They said, "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you." These were Protestants to a man, at least on this greatly controverted point. Whatever any of them, wise or foolish, had been called—whatever had been the place of their communion, only the foolish held the false notion of supererogation grace; the wise unanimously denied it. Such, too, was the result of praying to the saints for grace. "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." They could point their foolish companions to the true treasury of grace. So indeed can any saint minister grace to his fellow, even by the ministration of the truth—the truth which He who only can directly impart grace ever uses as the vehicle of his behests. But this was not what was requested by the foolish. Strange, indeed, that this notion of supererogation—of a church treasury of superfluous grace—applicable to the case of those who need such help; strange, indeed, that this notion should in fact be held, avowedly, by the immense majority of the so-called Christians of the age.

"While they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went with him unto the marriage, and the door was shut." Even Christendom itself, so called, was not converted, as a whole, when the personal return of the bridegroom took place. How much less then, the world at large! This is the end of Christendom. It must be removed out of the way, before there will be a converted world. The complete ingathering comprises only the wise virgins and the previously dead in Christ. The door is shut—the door—not of conversion—but into the marriage supper. Only those previously converted—those only who had taken oil in their vessels—were ready for admission through this door. The world's conversion is a subsequent event. This is the fate of Christendom.

Whence then the notion of the gradual growth of the church unto universality? Whence the notion that the church ever will include the whole world's population? Surely not hence—not from this wondrous scripture. No; there is no such teaching in any scripture. The church will be but as a little flock when the chief Shepherd re-appears. Those alive and remaining, with the dead in Christ, complete it. The spirits of the just men made perfect, of the previous age, these friends of the bridegroom (see John 3:29), shall stand in the bridegroom's presence, and hear him, and rejoice in seeing that he who only is worthy of the bride now has her by his side. The saints of the past dispensation, then, will be, apparently, the bridegroom's friends; those of the present dispensation will constitute his bride; whilst those of the yet future and millennial dispensation will constitute his subjects. "O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

Such, then, is the one grand predicted re-awakening, and such its result. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Would that the universal church, so call, could hear even now the solemn conclusion of this parable: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour." S.

Time of the End, but the End Not Yet, Time of the End, but the End Not Yet: 10. Conclusion - the Time When Things Shall Be

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X.-Conclusion. The Time When These Things Shall Be

The interesting inquiry: When these things are to happen, was addressed by the disciples to the Lord, and the curiosity is natural to all. It has indeed given rise to the wildest speculations, which often have only proved the folly of those who would force from scripture more than it was

intended to convey. The question naturally falls under two heads, viz., as to the Jews, and as to the church.

First—As to the Jews. After announcing His coming in Matthew 24:30, 31, the Lord goes on to say (vers. 32, 33, 36-44)—“Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” “But of that day and hour knoweth no one, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

There are three points very noticeable here: First, that the disciples are given distinct signs by which they will know that the Lord's advent is near—very near. Enlightened by scripture and instructed by the understanding ones, they will be able to comprehend, at least to some extent, the significance of the astounding political developments of the time. The marvelous resurrection of the Roman Empire, at which the whole earth wonders, will have an inner meaning for them. But the first prominent sign is that given in the “parable of the fig-tree.” This tree is an emblem of Israel, and the putting forth of leaves may well indicate a national revival of that people. When the second beast (Revelation 13:11), Israel's false king, arises, this will be patent. But before that, while the branch is yet tender, there is a putting forth of leaves, and this is a sign to the remnant. The movement called “Zionism” now already commenced amongst the Jews, feeble, undefined, and tentative as it is, may be the commencement of what, after the church is gone, will become the putting forth of leaves of the fig-tree. The national revival of Israel, be it remembered, does not wait for the resurrection of the Roman Empire; the beast finds a covenant with Israel in existence, which he confirms. But when the gospel of the kingdom is preached in the whole world, the remnant will know that they are in “the time of the end,” with all its awful accompaniments, but that Christ is coming for their deliverance and in judgment upon their enemies.

Secondly, the Lord intimates that though His coming will then be very soon, yet that the actual time of His appearing will be a close secret even in heaven itself; the angels will not know it. In Mark's Gospel it is added, “neither the Son” “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (13:32). This is a remarkable text, which has puzzled many believers, and been used by adversaries against the deity of Christ. Of this truth the believer does not need proofs; his armory is well furnished with texts, such as, amongst numerous others, John 1:1-4; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:16, 17, 19; 2:9; what he requires is to see the relation which an isolated text, such as that in question, bears to the larger truth of the deity of the Lord Jesus.

That text then is really only an evidence along with many similar, of the perfection with which the Son took the place of man, and, as man, of servant. He “emptied himself,” so we are taught in Philippians 2:7 (Greek), and took the place of a servant. In this His self-subordination was perfect. The works which He did were the works of Him who sent Him (John 9:4). He sought not His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him (5:30). His words were the words given to Him of the Father (17:8). “I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me I speak these things” (8:28). “The Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak” (12:49). It is remarkable that that Gospel whose specialty is the deity of the Son, should also exhibit so signally the perfectness of His self-subordination as man. Now this beautiful and wondrous position of condescension which the Son has taken in love to us, still continues notwithstanding that He has entered into glory at the Father's right hand. He is indeed no longer in humiliation as when He was here. Jehovah, however, has said to Him, “Sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet” (Psalm 110:1). It is in accordance with this that when, in Patmos, John was given to see Jesus, though His glory was overwhelming and John fell at His feet as dead, yet the Apocalypse is described as “the Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him”; and the Revelation itself, the Lamb receives out of the hand of Him who sits upon the throne (Revelation 1:1; 5:7). And the Lord, after His resurrection, tells the disciples that “the times and seasons” are placed by the Father “in his own authority” (Acts 1:7). In exquisite harmony with all this is the text which we have been considering—Mark 13:32. Even amongst men there is a personal knowledge, distinct from official knowledge. Personally a judge may have learned from newspapers the facts of a crime, but when he takes his seat upon the bench to try the case, that knowledge is laid aside. He officially knows nothing, and his mind is a tabula rasa for the reception of what may be brought before him in court. And so with the Lord Jesus. The omniscience pertaining to Him as God, is, in the instance quoted, held in abeyance, consistently with the proprieties of the position which He has condescended to take as the divine and perfect Servant.

Thirdly, notwithstanding the preaching of the remnant, the world will be in utter unbelief, wholly immersed in affairs of the present life, alike heedless of divine warnings, and oblivious of anything beyond the material world, just as men were at the previous awful judgment of the flood. So also states the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, “But of the times and of the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (5:1-3).

Secondly—As to the church. Be it remembered that signs are not for the church, but for the Jew of the coming day. The calling of the church is to wait for the Son from heaven, without any sign; so that the first prophetic event upon the list is the removal of the church to heaven. Now if the events of prophecy do not commence until the church is taken to heaven, the question arises, When will this occur? Near two thousand years have passed since the church was placed in a waiting attitude. Has the Lord Jesus Christ then forgotten or relinquished His intention to come for the church? Impossible. His last message to His church is in the Revelation, and thrice in the last chapter of that book He impresses the verity of His coming. “Behold I come quickly; blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book” (ver. 7). “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be” (ver. 12). “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus” (ver. 20).

It is not for nothing—this threefold warning of the Lord's return. It is not for nothing that the last of the three is an asseveration, “Surely I come quickly.” This betokens not slackness, but the Lord's eagerness for His return. Is it not the identical sentiment which we have in the fourteenth of John—“that where I am there ye may be also”? Plainly, it is His desire to have us with Himself. Yet some will say, How can be reconciled the Lord's coming quickly with the time that has elapsed since the promise was made? Well, when a mighty ship sets out from England to Australia, her throbbing engines force her huge bulk through the water at almost railway speed. She comes quickly, yet it will be

long before she reach her port. Take another illustration. The swiftest thing within human knowledge is light—186,000 miles per second is its rate of travel. Yet at that inconceivable speed it takes a ray of light three years to reach us from the fixed star which is nearest to our own system (a Centauri). That ray of light indeed comes quickly, though three years must elapse before it reach our earth. And so with the Lord's coming. There is no delay; it is approaching with all the speed that can be, though nineteen centuries have passed. Not that there is any prophetic requirement to be fulfilled. The clue to the lapse of time is found in the explanation of Peter, that the object is the salvation of others yet to be called (2 Peter 3:9, 15). The gathering of souls is going on—the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. But there will be a moment when the last elect member of Christ's body will have been brought in; and then the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, and the dead in Christ will be raised, and, joined by the living, pass into heaven. It is literally true, therefore, that we do not know the moment when the Lord will come.

But although we have no sign to look for, the growth may be unmistakably discerned of tendencies which will blossom in the changed moral atmosphere of the post-church period. Scripture reveals stupendous events which are to follow the church's rapture, and two of these have really begun to appear in our own day—at least so far as they can while the restraining presence of the Holy Ghost in the church remains below. They are—the apostasy of Christendom, and national activity amongst the Jews. The former has been sketched in previous pages; and the second, "Zionism," which has been but a few years in existence, is a national political agitation amongst the Jews such as has been unknown before, since their dispersion. At a meeting of the English Zionist Federation held in London in September, 1903, Mr. I. Zangwill stated with reference to the sixth Zionist Congress held at Basle that "the conclusion which he had carried away from it was that never for the last eighteen hundred years had Palestine stood so near to Zionists as it did that day"; and, so definite and tangible is the Zionist movement, that a letter was read "from M. de Plehve, Russian Minister of the Interior, in which he announced the willingness of Russia to assist Zionists in obtaining Palestine for them."¹

There is, however, dissension amongst the Jews on the subject, a large number having no zeal for their ancient patrimony, and no exalted national aspirations; all they desire being an amelioration of their worldly condition. Accordingly, M. de Plehve has since opposed the Russian Zionist Societies, on the ground that they have changed their policy of furthering the emigration of Jews to Palestine, into an endeavor to form an inner organization of Jews in their present place of domicile.

Still, the inception of a definite political movement to obtain Palestine for the Jews is certainly remarkable, as is also the offer of one of the great Powers to befriend and assist it. Let it be attempted now to realize the immense truth, that there is nothing revealed as necessary to occur before our Lord may descend into the air and translate the living saints to heaven; and not only so, but that the anointed eye can discern premonitory movements towards events which are to burst on the world after the rapture of the church. This surely is a solemn reflection. The reader may believe in a second advent of the Lord, and that there will be some who will be alive and caught up into glory; but does he recognize that according to the whole tenor of scripture, it is his duty and privilege, if a Christian, to expect to be one of those? Inspired scripture never says they "which are alive and remain"; always we. "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). "We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our body of humiliation," etc. (Philippians 3:20, 21). "The Lord himself will descend from heaven... then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1. Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Summing up, then, the subjects we have been considering, we have revealed to us the following—(1) The rapture of the church to heaven. (2) A temporary calm in the world, and the rising of a great leader of remarkable and comparatively peaceful success, who is rewarded with a crown ("a crown was given to him"). (3) The sealing of a remnant of Israel as servants of God, and their going forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom. (4) A parallel movement in the hardened Jews. Under the wing of the protecting power of Isaiah 18, they enter into possession of their land, the temple is rebuilt, and ritual established. (5) Persecution and martyrdom of the remnant for the name of Jesus. (6) Cessation of the world's delusive peace, and the outbreak of wars and rumors of wars; but the end not yet. (7) The nations (western) come into a state of tumult and revolution with awful threatenings; society is alarmed, men's hearts failing them for fear. (8) Reconstitution of the Roman Empire in ten kingdoms, with Rome at the head. (9) The new power (the beast) confirms a covenant with the Jews for seven years. (10) The ten horns and the beast destroy the harlot (corrupt Christianity), utterly abandoning and ending Christianity, thus consummating the apostasy in the west. (11) The beast breaks his covenant with the Jews, abrogating the Jewish ritual, causing the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. This in the east is really the full consummation of the apostasy. The destruction of Christianity in the west, and Judaism in the east (10 and 11) prepare the way for "the man of sin." (12) Revelation of the man of sin—the antichrist and second beast of Revelation 13:11-18. (13) The gospel of the kingdom being preached in the whole world, the time of the end comes on. The accomplishment of the preaching being a matter of degree, the criterion which determines and characterizes that time is the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. (14) The great tribulation. (15) Complete subversion of all government and the Son of man is seen coming in the clouds with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30).

If the result of these papers be to clear the views of anyone as to when and where prophetic events are to be expected; if they assist to show that many things which had been thought to precede the Lord's coming, are really to follow it, and that the first prophetic event is the rapture, or catching up of the church, to meet the Lord at His coming, these pages will not have been written in vain.

E. J. T.

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Time of the End, but the End Not Yet, Time of the End, but the End Not Yet: 9: Sundry Points

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

IX.-Sundry Points

1. That “the elect” of Matthew 24 are not “the elect” of the church, will be recognized by those readers who have grasped the truth that the whole of Matthew 24 from verse 3 to verse 44 applies to the post-church period. It is, however, not only in that chapter that the remnant are referred to as “elect”; scattered intimations of this characteristic may be found as early as Isaiah: “It shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem” (chap. iv. 3). “I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect (plural) shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there” (lxv. 9). So Daniel, speaking of the time of “the great tribulation”: “At that time thy people shall be delivered every one that shall be found written in the book” (xii. 1). The Revelation—as previously quoted—shows the remnant to be definitely numbered, and individually sealed for God (vii. 1-8); and it will be remembered that Paul, when dealing with the casting away of Israel, and the subject of a remnant, says, “God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew” (Romans 11:2).

2. The carcass and the eagles.— “As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (Matthew 24:28). For the understanding of this it is necessary to observe, that though included in one verse, there are here two distinct figures of two distinct events, which are not identical even in point of time. In prophecy there is nothing more usual than the announcement in close conjunction of events quite distinct, and sometimes far separated as to time. An eminent case is that of Isaiah 61:2, where two clauses of the same sentence link events which are near two thousand years apart: “To proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah, and the day of vengeance of our God.” The Lord Jesus stated that the first part of this—the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord—was fulfilled in His first advent; and in the reading of the scripture He stopped at that point, closed the book and returned it to the minister (Luke 4:19, 20). The second part of the sentence— “the day of vengeance” —He had not then come to proclaim; that awaits His second advent.

In our text the lightning as a vivid figure of the coming of the Son of man needs no explanation; but absurd and very objectionable interpretations have been proffered of the parable of the carcass and the eagles. There need, however, be no great difficulty, for the meaning is comparatively plain. A carcass, with vultures crowding to prey upon it, is manifestly nothing very pure or lovely. The carcass is a figure of the dead and putrifying nation of Israel; and scripture shows that the nations will gather to prey upon Israel, and these are aptly figured in the eagles or vultures. Old Testament prophecies are abundant and graphic in their portrayal of this feature of the last days. In Zechariah this future attack of the nations is given, “Behold the day of Jehovah cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken,” etc. (14:1-3). Again in Isaiah: “Woe to the multitude of many peoples, which make a noise like a noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters” (17:12). Then as to the effect upon Israel:

“They shall be left together unto the mountain birds of prey, and to the beasts of the earth: and the birds of prey shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them” (18:6). Details cannot here be set out, but this attack of the ungodly nations is in scripture a large event of the last days, which, while permitted as a judgment on the apostate mass of Israel, will yet be checked by the Lord in the interests of the pious remnant. The reader who may consult the scriptures quoted, will recognize these two elements of the great event in question.

3. The sign of the Son of man in heaven.— “Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the nations of the earth (or, land) mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The disciples had asked, “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?” The Lord had already instructed them about the end of the age; now He tells them that the sign of His coming will be the coming itself, for they should see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The expression, “sign of thy coming,” is the genitive of definition, for Mark and Luke give the substantial coming of the Son of man without referring to it as a sign.

4. The angels and the trumpet.— “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, and from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31). Whatever in that day may have been done by man, as a political measure, in placing Jews in the Holy Land, and though that people may have autonomy under their own false king, the antichrist, yet the scattered condition of Israel under the sentence of Jehovah remains. But when the Lord comes, He will, by the instrumentality of angels, gather His elect from the most distant parts of the earth. How beautiful will it be to the despised, persecuted, and oppressed remnant, to suddenly find that they are the objects of inquiry and succor by the angels of the Lord! Romance cannot show such a brilliant reversal of position—yesterday, thought not fit to live; now, the quest of Jehovah's angels! How good has it ever been and ever will be, to be faithful to God in the face of a corrupt and unbelieving world.

5. Angelic activity is prominent at the appearing of Christ.—All the angels will then attend upon the Son of man (Matthew 25:31), and will act both in blessing, as we have just seen, and also in judgment. The Son of man will send His angels to gather together His elect; but likewise; the Son of man will “send his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41). Isaiah alludes to this gathering of the remnant, and to the great trumpet whose sound will reach them in the distant places of the earth— “And it shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (27:12, 13). Many may have sent ambassadors by the sea to this nation (Isaiah 18:2), ignoring the divine displeasure which rests upon it. With this movement Jehovah has no sympathy, as shown in an earlier chapter. Man places unrepentant Jews in the land, where they become the persecutors of the godly, and they themselves ultimately the prey of vultures—the other nations. Jehovah then stands quite aloof; but now has come His time. The Son of man comes in His glory and sends His angels, not to the case-hardened Jews, but to the faithful and godly remnant amongst them, who shall be saved and delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (Daniel 12:1). The blowing of the trumpet is mentioned in Isaiah 18:3 in connection with the same subject. The result of the assemblages of Jews in ungodliness is shown in ver. 6; but an ensign is lifted up and a trumpet blown, and in ver. 7 the remnant is brought as an offering to Jehovah of hosts. The blowing of a trumpet may of course be symbolical of the loud joyful message which will summon the remnant to mount Zion.

6. One shall be taken and the other left.—In describing the judgment at the coming of the Son of man, the Lord says, “Then two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left” (Matthew 24:40, 41). At a first glance some have thought that this was like the rapture of the church, but it is exactly the converse. At the rapture the saints are caught away, and the world is left to proceed in its course. But when the Lord comes to the judgment of the living upon the earth, the taking away is in judgment, and the righteous are left to pass into blessing upon the earth at the millennium. This is plain from the parallel passage in Luke 21. There, speaking of the same judgment, the Lord states that “as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth”; and the disciples are exhorted to watch and pray that they “may be accounted worthy” —not to be caught away into heaven, but— “to stand before the Son of man”; that is, when He comes to the earth and the wicked are taken away in judgment. The judgment, however, is strictly discriminatory, wholly different from what takes place in the slaughter and sack of cities after conquest. Whether men in the field, or women at domestic operations, one is taken and another left. Sudden it may be, but it is judicial.

[E. J. T.]

(To be continued)

Time of the End, but the End Not Yet, Time of the End, but the End Not Yet: 7. Time of the End, Continued

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VII.—The Time of the End (continued)

Now we come to that verse of deep significance, the 27th. “He shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week.” The pronoun, of course, refers to the last person mentioned, “the prince that shall come”; that is, of the Roman people. It is needless to say that this covenanting of a Roman prince with the Jewish people is an event yet future. No Roman prince has yet made such a covenant; nor has that people been in a position to reciprocate, since the destruction of Jerusalem and their scattering over the face of the earth. Here, however, we have the last week of the seventy. The expression “the many” means the majority of the nation, in contrast with the godly remnant already placed before the reader. At the time of the end, therefore, there are to be dealings between the Roman Empire and the mass of the people of Israel, and we have already seen the prominence of Israel in the latter day.

Events of current history help us to understand this. Who has not noticed the great stir of late amongst the Jews? What means the “Zionist movement” but the incipience of a corporate and national activity? Is it not a budding of something that will yet bear fruit? In ver. 27 we see a covenant with the mass of Israel which a Roman prince is to confirm for a hebdomad. This has generally been taken to mean that he shall make a firm covenant; but there seems no reason why the phrase should not be understood in its simple sense of confirming a covenant already made. Indeed, the latter sense would coincide with the general tenor of prophecy as regards Israel, for, near the close of the age, we find Israel having a national and religio-political existence; their land restored to them, and the temple rebuilt. When one considers their present position as foretold by Hosea, viz., that “the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an epod, and without teraphim” (chap. 3:4); when we see them persecuted, barely tolerated, exiled through centuries from their own land; and their highest ambition to gain equality with Gentiles; when we find all this reversed, and that they are in a position to make a treaty with the head of the Roman Empire, it is obvious that a vast political change must have occurred as regards that people.

If, however, scripture shows that some great power will take up the case of Israel, sending ambassadors to them, it becomes easy to understand that when the Roman prince of Daniel 9 comes upon the scene, he might find a treaty or covenant with Israel in existence which it would be to his interest not to set aside, but to confirm.

Strikingly apposite to this is the 18th chapter of Isaiah. The Authorized Version of this chapter is preferable to the Revised, which latter appears to have got further away from the sense of the original. The following is the corrected rendering of the late Mr. J. N. Darby— “Ha! land shadowing with wings, which art beyond the rivers of Cush, that sendest ambassadors over the sea, and in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, [saying, Go, swift messengers to a nation scattered and ravaged, to a people terrible (or, marvelous) from their existence and thenceforth; to a nation of continued waiting and of treading down, whose land the rivers have spoiled! All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, when a banner is lifted up on the mountains, see ye, and when a trumpet is blown, hear ye! For thus hath Jehovah said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will observe from my dwelling-place like clear heat upon herbs, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For before the harvest, when the blossoming is over, and the flower becometh a ripening grape, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning knives, and take away [and] cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the mountain birds of prey, and to the beasts of the earth; and the birds of prey shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them. In that time shall a present be brought unto Jehovah of hosts of a people scattered and ravaged—and from a people terrible from their existence and thenceforth, a nation of continued waiting and of treading down, whose land the rivers have spoiled,... to the place of the name of Jehovah of hosts, the mount Zion” (vers. 1-7).

This remarkable prophecy points to some nation very distant from the land of Israel— “beyond the rivers of Cush,” described as “shadowing with wings,” which sends “ambassadors over the sea to a nation scattered and ravaged, to a people terrible (or, marvelous) from their existence and thenceforth, to a nation of continued waiting and treading down” —which latter terms graphically outline the nation of Israel. Here is indicated the befriending of Israel by some maritime nation of widely extended protective power— “shadowing with wings.” Vers. 3-6 intimate that Jehovah stands utterly aloof from all this, for the movement is purely worldly and political, without a trace of repentance on the part of the guilty people. Probably the befriending nation makes a treaty with Israel to restore their land to them and protect them in building their temple and re-establishing their worship. At all events the Roman prince will “confirm a covenant” with the mass of the nation.

Should the reader be curious as to this most interesting chapter of Isaiah, it may be well to explain, without staying now to prove it, that ver. 1 expresses the aloofness of Jehovah from Israel when returned unrepentant to the land; vers. 5 and 6 the awful carnage which comes in judgment upon the apostate mass who will have received and worshipped "the man of sin" ("the antichrist") in the temple; while ver. 7 represents the godly remnant, brought as an offering or present to Jehovah of hosts, when the wicked of Israel will have been destroyed. With fullest desire not to travel beyond the record, yet the description of the tutelary power in Isaiah can scarcely be read without the mind receiving, from the terms of the prophecy, a suggestion of England. No country could be better described as "shadowing with wings," nor more distinguished for friendship to oppressed peoples—especially the Jews.² It would be wrong, however, to assume that England is necessarily indicated, for we do not know what nation may, or may not, at the date in question, answer as well or better, to the terms of the prophecy. The phrase, "Woe to the land shadowing," etc., is preferably translated, "Ha! land shadowing," etc., and "beyond the rivers of Cush" may be simply expressive of extreme and unknown distance from the land of the prophet, beyond the remote parts of Africa.

Reverting now to the last week of the seventy, we find that in the midst of that week the Roman prince causes the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. This shows that the Jewish ritual is at this time established; not that the Roman prince caused it to be installed, as that probably was a subject of the covenant which he "confirmed" for a week. But now in the middle of the week, he breaks the covenant, obviously, in order to substitute for the Jewish sacrifice the worship of himself and of the antichrist in the temple. This seems a legitimate inference from the general tenor of the prophecies. That is, "abomination" is a name for an object of idolatrous worship, and we find that the antichrist is to set himself up for worship in the temple. It seems unavoidable that this must be the "abomination of desolation" which scripture predicts to stand in the holy place—a view which is somewhat confirmed by another verse of Daniel which makes the two events to be simultaneous, inasmuch as that they together, are given as a point of time, from which a certain number of days is to be reckoned, viz., "From the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days" (12:11).

Now the instruction for those of the remnant who are in Judaea at this time is immediate flight into the mountains: there is not to be a moment's delay for any consideration whatever. Notice, in passing, the tender solicitude of Christ for His persecuted people. They are told to pray that their flight might not be in the winter, neither on the sabbath day, for then ensues a tribulation such as the world has never yet seen, nor ever will again. "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). We of the present day who may freely hold and profess whatever faith we choose, enjoying the beneficent protection of government, can have but a faint apprehension of the cruel and relentless oppression of that time. An image is to be made of "the beast," and all who will not worship the image will be killed (Revelation 13:1.5). As beheading (20:4) is stated to be the mode of this death, probably the guillotine will be again at work. "And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (13:16; 17). Thus, even short of death, there will be harassments and persecutions from which there will be no escape. Acknowledgment of the dragon's representative, the beast, will be insisted upon. The mark must be in the right hand, or on the forehead; no occupation can be followed, no one can sell and no one buy, except in the name of the beast; no exception will be allowed; the noble and the peasant, the poor man and the millionaire, the slave and the freeman must bow to and acknowledge Satan in his representative—the beast. The prophetic words are only the graphic touches of a sketch, but reading, as it were, between the lines, one can understand that the tribulation will be, as the Lord said, "such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be."

This great tribulation will probably have its vortex where the image of the beast is set up—in Jerusalem—but it will be world-wide; for the great multitude of Revelation 7 (see vers. 9-14), and who are of every nation and tribe and people and tongue are stated to have come out of "the great tribulation"—not merely (as in the Authorized Version) great tribulation, such as might happen to any godly person at any time. This is "the great tribulation" (ἡ θλίψις ἡ μεγάλη)

And what will be the end of all this? The Lord says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). This is the symbolical language of prophecy; but how is it to be interpreted? Peter tells us that no prophecy of the scripture is of its own, or isolated interpretation (ἰδίᾳ ἐπιλύσεως.); that is, the whole of the scripture hangs together, and there is a consistency, if not uniformity, in the use of prophetic figures. Now in Genesis the greater light, the lesser light, and the stars are described as ruling the day and the night respectively; and it will be found throughout the Revelation and prophecy generally, that the heavenly bodies are symbols of rule—the sun supreme authority, the moon reflected, while the stars represent the minor and subordinate vessels of rule. In the 29th verse then is symbolically portrayed the complete upsettal of all government immediately upon the conclusion of Daniel's seventieth week. What follows the great political convulsion? "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the land lament, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). To all, except the godly, how appalling will be this sight; but to the Jews who will have accepted, and glorified in, the "lawless" king, the antichrist, how terrible will it be to see the Jesus whom they had crucified and despised, suddenly appear on the clouds of heaven in supernal glory!

[E. J. T.]

(To be continued)

Time of the End, but the End Not Yet, Time of the End, but the End Not Yet: 7. Time of the End

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

VII. The Time of the End

Making our way slowly, but we trust surely, through the 24th of Matthew, we have passed in our progress these events—

(1) The rapture of the church to heaven,

(2) A temporary calm in the world, and the rising of a great leader of remarkable and comparatively peaceful success, who is rewarded with a crown ("a crown was given to him"),

(3) The sealing of a remnant of Israel as servants of God, and their going forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom,

(4) Persecution and martyrdom of the remnant for the name of Jesus,

(5) Cessation of the world's delusive peace, and the outbreak of wars and rumors of wars: peace is taken from the earth; but the end not yet.

Previous pages have afforded some explanation of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom; but in verse 14 of our chapter we reach a signal mark for the division of the prophecy. Verses 4-14 give "the beginning of sorrows," not "the time of the end." Now, however, it is stated, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable earth for a witness unto all the nations: and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). The prophecy now therefore enters upon "the time of the end." "The end" or "The time of the end" is a technical term of prophecy. Thus in Daniel 11:35 we are told that some of the understanding ones should be tried (persecuted) and fall (that is, martyred) "to the time of the end." In verse 40 is predicted war by the king of the south, and by the king of the north, "at the time of the end." In chap. 12:1 (connect with 11:40) the same period is referred to as that in which "the great tribulation" should take place. And our Lord in Matthew 24, after stating in verse 14 that "then shall the end come," goes on to say, "Then let them which be in Judah flee into the mountains... for then shall be great tribulation," etc. (vers. 16, 21); adding, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened... and then they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven" (vers. 29, 30). "The end," therefore, is a period within which events happen; not the exact moment of the coming of the Son of man, but the last brief epoch of the age, commencing with "the abomination of desolation" (ver. 15), and culminating in the appearing of "the sign of the Son of man, in heaven" (ver. 30). It is the latter half-week of Daniel 9:27 when the Roman prince abrogates the Jewish ritual, causes the oblation and offering to cease, substitutes for Jehovah's worship the worship of "the man of sin" in the holy place. These then are distinct sections of our chapter, viz., vers. 4-14, the beginning of sorrows; vers. 15-44, the time of the end.

Before leaving verse 14, let us notice that the common acceptance that the gospel of the kingdom here spoken of must be preached to every individual nation or tribe before the end can come, is scarcely borne out by the text. The verse does not say that the gospel must be preached to every nation, but that its being preached in the whole habitable earth (no longer confined to Israel) was to be a witness to all the nations. Just as the reading of the Riot Act puts a city under responsibility, though every individual person might not hear the words; so the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom in the wide world (ὅλη τῆ οἰκουμένη) will be as a trumpet blast to the nations, requiring them to bow to the universal authority of Christ. It will be one more, one final, appeal, just prior to the coming of Christ in judgment. The kingdom of heaven will then indeed be at hand, and that, in awful significance.

However, on the gospel of the kingdom being preached in the whole habitable earth, "then shall the end come," and the initial event of that period is given in the succeeding verse: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand), then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" (vers. 15, 16). What now is meant by this mysterious expression, "the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place"? Of all iniquities, that which is pre-eminently abominable to God is idolatry, for it is the formal, overt denial of His Godhead, and the substitution of the creature for Himself, the Creator. Hence we find in the Old Testament that the word "abomination" has a special use as signifying an object of false worship. Thus, "Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians; Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites; and Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon."¹ The "holy place," of course, means the temple. The Lord had announced with reference to the temple then standing, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (ver. 3). Hence it follows that in the interval the temple will have been rebuilt. Take in connection with this, 2 Thessalonians where the apostle Paul speaks of one who is to be revealed before "the day of the Lord," namely, "That man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (vers. 3, 4). Here we have in the apostle's teaching, the two points of Matthew 24:15—the temple recognized as again in existence; and an exorbitant phase of idolatry, a man setting himself up as God, sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself that he is God. This somewhat illuminates the expression, "abomination of desolation," but it will be more fully explained later on.

In the verses just quoted from Matthew 24 it will be observed that our Lord makes pointed reference to the prophecy of Daniel. The parts of that prophecy which principally relate to the subject are in the 9th and 12th chapters. The ninth gives in vers. 24-27 the celebrated prophecy of the "seventy weeks," viz., "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after the threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

The weeks here, it is almost unnecessary to explain, are hebdomads of years, not of days. This prophecy is introduced by the exhortation, "Understand the matter, and consider the vision" (ver. 23). Then it says, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city." These seventy weeks, then, relate to Daniel's people, and to Jerusalem. The church-period, therefore, in which we now are, is no part of those weeks. As a matter of fact it is a gap between ver. 26 and ver. 27, and this harmonizes with what has already been shown, namely, that the church-period is a hiatus between God's past dealings with Israel, and those yet to come. A careful reading indicates that the "seventy weeks" are divided into three parcels, viz., seven, sixty-two, and one. The seven, plus the sixty-two, i.e. sixty-nine, bring us (see ver. 25) to Messiah the Prince—leaving one week of the seventy unaccomplished, and this, the last week, is in ver. 27. But several events, the cutting off of Messiah, and the destruction of Jerusalem, are subsequent to the sixty-nine weeks, and yet before the seventieth, of ver. 27, clearly

showing the broken currency of the weeks, broken between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth, so that the whole of the present period, from the cutting off of Messiah, to the appearance of the Roman prince who will confirm covenant with the many, is a gap or interval forming no part of the seventy weeks. For our purposes in considering these weeks we need not go further back than ver. 26, for there we get a clear point of time in the cutting off of Messiah. That event is stated to be “after the three score and two weeks” (virtually, after the sixty-ninth, i.e. seven plus sixty-two).

An important error exists in ver. 26 as given in the Authorized Version. It reads, “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself.” The correct translation is, “Messiah shall be cut off and have nothing.” That is, the Messiah did not take the kingdom, though it was His by right. Being rejected and crucified, He could only have taken it by judgment in power; and His then mission was not one of judgment but of salvation (John 3:17). So He was “cut off,” and went back to heaven with “nothing.” There are also some minor errors in the Authorized Version, but the following is a correct rendering of vers. 26, 27, with which we have now to do, viz., “And after the sixty-two weeks shall Messiah be cut off and shall have nothing: and the people of the prince that shall come, shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with an overflow, and unto the end, war—the desolations determined. And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and because of the protection of abominations [there shall be] a desolator, even until that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate [one].” The first item in this prophecy—the cutting off of Messiah, has been already explained. Next, there is the destruction of the city and the sanctuary—not, mark, by the prince that shall come, but by the people of that prince. We know that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was by the Romans; and though a Roman prince, Titus Vespasianus, was with the Roman hosts at the time, the destruction of the temple was emphatically by them, not by their prince. It was contrary to his express commands, and he exerted himself to his utmost power to prevent the destruction of the temple. (See Milman's History of the Jews, pp. 408, 409, 2nd Ed.; and Josephus, Wars, VI. ch. 4, pp. 5, 7). But here we have an intimation that that important personage, “the prince that shall come,” and who is referred to in the next verse as “confirming a covenant with the many,” will be of the same nationality as the people who destroyed the city and the sanctuary—the Romans.

(To be continued)

[E. J. T.]

Time of the End, but the End Not Yet, Time of the End, but the End Not Yet: 2. Difficult Texts, Continued

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Another part of our chapter around which immense misunderstanding has gathered is that verse in which the Lord says, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto nations: and then shall the end come” (ver. 14).

How often in sermons, and at missionary meetings has this been used as an incentive to the preaching of the gospel abroad! How many earnest servants of Christ have gone to remote corners of the earth under the impression that they were promoting the Lord's coming by carrying the gospel where it had never been before! Such devoted labor will no doubt be accepted by the Master and richly rewarded, but nevertheless, so far as it rests on our text, it is based on an entire misconception.

In the first place, “the end” here is not identical with the Lord's coming for His saints, or the end of the church period. It is “the end” about which the disciples had just been inquiring— “the end of the age.” 1 Thessalonians 4 shows that the Lord comes and takes suddenly to Himself those of the church who then are alive and remain; and we have already seen that when, thus, the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, divine dealings with Israel are resumed. Jewish matters, now in abeyance, then come into position again. Many things were altered by the cross. The relations of Jehovah with Israel were broken off and suspended. But when the church-period terminates, the course of “the age,” disrupted by the rejection of Messiah, commences again to run: the end of that age, precedent to the glorious age of the Messiah, is “the end” which the Lord was discoursing about. The church is, as it were, an intercalation between the breaking off and the re-commencement of dealings with Israel.

Secondly, the gospel to be preached prior to “the end of the age” is not the present gospel. The reader may be startled to hear that there are two gospels; but as a fact there are more than two spoken of in scripture. Israel in the wilderness had a gospel declared to them of a land flowing with milk and honey—type of heaven to the Christian; and Hebrews (4:2) says that “to us has a gospel been preached as well as unto them.” The twelve apostles had a gospel to preach after the Lord's resurrection. And again, Paul, by the Spirit of God, speaks of what he designates “my gospel”: that is, Paul, called later than “the twelve,” had revealed to him further and fuller truth than was embodied in the commission of “the twelve” (Romans 2:16; 16; Galatians 1:11; 2:4; Ephesians 3:2-4). The very text with which we are dealing distinctly implies that there are various gospels, for it says particularly, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached,” etc. The language of scripture is exact, and many a misconception is formed, many a doubt is thrown on scripture, simply through inattention to its actual words. So here. The Lord specifically declares that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness unto all the nations, and then shall the end come.” Through inattention to the terms men have come to think that the present gospel was meant.

What then is the “gospel of the kingdom”? Certainly not the gospel as we have it now—the gospel of full redemption—for redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord had not been accomplished, and therefore could not be preached. What then was it? It will be necessary to trace it slightly through scripture. So early as the time of David, the kingdom forms the subject of prophecy. “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:6-8). Needless to say, this is prophetic, going in its terms far beyond David, Solomon, or any other than the Messiah. Here is a king decreed to be set upon the holy hill of Zion, who is also Son of God, begotten (as to His humanity) in time; One who is to have the nations (Gentiles) for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. To the godly Israelite who pored over the scriptures this and other Messianic prophecies were familiar. Thus Nathanael, the moment that the displayed omniscience of Jesus brings to his mind who the wondrous Person

is who stands before him, immediately recognizes Jesus as the promised King, and applies to Him the very terms of the second Psalm, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:48, 49).

In the book of Daniel the kingdom is very distinctly foretold. "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed," etc. (2: 44). "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven... and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (7:13, 14).

When we see how this magnificent kingdom was the goal of Israel's hopes, light is thrown upon that which was the burden of John the Baptist's testimony, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That was the Baptist's gospel. Jesus took up and continued it after that John was delivered up. "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; 4:12, 17). In passing, note the character of this gospel. A mighty kingdom had indeed been predicted for Israel, and now it was imminent. But it was not to be the mere advent of power to deliver the people from their Roman oppressors. The condition they were in was chastisement for their sins, and repentance was called for. Jehovah was not going to bring them into blessing as they were: that would have been unholy. It would have been the acceptance and sanction of their sins and their sinful state. This moral character of the kingdom was what made the preaching a stumbling-block to the Jews. They would have been glad indeed to have been delivered from the power of Rome, and set in their due place at the head of the nations. But to enter in through the strait gate of repentance they would not. So is it ever with the natural heart. Men to-day would hail a millennium of delights brought in simply by power. But repentance!—without which God, being holy, cannot meet them—this is foreign to their hearts and repugnant to their will. The sermon on the mount accordingly gives the character of the subjects of the kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:2). Both the twelve and the seventy were sent out with the same message: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7; Luke 10:9).

This slight tracing of the subject of "the kingdom" illustrates the specific force of the Lord's words, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world." The expression is not vague. It is not "the gospel," nor "a gospel," but definitely, "This gospel of the kingdom."

A point important to observe (as there is misconception with regard to it) is that "the kingdom of heaven" is not heaven. It is just the contrary. It is the earth, but the earth under the rule of heaven. "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom," that is, over the earth. The Son of man comes "with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him a kingdom that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him." Nations and languages are not in heaven; they belong to the earth. But the kingdom is now in mystery, because the King has been rejected and is concealed in heaven. The establishment of the kingdom in power as prophesied, and as it will yet be, is now in abeyance, and the present form of the kingdom is the word sown, and left as a system of truth on earth. This was all fully explained by the parable of the sower and the other parables of Matthew 13, which are stated to be the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (ver. 11), consequent upon the rejection of Christ by Israel (vers. 14, 15). This teaching was prior to the statement about the keys in chap. 16. It was of the kingdom in this form that the keys were conferred on Peter, who accordingly opened the door to the Jews by his preaching in Acts 2, and afterward formally admitted the Gentiles in the person of Cornelius and his house (see Acts 10:44-48). But heaven itself is another thing. And Peter has no more to do with the admission of a soul to heaven than has my reader.

The kingdom of heaven is not spoken of in the Acts or the Epistles. Indeed the term is found in Matthew only. "The kingdom of God" spoken of elsewhere is not quite the same thing. It is a larger expression and finds its fullness only in heaven. Hence in one place in scripture it is spoken of as heaven—"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50); but the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is never so employed. That is the kingdom of heaven over the earth. In the kingdom of heaven there will be flesh and blood, but into the kingdom of God flesh and blood cannot enter.

We have seen that the gospel of the kingdom was preached by John the Baptist, and by our Lord, and—before the cross—by the twelve apostles and by the seventy disciples, whom He commissioned and sent throughout the land. But, except for the little band whom He in grace gathered around Himself, the preaching ended in His total rejection. Israel was nationally apostate, when they cried, "We have no king but Caesar," and demanded a felon's death for the Lord of glory (John 19:15). An offer of repentance to Israel was still held out by the preaching of Peter in Acts 3 consequent upon the glorification of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. But the offer was futile as regards the nation. They ratified the crucifixion of Christ by stoning His witness Stephen, whose face shone as an angel's while he bore testimony to the glory of Jesus (Acts 6:15; 7:54-60). They had already cast the Heir out of the vineyard and slain Him according to Matthew 21:39; and now, in the murder of His servant Stephen they fulfilled the other parable, and "sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

The consequence of all this was the abrogation of relations between Jehovah and Israel as the chosen nation, the detailed results of which that unhappy people are reaping to the present hour. "His blood be upon us and on our children" was their own awful imprecation against themselves (Matthew 27:25). But Israel being nationally laid aside, God now in wondrous forbearance sends out the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. The message is intrinsically the same to each, though if there be a preference it is to the Jew—"to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). But this is not the gospel of the kingdom. It is sovereign and free grace to every man (Colossians 1:23).

There is yet another misapprehension lying across the face of this scripture, which it were well to remove. The Lord said, "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:32; Luke 21:33). Many have taken this to mean that the prophecy was to be fulfilled in the lifetime of persons then present in the world. And this erroneous supposition has entailed two further errors. Rationalists have based upon it a claim that the prophecy has broken down, and others have put a strained interpretation upon it in order to reconcile the seeming contradiction. It has been said, as an explanation, that the coming of the Son of man in the chapter was no more than death—an hypothesis which will not bear examination, yet it was the common teaching in pulpits about fifty years ago. But had it been so that would not remove the difficulty, because not only is the coming of the Son of man to take place before that generation passes, but also "all" the things foretold in the prophecy.

When, however, the proper meaning is seen, the supposed contradiction vanishes and all is clear. It is a positive error to take the word "generation" in the meaning referred to. There is an obvious principle of interpretation which indeed is recognized in law, that when a word has different meanings that one must be adopted which carries out the intention, not one which frustrates the intention. Now any person who

turns to a good English dictionary will at once see that the word "generation" has a variety of meanings. Webster gives seven; and while one is the sense referred to, namely, "the mass of beings living at one period," another is "race, family, kind." This latter is the true sense of "generation" in Matthew 24:34. What the Lord really says is that the Jewish race—and more especially that moral character of it then present—should not pass away till all those things should be fulfilled.

The existence of that generation—the Jews dispersed amongst all nations and yet separate from them—is indeed one of the wonders of the world. Bishop Butler refers to it as "the appearance of a standing miracle, in the Jews remaining a distinct people in their dispersion." He says, "The Jewish nation and government were destroyed in a very remarkable manner, and the people carried away captive and dispersed through the most distant countries, in which state of dispersion they have remained fifteen hundred years; and that they remain a numerous people, united amongst themselves and distinguished from the rest of the world as they were in the days of Moses by the profession of His law, and everywhere looked upon in a manner which one scarce knows how distinctly to express but in the words of the prophetic account of it, given so many ages before it came to pass: Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee"1 (Deuteronomy 28:37)." Here we have the fulfillment of the Lord's words, "This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled."

If we take the word in the original Greek (γενεά), either in the New Testament or the Septuagint, we shall find it abundantly used in both senses. Let us look at the latter, that is, the sense in which it ought to be taken in our text. But remark that what is meant is not merely the race of the Jews, but that adverse moral character of it which stood around and resisted Jesus in His life and pursued Him to a cruel death. As another has said, "The non-believing race of the Jews is not to pass away till all these things have taken place. Thus the same generation which crucified the Lord of glory is going on still, and will, till He comes again in the clouds of heaven."2

Now for the scriptural use. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses is recounting the faithfulness of Jehovah and the unfaithfulness of Israel throughout their whole history from its commencement, and he says: "They have corrupted themselves they are a perverse and crooked generation" (ver. 5). Then, referring to the present era when Israel is cast out by Jehovah, and which has already lasted for centuries, "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" (ver. 20).

Palpably, here "generation" is used for the people or nation of Israel. Of those termed a perverse and froward "generation" in vers. 5, 20, it is said in ver. 28, they are a "nation" void of counsel. Thus the word is used as the synonym of "nation."

Again, "Jehovah hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith Jehovah" (Jeremiah 7:29, 30). "Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family" (chap. 8:3). Here the word is properly rendered "family" without any limitation of time. In the very discourse which the Lord concluded in Matthew 23, He uses the word "generation" in an extended sense— "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" (ver. 35). He addresses them nationally, and then adds, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this 'generation'" (ver. 36).

Parkhurst, in his Lexicon, gives as a meaning of γενεά "Men of like quality and disposition, though of neither one place nor age"; and this is amply borne out— "Thou shalt keep them, O Jehovah, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever" (Psalm 12:7). In this text "generation" is obviously not limited to the set of people at any one time upon the earth. Again, "God is in the generation of the righteous" (Psalm 14:5). "The generation of them that seek thee" (24: 6). "If I say, I will speak thus; behold I should offend against the generation of thy children" (73:15). "There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth" (Proverbs 30:11-14). In these verses a certain moral character or kind of persons is implied. More evidence might be adduced, but is scarcely necessary. When the Lord said, "This generation shall not pass," He referred to the Jews, both ethnically and morally—as in the apt phrase already quoted, "the non-believing race of the Jews."

"This generation," then, will continue until the whole prophecy of Matthew 24 is fulfilled. Indeed the Jews will be far more prominent as we shall see, in the closing scenes of the age, than ever they have been in the centuries of Christianity.

[E. J. T.]

(To be continued)

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