

The Coming Of The Son Of Man

By E. J. Poole-Connor

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Preface

This little book is intended for the use of beginners in the study of the Scriptures concerning the Lord's Return. It is entirely non-controversial, and no reference is made, therefore, to other views. The writer, however, is not unacquainted with them. Where a word of explanation not suitable for the text is called for, it takes the form of a note at the end of the book.

E. J. Poole-Connor (1913)

I. The Prophecy Of Daniel

Some six hundred years before Christ was born a great King lay on his bed, meditating upon the future of the empire over which he ruled--an empire daily growing in power and glory. To what was it tending? How would it end? Thus questioning, he fell asleep and dreamed; and in his dream he saw a great image before him, curiously composed. Its head was of gold, its breasts and arms were of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron and part of potter's clay. As he contemplated it he saw a stone smite the image upon its feet and break it; so utterly, that the image became as chaff of the threshing floor, and the wind carried it away; while the stone became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

Such was the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, as recorded in the second chapter of Daniel's prophecy. And the vision was no empty product of an excited brain, but God's answer to his questionings. It was given to him that he might know "the thoughts of his heart," and what should come to pass in "the latter days."

And God, who gave the dream, gave, through His servant Daniel, the interpretation. The image, the king was told, symbolized the whole course of Gentile rule; Nebuchadnezzar himself being the head of gold. His kingdom should be followed by one governmentally inferior⁽¹⁾, set forth by the breasts and arms of silver, which in its turn should be displaced by a third, of which the brazen portion of the image was the type.

Concerning the identity of these kingdoms there is no question, since Nebuchadnezzar was informed that his rule was indicated by the head of gold. It is a matter of history that the Babylonian empire was succeeded by that of Medo-Persia, and later by that of Greece. Moreover, both these kingdoms are expressly named in this prophecy; the former in chapter 5:8, and the latter in chapter 8:20, 21.

The king was further informed that in process of time a fourth world-power would arise, strong as iron, which, like iron, would break in pieces all opposed to it. That this fourth kingdom was that of Rome no direct Scripture tells us, but such we know to be the fact. It is this imperial power which looms large and sinister behind all New Testament history. Roman Emperors, Roman judges, Roman soldiers, pass through its pages. A Roman census drives Mary to Bethlehem; a Roman tax creates the publican; a Roman citizenship affords its temporary protection to the Apostle Paul; and it was a Roman cross on which our Lord was put to death.

But this was not all. The image of the king's dream had ten toes upon its feet, and these ten toes had their prophetic significance. They represented ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire was itself to be divided; and "in the days of those (ten) kings"--so Daniel was commissioned to declare--"shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom" (2:44); and set it up by Violence and destruction⁽²⁾, for "it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

Later, as we are told in the seventh chapter, God was pleased to confirm, by a dream given to Daniel, the revelation thus made. In his vision the prophet saw four wild beasts rising from the Great Sea--the first a lion, the second a bear, the third a leopard, and the fourth diverse from all others, "dreadful and terrible," and

having ten horns. From among these ten horns, another and a smaller horn was seen to rise, "having eyes like a man, and a mouth speaking great things." As the prophet lifted his gaze, he saw heavenly thrones placed, and the Ancient of Days sitting in judgment on the great and terrible beast, and on the little horn which had sprung up amid the ten; and he saw the beast destroyed. He then beheld sovereign rule given to the Son of Man, even "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him: and his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

To Daniel also was given the interpretation of the dream. The four wild beasts, he was told, were four kings which should arise out of the earth. A comparison of the dreams of the King and of the Prophet makes it clear that the same four kings, or kingdoms, are foreshadowed in both, though under different figures; while the "ten toes" of the one correspond to the "ten horns" of the other. But in the vision seen by Daniel, we have this further revelation: out of the ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire was to be divided there would arise a king who would "speak great words against the Most High, and wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand until a time, times, and the dividing of a time," that is to say, for three years and a half; for in chapter 4:16 "seven times," the period of King Nebuchadnezzar's affliction, clearly mean "seven years," so that "a time, (two) times, and the dividing of a time" signify half that period.

Consider what this further revelation means. The first three kingdoms of which this prophecy speaks have risen and passed away, but the division of the fourth into the final ten has never yet taken place.⁽³⁾ This cannot be too strongly urged, nor too clearly recognized. Here, then, is a portion of God's sure Word awaiting fulfillment, and with it, the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the blasphemous, persecuting king who shall arise from the midst of the ten. When he appears the end shall be very near.

Let the reader secure a map of the old Roman Empire. Let him ponder all that has happened, for the weal or woe of the human race, within its borders, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to his own; and let him remember, that, great as have been the events of the past, the events of the future shall be equally great. Then let him contemplate the modern nations which form its component parts, and watch. By war, by political treaty, by national spirit, by forces known, it may be, only to God, the kingdoms shall shake and shift until they be ten; from among that ten shall emerge the most awful figure that has ever cast its shadow across history, to be judged as none have yet been judged; and with that judgment Gentile rule shall end, and the rule of Christ begin.

II. The Olivet Prophecy

We have seen that God was pleased to give to Daniel a prophecy of vast importance. But God Who "spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"; and not less important than the prophecy of Daniel was the prophecy uttered by our Lord as He sat in the midst of His disciples upon Mount Olivet.

This wonderful discourse (recorded for us in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21), formed the answer to three questions of the disciples, arising out of His statement that not one stone of the Temple should be left upon another which should not be thrown down. "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming? and of the end of the age?" To the first question, which had to do with the destruction of the Temple, the Lord replied, "When ye see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh . . . for these be the days of vengeance . . . and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-24).

This prophecy, in so far as it concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, has long since been fulfilled; but "the times of the Gentiles," which is the period covered in the prophecies already considered in Daniel, are still running on.

The question, third in the order of the disciples' inquiry, but second in the order of the Lord's answer, was concerning the sign of the end of the age; and to by "the age" was meant the period which should elapse before the Lord returned.

In his reply (Matt. 24:4-14) our Lord gave first an outline of what should be the general character of the age. It would be marked by the recurrence of war, famine, pestilence and earthquake. His followers would have to endure persecution. False prophets would arise and deceive many. The Gospel should be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations "and then," said our Lord, "shall the end come." In other words, the age would not terminate, nor the Lord return, till in every nation the Gospel had been preached. Such was the clear sign given by the Lord in His response to the disciples' third question.

The question answered last by our Lord was one of such importance that we must linger awhile over the reply, and consider it somewhat in detail. The disciples' enquiry was, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" To which our Lord thus began to respond "When ye therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation,⁽⁴⁾ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, . . . then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" (verses 15, 16). Here we pause for a moment to recall what we have already learnt from Daniel's prophecy. We have been told that in the latter days a blasphemous and persecuting king shall arise who shall for a time wear out the saints. To this we add further information, found in that prophecy (chapter 11:31), concerning this king and his allies, namely, that "They shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate." This is the prophecy to which our Lord referred. The sanctuary" or "the holy place "is the Temple; the "abomination of desolation" is an idolatrous image; and the purport of the whole is, that in the (rebuilt) Temple of Jerusalem the king shall set up an object of idolatrous worship. When this is done, "then," said our Lord, "let him that is in Judaea flee . . . for then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

It is evident that this tribulation will be the outcome the setting up of the idol. Some will submit and worship, but others will resist and be persecuted. Probably few, if any, Christian believers will suffer in Jerusalem

(where the white heat of the furnace will be), owing to our Lord's warning to flee; nevertheless, the persecuting spirit will be abroad on the earth, and all who "keep the commandments of Jesus" rather than the commandments of the anti-Christian king, will doubtless suffer in varying degrees. But "for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"; and immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light . . . and the powers of heaven shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."

Such, then, is our Lord's answer to the question, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" On earth, the idol in the holy place, and the ensuing tribulation; in the heavens, the darkening of the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars. Amid such dread scenes the day of deliverance and of doom shall be ushered in.

Our Lord's discourse did not end here. He proceeded to say that neither men nor angels knew the day and hour fixed in the divine purpose for His Return, and that, the world at large, His Coming would be as unexpected and as terrible as the Flood. "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away so also shall the coming of the Son of man be" (verse 38). And this would be so, not because that day should come unheralded--for He had just foretold the events which would signify its near approach--but because ungodly men would not regard His warnings. Men "knew not" that the flood was coming; yet for years the preaching of Noah and the building of the ark foretold their doom. Even so no man will know that Christ is at the door unless, by God's grace, he shall recognize the "knocking" (Luke 12:36). To all, therefore, who would escape the judgments His Coming will usher in, our Lord has uttered these solemn words: "Take heed to yourselves lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; for it shall come on all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every Season, making supplication that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34-36, R.N.)--prevail, that is over the evil influences of that hour, its materialism and unbelief; and so escape, not the tribulation, which is one of the signs of the Lord's Coming, but the judgments which His Coming will bring.

III. Paul And The Thessalonians

It will have been observed that in the Lord's Olivet discourse He not only delivered a prophecy of His own, but quoted and confirmed the older prophecy of Daniel. We come now to a third link in this prophetic chain--the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians; for the Apostle, while imparting certain truths respecting the Lord's Coming which were directly revealed to him by God, nevertheless based the bulk of his instructions upon the prophecy of our Lord and that of Daniel before Him.

That the Apostle was well acquainted with the utterances of our Lord, there is abundant evidence. "Ye ought.., to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, It is more blessed to give than to receive," he said to the Ephesian Elders. "I command, yet not I, but the Lord," he wrote to the Corinthians in quoting another pronouncement of the Lord Jesus. It need cause us no surprise, therefore, to find his teaching on the subject

of the Lord's Coming to be interpenetrated with that teaching which the Lord Himself delivered to His disciples on Olivet.

In writing to the Thessalonians, his first detailed statement is concerning the dead in Christ. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (we take up His words at verse 15 of the fourth chapter, 1st Epistle) "that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

In this utterance we have certain truths stated which were known to the Apostle by direct revelation; to this fact he refers when he says "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord." Nevertheless, his mind is still full of the Olivet prophecy. "The voice of the archangel and the trump of God" is an echo of the Lord's words "He shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet " while the reference to believers who " are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" being "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," echoes that other word of the Lord concerning "the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven."

The Apostle then continues " But of the times and 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... But ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief . . . Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober" (chapter 5:1-6).

In these words we have nothing of the nature of a revelation specially given to the Apostle. The Holy Spirit was simply bringing to his remembrance prophecy already uttered. His statement that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night was but another form of the Lord's words--"If the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not suffered his house to be broken up." His confident declaration to the Thessalonians that they were not in darkness: that the Day of the Lord should not overtake them as a thief: was evidently based upon his knowledge of what the Lord had said concerning the signs which should herald His approach. The Day of the Lord would come upon His people, as well as upon the world, but it should not come on the former unexpectedly or hurtfully. God had not appointed them to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, they were not to be slothful or indifferent, but they were, as the Lord had said, to watch.

Such was the teaching of the Apostle given in this First Epistle; and such was the teaching given to Thessalonian believers by word of mouth. Notwithstanding this, they fell into a snare. They were persuaded to think, in spite of the absence of the heralding signs, that the Day of the Lord had set in. A spirit, probably speaking through some person in their assembly, had misled them; specious teaching had beguiled them; a forged epistle of Paul had been circulated among them supporting the error. The result was agitation, confusion, and a neglect of daily duty. To them, therefore, the Apostle wrote again--"Now we beseech you,

brethren, touching the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken . . . neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is come. Let no man deceive you in any way, for that day shall not come, unless there shall have come the apostasy first, and the man of lawlessness shall have been revealed (2 Thess, 2:3, Alford's translation).

On what ground could the Apostle so confidently assert this? He did not say it "by the word of the Lord"--that is, by revelation specially committed to him. Here, as before, guided by the Holy Spirit, he bases his teaching on the prophecies of Daniel and our Lord. Daniel had declared that prior to the Coming of the Son of man there should rise one who should speak great words against the Most High, and think to change times and laws: till the "man of lawlessness," therefore, had been manifested, the Day of the Lord could not come.

But the Apostle continues his description of this terrible being--still based upon Daniel's prophecy (chapter 11:36, 37)--and delineates him as "He that opposeth and exalteth himself above every one called God, or an object of worship, so that he sitteth down in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (Alford).

Once more we stay to recall prophecies going before. Both Daniel and our Lord foretold that this blasphemous king should set up an idolatrous image in the Temple we learn here that the idol will be an image of himself. The setting up of that abomination was declared by the Lord to be one great sign of His near approach; till that sign appeared the Day of the Lord could not come. These things the Apostle had told the Thessalonian believers, but they had forgotten them, or they had been explained away. For their instruction and for ours, the Spirit of God leads him to reassert them, and he thus concludes--"The mystery of lawlessness doth already work (only there is One that hindereth) till it be developed out of the midst.⁽⁵⁾ And then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming."

In that day shall the long tribulation of the people of God come to an end. Then shall the justice of God be vindicated. "It is a righteous thing with God," says the Apostle in an earlier passage, "to recompense tribulation to them that tribulate you"--(we venture to coin a word to indicate the original)--"and (to recompense) to you who are tribulated, rest, with us" (the apostles, and the long line of suffering and persecuted saints) "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe . . . in that day."

Daniel in Babylon: our Lord on Olivet: Paul in Thessalonica: these are the links in this great prophetic chain. The first foretold the long course of Gentile rule, and the rise in the latter days of the blasphemous, lawless, persecuting king; declared his doings and his doom; and looked onward to the Coming of the Son of Man. Our Lord predicted the treading down of Jerusalem beneath Gentile feet; foreshadowed the character of the age till He should return; and made known the signs, disregarded by the world, but recognized by the believer, which should herald His approach. The Apostle spake of the resurrection of the sleeping saints, the

rest from tribulation, and the rapture, which that day should bring; declaring it nevertheless to be a day of terror and destruction to the wicked; and he reasserted the manifestation of the lawless king as a prophetic sign, without which the Day of the Lord would not come.

The earthly work of both Prophet and Apostle has long since ceased. In a far eastern city the dust of Daniel mingled with the earth; the dust of Paul was scattered in the imperial city of the west; but in Jerusalem the city of their love and prayers, the Lord of both Prophet and Apostle died and rose again, and became the first-fruits of them that sleep. One day, when He returns, His voice shall awake the sleepers, and the body of Apostle and Prophet, sown in weakness, shall be raised in power; sown in dishonor, shall be raised in glory; and with them the whole family of faith, who from the earliest dawn of history have turned their eyes of love and longing toward the Redeemer.

IV. The Lord's Coming In Relation To The Professing Church

Hitherto we have followed the broad stream of prophecy, and have spoken of our Lord's coming as affecting two main classes: the people of God and the people of the world. But as we pursue our Lord's teaching another aspect of the solemn subject comes to our view. We find in His utterances repeated warnings that the Church itself would become corrupt, and that at His Coming He will pronounce judgment, not only upon those who openly reject Him, but upon His professed followers.

Nor need this fact, for all its sadness, greatly surprise us. God's work has ever been opposed by a personal spirit of evil, as subtle as he is powerful. And while he has not been permitted to prevent the setting up of the Church on earth, he has been allowed to hinder it sorely, both from without and from within.

This aspect of the Lord's return is particularly brought before us in certain parables recorded in Matthew's Gospel, chapters 13, 22 and 25.

In chapter 13 we have a series of parables setting forth some of the methods of the enemy. In the Parable of the Sower he is depicted as catching away the truth as it is sown in men's hearts. In the Parable of the 'fares he is seen planting unregenerate men in the professing Church. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed we are forewarned that the Church would forsake its lowly position and assume, as we know it did under the Roman bishops, the place of a world-power; and in this "tree" the "fowls"--the powers of evil--should find their nest. And although in the Parable of the Leaven⁽⁶⁾ we have the picture of an apostate system leavening wholesome truth with corrupting error, it is still the enemy's work which is being done.

How truly our Lord's forewarning has been fulfilled let the present condition of Christendom declare. When we call to mind the history, from the Middle Ages till today, of the various sections of the professing Church--Roman, Greek and Protestant; when we remember the errors promulgated throughout the world in the name of Christ; when we contemplate the number of those who, while bearing the title of Christian, have manifestly never been born from above; we may well believe that when the Lord returns it will be necessary for Him "to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity."

The parable which sets forth most fully the necessity and certainty of such a judgment is the Parable of the Tares. "The kingdom of heaven," said our Lord, shall be likened to a man which sowed good seed in his field. But . . . his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.

The tares (zizania) to which our Lord refers are semi-poisonous plants so like to wheat in their earlier stages that even the experienced farmer does not venture to separate the two. The Lord, therefore, warns us that those unregenerate souls planted in the professing Church by the Evil One will often, in all external matters, be indistinguishable from the true children of God. Nevertheless, the parable shows equally clearly that when the Lord returns they shall be manifested and separated. "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." When the zizania and the true wheat are fully developed, the difference between the two is so marked that a child cannot mistake them. Even so in that "harvest" which is "the end of the age," the Lord's own people will be distinguished from all others, for they shall "be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:51, 52), and shall "shine forth" bodily and literally, "as the sun." But no such glorious change shall pass over the unregenerate however lofty their religious profession. Today there are many of whom it is impossible to say whether they be wheat or tares. In that day there shall be no longer any doubt. And then shall the angels "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity."⁽⁷⁾

In chapter 22 we have the Parable of the Wedding Feast; and in the closing portion of the parable we find teaching of a similar import. A king, said our Lord, made a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call them that were bidden, but they would not come. A second messenger was sent. Some of the invited guests made light of it; others ill-treated the servants and slew them. The king being wroth sent his armies, destroyed the murderers, and burnt up their city. He then sent his servants out into the highways and commanded them to bid as many as they found to the feast, and the wedding was furnished with guests, both bad and good.

Here we are on sure ground. The bidden guests who refused to come, and slew the servants, were the Jewish people in their rejection of the Gospel call. The burning up of their city was the destruction of Jerusalem at Roman hands. The going out into the highways and bidding as many as could be found to the feast is the calling of the Gentiles. But the parable does not stay here. It carries us on to the Coming of the Lord. "The king came in to behold the guests, and saw a man there that had not on a wedding garment. . . . Then saith the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot and take him away and cast him into outer darkness."

Let it be noted that this man had not refused the invitation, but he had refused the wedding garment-- a type of the man who, while a professed recipient of salvation, has never submitted himself to the "righteousness of God"; and in the "day of finding" he shall be severed from the company of true believers and shall be cast out. It was doubtless this parable which was in the mind of the Apostle Paul when, after enumerating to the Philippians the things which constituted his own righteousness, he wrote--"I have suffered the loss of all (these) things and count them as dross that I may gain Christ, and be found"--found by the King--". . . not

having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but . . . the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:8, 9). "Be diligent," says the Apostle Peter, seeming also to echo the words "that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

Finally, in chapter 25 we have the Parable of the Virgins, in which is pictured a company of those who were waiting for the bridegroom; of whom some, having oil in their vessels to maintain their lamps, went in to the marriage feast; while others, having no oil, and not being ready to meet the bridegroom when he came, were shut out. Here, once more, we have the same truth taught us. The foolish virgins represent those who make a Christian profession, but have not received the Spirit in their hearts; and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." To such the Lord, Who "knoweth them that are his" shall say when He shall come, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

Such are the solemn truths stated and repeated by our Lord; and in all considerations of His Coming they should be given their due and serious weight. Far deeper than any distinction between fruitful and unfruitful believers is the distinction between believers and unregenerate professors of religion; between the spiritually living and the spiritually dead. Our Lord speaks frequently of coming to His Church and finding His servants unready to meet Him. But many of His servants--servants in profession, that is--are even now unready to meet Him, in that they are as truly strangers to the new birth as the avowed unbeliever. It cannot be too strongly insisted that readiness to meet the Lord consists primarily in a renewed condition of heart; in a personal experience of that change of nature which is wrought by the Holy Spirit of God.

To the professing Church, therefore, Christ addresses Himself--to the Church as He foreknew it would be: a mixed body of wheat and tares, of wise and of foolish virgins, of faithful and of wicked servants--and to all within its borders He gives His earnest counsel, "Be ye also ready"--see that ye are children of the kingdom, guests truly garbed in the righteousness of Christ, virgins having the oil of the spirit in the heart--"for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." To all merely human calculation the coming of Christ will seem furthest off when it is most nigh. The heralding events will be as little understood by the unsaved professor of religion as by the materialistic man of the world. To the "evil servant" the Lord will come "in a day when he looketh not for Him" as truly as to the man who is His open enemy. Ability to recognize the signs will be found, not in a powerful intellect, but in a renewed heart. Of all mankind, it is only to the regenerate believer it can be said--"That day shall not overtake you as a thief."

To this issue the Lord directs the weight of His teaching. To be strangers in heart to the grace of God is not only to be unready to meet Him, but is also to be morally incapable of recognizing the events which tell that He is near. Therefore let every professed servant of His--such is His solemn counsel--see to it that he belongs to the new and heavenly order, that he has been born of the Spirit; for if that be not so, then, whether he die first, or live till the Lord returns, the outer darkness shall be his portion, for ever and ever.

And God grant that upon the conscience of no Christian teacher may it ever lie that he has misinterpreted his Master's words, and turned the edge of these solemn, searching, and vital truths.

V. The Lord's Coming In Relation To The Believer's Service

In Matthew 25 there is recorded a further parable relating to the Lord's coming, known as the Parable of the Talents, which may thus be summarized: A certain man, going into a far country called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. To one he gave ten talents, to another five, and to another one, each according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. After a long time the Lord of those servants returned, and reckoned with them, rewarding the faithful, but condemning the wicked and slothful servant to be cast into outer darkness.

The general teaching here conveyed is similar to that found in the parables already considered, and has reference to the "judgment which begins at the house of God" (1Peter 4:17). The wicked and slothful servant belongs to the same order as the man without a wedding garment; both are cast into the outer darkness. The additional solemn suggestion of this parable is, that a man may even be entrusted with spiritual powers and opportunities of service, and yet prove to be a son of perdition at the last; a sad possibility vividly made real by the story of Judas, and foretold in the words of our Lord, "Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works. Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23). But while the general teaching of the parable is thus similar to that already met with, we find in the earlier verses a truth indicated which we have not hitherto faced, namely, that the Lord's Coming will not only be to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity," but will also be to make enquiry into the service of those who are really His own, and to reward them according to their works.

Here, then, is a doctrine of great importance, concerning which it behooves us to be clear. Let us remember, on the one hand, that no child of God can fail of blessings secured to him by covenant-grace. Resurrection and transfiguration cannot be delayed even by unfaithfulness, nor can glory be forfeited. "Christ the first-fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" is the divine order which nothing can interrupt. All who are "children of the kingdom" shall, whatever their attainments in holiness, "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." "If children," says the Apostle, "then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." "Whom he called, them he also justified; whom he justified, them he also glorified." But let us not forget that they who are children of God are also servants of Christ, and as such must render to Him an account of their stewardship. "The Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." All that which goes to make up the believer's life--his outward conduct and his inward motives--shall one day be brought under review. "We shall all stand," says the Apostle, "before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue confess to God, So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10-12).

It was this great fact to which the Apostle Paul appealed in writing to the Corinthians concerning Apollos and himself, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. . . . Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; for the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Apollos and he

were alike true servants of Christ; were alike building on the sure foundation; yet the ministry of neither could escape the divine testing. Should it prove to be "gold, silver, precious stones," all would be well; should there be found "wood, hay, stubble," it would be consumed. "If any man's work abide," the Apostle says, "he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. 3:8-15).

"It is a very small thing with me," he says later, "that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I am conscious of nothing against myself;"--so may his words be translated--"yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore," he concludes, "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; then shall every man have praise of God." And lest any should imagine that the divine investigation did not cover every detail of life, the Apostle was led to write to the Christian slaves of Colossae, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord . . . knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward . . . but he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons" (Col. 3:24, 25).

Such is the clear teaching of our Lord and His Apostle concerning the day when He shall come to reckon with His servants; and it is evident that the whole weight of the emphasis is thrown on the fact that the entire life of the believer will come under review. It will not merely be what the servant was doing when the Lord came that will count in that solemn enquiry, but how he was occupied during His absence. The question as to the actual employment of the believer when death, or the Coming, shall find him is one of importance, but it is not the main consideration. The matter of supreme concern is how he shall have ordered his life from the first day that grace called him into the service of Christ till the day when earthly labor came to an end. Thus regarded, the fact of the Lord's coming has a sanctifying power which is entirely unaffected by the knowledge of preceding events. If every servant of the Lord knew, as Peter and Paul knew, that he should die before the Lord returned, the solemn certainty of the judgment seat would not be altered thereby, nor would the believer be deprived of a single incentive to holiness. It is the sure approach of that day, not when and how it comes, that matters. Long years have passed since the Apostle, who taught that everyone must give an account of himself to God, passed to his rest; yet the Apostle's own service shall as surely undergo the coming testing as that of the last convert born of God before

the trumpet sounds. "We make it our aim," said the same inspired teacher, "whether present or absent"--whether present in the body or absent from it when the Lord returns--"to be well-pleasing unto Him. For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 4:9, 10, R. V.).

Here is the true perspective of the Lord's Coming and here its true power. The motive for holiness of life and for earnestness of labor is found, not in a fear that the Lord may stealthily come and catch His servants momentarily off duty, but in a solemn conviction that all our days of service must be accounted for to Him; that whether our lot be resurrection or translation, our lives shall equally be subjected to the scrutiny of Him

whose eyes are like a flame of fire; and that in proportion to our fidelity there shall be, in ways but obscurely revealed at present, certain reward or certain loss.

VI. Watchfulness

In following the teaching of our Lord and His Apostle concerning His Coming, we cannot have failed to observe the constant repetition of the exhortation to watch. It is the lesson, implied or stated, of almost every parable; the warning attached to almost every prophecy. It behooves us, therefore, to ponder the word, and to ascertain all that it is intended to convey. And having learnt, in some degree, the relation of the Lord's Coming to the world, to the professing Church, and to the genuine servant of Christ, we are so far better fitted to pursue the enquiry.

In turning to the passages in which the exhortation is found, we at once observe that the word is used to convey more than one meaning. To be exact, two different Greek words are used in the original; and while the difference between the two is very slight, yet the fact itself is suggestive. And a closer examination of the passages in question shows that the application of the word is varied and distinct.

We find the word used by our Lord, for example, in urging upon the members of the professing Church the need for wakefulness concerning their spiritual condition. At the close of the Parable of the Ten Virgins we read "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" (R. V.). The wise virgins had been awake to their need of oil, and alert to secure it; and so, in spite of slumbering while the bridegroom tarried, they went in to the marriage feast. But the foolish virgins had neglected so to do; and to them the door was shut. In the Book of Proverbs--that book which inculcates wisdom and dissuades from folly-- frequent warnings are given against the sloth which imperils the future. "A little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." It is against the folly of such spiritual sloth that our Lord also gives warning. If there be no recognition of the need of grace in the heart, and no earnestness to seek it, death or the Lord's Return shall come, even to the professed disciple, as something utterly unexpected and terrible. To all such, the Lord utters His sternly-gracious words, first sent to the Church in Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die . . . If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I come upon thee." To be possessed, not of religion, but of eternal life, is a matter of such infinite importance that it dwarfs all beside it. Oh, to be awake to secure that!

We find the word used also as a command to the Lord's people to be on their guard against influences hostile to the spiritual life. "Watch ye at every season, making supplication, that (so) ye may prevail to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36, R. V.).

The Lord's own words have made it abundantly clear that the days that will immediately precede His Return will be characterized by utter absorption in the things of this life. Eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting: these are the terms used by the Lord to set forth the pursuits in which the world shall be engrossed;

so engrossed that in spite of solemn signs and arresting portents, in spite of prophetic warning and corrective judgment, the Day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief, and as fatally as a snare. Against this spirit the Christian warrior must contend, with whole-hearted earnestness. "Take up," says the Apostle, in a passage which echoes the words of the Lord, "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day... praying at all seasons, in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance" (Eph. 6:8). The grace of God assures that the believer will escape the doom of the ungodly; he is not in darkness that the Day of the Lord should overtake him as a thief; God has not appointed him to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ, who died for him, that whether he shall wake or sleep, he shall live together with Him. But he shall escape, not by presumptuous indifference, but by heeding his Lord's commands; by seeking and obtaining strength to watch and to be sober, to put on the whole armour of God; and so to resist the influences of the dark hour that precedes the dawn.

Yet again, the word is used in exhorting those who have the spiritual oversight of their fellows to see to their charge, and to be on the outlook for the returning Lord. There is a passage of great moment to all such watchmen found in Mark 13:33 (R. V.): "Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. It is as when a man sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each man his work, commanded the porter to watch!" Observe the final clause. The absent Lord has not only left His servants to work, but He has appointed a porter, and commanded him to give warning of danger to his fellow-servants, and to announce their Master's return. So the Apostle Paul acted in his ministry to the Ephesian Church; and so he bade the elders act when he had gone. "Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). So, too, should every faithful servant of the Lord act, as the age draws to its close; warning those for whose souls he watches against the spirit of the time, and lifting up his voice as he sees the Coming of the Lord draw near--not evolving his message from his inner consciousness, but basing it upon prayerful study of the inspired Word, and a Spirit-taught observance of the signs which shall herald the Lord's return. And that which is the special duty of the Lord's watchman, is, in its degree, the duty of each toward all. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" (Mark 13:37).

Finally, the word is used as counseling His own servants to have ever before them the coming day of reckoning. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning,"--the symbols of active service and holy living--"and be ye yourselves like men looking for their Lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast,"--men who expect to render an account; "that when he cometh and knocketh they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching" (Luke 12:35-37).

With such varied application does the Lord bid His people to watch? To the professing Church, with its admixture of the true and the false, the word is a solemn counsel to awake to the need of regenerating grace, before the door is shut. To the true believer it comes as a warning to guard against the adverse influences which would dim his vision of eternal and spiritual things; a command to be vigilant concerning dangers which threaten the church, and to be looking for the signs that herald His return; an exhortation to have ever

before him the tribunal of his Master; and to know that whether the great day be near or distant, its final approach is as certain as the existence of the God who appointed it; it bids him expectantly to wait for His Son from heaven, and for the dawn of the day of resurrection and of rapture; the day of the saint's deliverance, and the day of the sinner's doom.

VII. The Purpose And Methods Of Grace

The central affirmation of New Testament teaching is that there are certain spiritual blessings secured to the believer apart from his merit or desert. A clear knowledge of the privileges so secured is of manifest importance in any enquiry concerning the Coming of the Lord.

Moreover, "He who has ordained the end has ordained the means"; and the methods by which God is pleased to execute His plans are equally to be taken into account in the consideration of the solemn theme. For these reasons (although a reference has been made to these aspects of truth on previous pages), we propose to examine, somewhat more in detail, what Scripture has to say concerning the purposes of grace and the means by which those purposes are accomplished.

The great charter of the believer's privileges is found in Romans 8:8-30. It commences by clearly defining those to whom the privileges belong. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Here are words which are perfectly lucid. They teach that mankind consists of two classes; those who are "in the flesh," that is, unrenewed sons of Adam, and those who are "in the spirit," that is, believers, who by the new birth are possessed of the spirit of Christ. Only those over whom the regenerating change has passed can truly claim to be His. But being His, certain consequences follow: --"If Christ be in you the body is dead because of sin"--still liable to death, that is--"but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

This, then, is the first privilege secured by grace to the believer; the quickening, or rising again, of the body. While the indwelling of the Spirit does not preserve the outward man from dissolution, it does assure his future resurrection. In other words, a change of nature here is the pledge of a change of body hereafter.

The words that follow emphasize this:--"If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live." If a man lives habitually in sin and self-will, he is assuredly not born from above, and shall not share in the "resurrection unto life." But if by the Spirit evil impulses and actions are being slain, he is spiritually alive now, and shall live again bodily when the Lord returns.

The Apostle continues: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry,

Abba Father."

Here the prospect broadens. "Adoption" (which means literally "placing as a son ") is a Scriptural expression which is associated with dignity and ruling power. Israel's title of honor is God's son (Ex. 4:22). Christ, in the kingly second Psalm is so addressed, "Thou art my Son" (Ps. 2:6). In the Epistle to the Hebrews He is spoken of as a "son over his own house" in contrast to Moses as the servant in the house (Heb. 3:5, 6). So that to be given the spirit of adoption is more than to be made a child of God: it is to be constituted an heir of the kingdom. This the Apostle proceeds to state:--"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together."

Emphasis is given to this truth by the statement that creation is eagerly waiting not only for the manifestation of Christ, but of those also who are co-heirs with Him:--"The earnest expectation of the creature (or creation) waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." This is so, not only because the final deliverance of God's children coincides with the deliverance of creation from the curse, but because they shall then resume, with their Lord, the beneficent rule committed to Adam, and long since lost. This great thought finds expression in the Apostle's summary of the purposes of grace: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Conformity to the image of God at the first creation was not only moral and physical, but governmental also. "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness" God said "and let them have dominion . . . (Gen. 1:26). Even so conformity to the image of the Son, as the issue of the new creation, is to be construed in its widest sense as moral, physical, and governmental. The sons of God will be like their Lord in stainless holiness, in glorious immortality, and in kingly power. This is the final privilege secured by covenant grace; and so surely will God fulfil His purpose that it is stated in terms of accomplished fact: "Whom He did foreknow. . . them He also glorified." A voice from the throne has said, It is done.

Similar teaching is found in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 1 (R. V.): "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing. . . in Christ; even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love; having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Here, however, the stress is laid upon the truth that every spiritual blessing to which the believer is heir has already been bestowed upon Christ, as the representative of His people, as the Head over all things to the church, which is His body. Whatever variety there may be in the gifts, or service, or rewards, of the individual members, whatever differences of administration there may be in the kingdom which is yet to be revealed, the church is one. To every member of that one body belongs, by inalienable right, participation in all that is bestowed on Christ as the Head; and the "exceeding greatness of the power" which lifted Him from the grave to the throne, and "put all things under his feet," is to be exercised to place beside Him every unit of that blood-bought company.

These, then, are some of the Scriptural statements concerning the goal to which grace will conduct the people of God. But by what road must they travel to reach this goal? What are the means by which the ends of grace are achieved?

In the first place, the purposes of grace are wrought out in perfect consonance with righteousness and truth. It is the repeated affirmation of the Scriptures that in all God's dealings with men no principle of holiness or justice is ever violated. It is so in the justifying of the sinner; it is not less so in the glorifying of the saint. "We know," says the Apostle, "that the judgment of God is according to truth . . . who will render to every man according to his works; to them that by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor, and immortality, eternal life; but to them who are factious and obey not the truth shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish" (Rom. 2:2-9, R. V.). No man is justified by his works; his own holiness is no title to heaven; yet among all those who shall share the heavenly glory there shall not be found one who did not on earth repent of sin, and set his feet upon the King's highway. "Be not deceived," says the Apostle again, in writing to the Galatians, "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8). No other highway but that of holiness can terminate in resurrection life. No "worker of iniquity" shall be recognized by Christ as His own when He returns.

Further, the purposes of grace are effected by means of the diligence, the whole-souled earnestness of the believer, in-wrought by the Spirit of God. There is perhaps no scripture which sets forth this fact more vividly than the utterance of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:8-14. "I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. . . . I count not myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (R.V.)

No doctrine of Scripture is clearer than that if a man attains to the "resurrection from among the dead," it is due, not to his own efforts, but to the divine mercy. Eternal life of the body, no less than that of the soul, is the gift of God. Nevertheless it is by the path of eager earnestness, willing self-sacrifice, the spirit of the runner speeding on toward the prize, that the God-given end is attained. It is thus a man works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, while it is God who is working in him to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13). "Fight the good fight of faith," the Apostle writes to Timothy, using the same athletic figure as in the Philippian passage, "lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called" (1 Tim. 6:12). Strive, he says in effect, like the wrestler or racer who calls forth every energy of brawn and brain; "agonize" in the holy contest, and lay hold of resurrection as the victor seizes the crown. It was not that the end was uncertain. The sovereign grace of God had called Timothy to eternal life; but not through indolence was the purpose to be fulfilled. Conflict with the body, wrestling with spirits of evil, resistance of the world, fervent labor in prayer--through such "agonia" as these lay for Timothy the pathway to the glory. "He that cometh to God," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaking with reference to the translation of

Enoch, " must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Further still, the purposes of grace are fulfilled through the endurance of suffering borne for Christ's sake. Persecution, in greater or lesser degree, is the inevitable lot of the true disciple. "If they have persecuted me they will persecute you." So said our Lord. By much tribulation must the Kingdom be entered. If any man will not take up his cross and follow Christ he cannot be His disciple. It is the man who endures testing, and endures it to the end, who shall receive the crown of life (Matt. 24:13; James 1:12). "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together," is not a qualifying clause threatening some of God's children with the loss of their birthright, but it is a declaration that for all the heavenly family the way of the cross is the only way to the crown.

Finally--nor is this fact the least important--the purposes of grace are wrought out by means of the obedience of the Lord's people to the admonitions of His holy Word. Believers are matured in holiness by being warned concerning the consequences of spiritual declension, as well as by being instructed in the blessings of obedience. Exhortations not to draw back, to hold fast their profession, to take heed lest there be an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, are means continually used by the Holy Spirit for the preservation of His people. The saints who are alive when Christ returns will be saved from the Day of the Lord overtaking them as a thief, not by any mechanical or unnatural methods, but by being led of the Spirit to heed His counsels against spiritual surfeiting and drunkenness, and by obeying His exhortations not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober. The solemn warnings associated with the Lord's return are not contradictions or modifications of the purposes of grace; they form part of the very means by which those purposes are wrought out.

So, then, the believer is "to go to both extremes." He may rest with triumphant security in all that grace assures. Let him not be hardened or terrified by fears of being left behind when Christ comes for His own, or weighed down with dread that he shall not sit down with the Lord on His throne. He is the heir of covenant blessings. Let the child of God rejoice in these with all his heart. Then let him give himself, with all diligence, to observe whatsoever the Lord has spoken, and to walk in the path by which the covenant blessings are obtained. Let no man vainly imagine that if he dallies with sin, and folds his hands in spiritual slumber, if he shuns the cross, and habitually disobeys the Word, he belongs to some order of "low-level Christians," who, although missing certain blessings, shall yet find heaven at last. Let such a one look to his very beginnings, for assuredly the Spirit of Christ is not in him. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His, and, Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting . . . to such as keep His covenant and to those that remember His commandments to do them."

VIII. The Imminence Of The Lord's Coming

In one of his Epistles the Apostle Paul makes use of the word "Maranatha"--an Aramaic expression signifying "The Lord is at hand." This expression was apparently an early Christian watch-word, used not only in reference to the spiritual presence of the Lord with His people, but in reference also to the proximity

of His personal return. That such a watch-word should be adopted by these early believers clearly indicates the teaching current amongst them. "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh," "the end of all things is at hand"--such utterances were manifestly integral portions of the Apostolic doctrine of the Lord's Return. It is necessary, therefore, in the consideration of this great theme, to ascertain in what sense this quality of Imminence, or nearness, is to be attributed to the Coming of the Lord.

In the pursuit of the enquiry, certain facts must be borne in mind. The first is that the Lord Himself definitely taught that His Coming would be long delayed. In Matthew 24 we have the following utterance recorded: "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming and shall begin . . . to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The evil servant here is clearly a professed, but unregenerate, follower of Christ, to whom is meted out the special judgment which falls on those who are "tares" amongst the "wheat." His portion is appointed, not with the ungodly world, but with the hypocrites. Having no grace in his heart, he fails in the day of testing, and gives way to the moral surfeiting and drunkenness by which he is surrounded. But the occasion of his falling is the prolonged absence of his lord. His wickedness does not consist in saying "My lord delayeth his coming"--for therein he states the fact--but in yielding to the temptation to which the fact gives rise.

In the parable of the Virgins, which follows in chapter 25, the Lord again refers to the delay of His return. "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept." It may be that these words were uttered as a forewarning that the church would soon lose that alertness to the "blessed hope" which characterized the first generation of believers, That such was the case we know to be sadly true. From an early period to late post-reformation times the doctrine of the Lord's Coming as a practical factor in Christian life almost disappeared. But here, as before, that which would give occasion for this condition of oblivion is stated to be the Lord's delay.

Finally, in the parable of the Talents we have the passage, "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh." The words admit of no misunderstanding. They clearly affirm that the season of the Lord's absence would be, so far as men measure years, a protracted period.

The second fact to be borne in mind is that the two Apostles who wrote most fully concerning the Lord's Return knew it would not take place during their life-time. To Peter the Lord was pleased to say, "When thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." "This spake he," John adds, "signifying by what death he should glorify God" (John 21:18, 19). In this utterance Peter was told two things: first, that he would live to be old, and, second, that during the lengthened period of his earthly pilgrimage the Lord would not return. How or when a similar knowledge came to the Apostle Paul we are not told. We find him referring, in his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus, to events which would take place in the church after his death. It may be that his acquaintance with

prophecy led him to see that he could not expect to live to the Lord's Return or he may have known the fact by special revelation. In any event he knew, like Peter, that the Lord's Coming could not immediately take place; like Peter, the resurrection, and not the rapture, was his hope; and, like Peter also, he did not hesitate to acquaint others with the fact.

The third point to be borne in mind is that certain prophecies covering a considerable tract of time were necessarily to be fulfilled before the Lord returned. Daniel's prophecy showed that the ten kingdoms were first to emerge: that scattered Israel were to be restored to their own land and there to enter into covenant with the "prince that shall come." From our Lord's prophecies in Matthew 13 and 24 we see that the professing Church was to develop into a world-power that a system was to be established which would leaven with corrupting error the whole body of Christian truth;⁽⁸⁾ and that in spite of apostasy and error, the Gospel, in some degree of purity, was to be preached in all the world, for a witness to all the nations. Such events could not occur within the lifetime of the first generation.

These facts show that in apostolic days the Lord's Coming was not imminent in point of time. In what sense, then, is the word to be understood? What was the Apostles' meaning when they declared it to be near?

The primary sense in which the Lord's Coming is imminent is that it is the next great event for which to look; the next crisis, introducing a new order, in the history of mankind. However long the present age lasts, it will not vary in its essential characteristics, although toward its close those characteristics will be accentuated. War, pestilence, and earthquake have periodically devastated the earth from the beginning, and will do so to the end. Persecution has been the lot of God's people, and will be their lot again. "As ye have heard that Antichrist shall come," says John even now are there many antichrists." The same beloved disciple could write truly, "It is the last hour," and though that hour has lengthened out, the age is no different in essence today from what it was in the days of the Apostle. There is only one event which will terminate the present order; which will introduce new conditions for the believer, for Israel, for mankind, for all creation: and that is the Coming of the Lord. Between us and it there is no experience which differs in anything, except degree, from that through which the people of God have already passed. In this high sense the Day of the Lord is at hand.

There is, however, a secondary sense in which the Lord's Coming is imminent. After the first generation of believers had passed away, the realization of "the blessed hope" became a possibility in any ordinary lifetime. As we have seen, the Apostles Peter and Paul knew that the Lord would not return in their day; but when their period ended, the prophecies of Daniel and of our Lord might conceivably have been fulfilled within comparatively brief limits, and the Lord have returned. The slow evangelization of the world was no necessity--nor is it still; rather has it been the Church's shame that it has been so long delayed; while the rapidity with which apostasy may develop, or national changes be effected, has again and again been demonstrated. For many centuries now there seems to have been nothing to prevent the ante-Advent prophecies from being fulfilled within a far briefer compass than three score years and ten.

One question remains for consideration. If the early disciples knew that it would not be until "after a long time" the Lord would come; if we today know that, late as it is, certain developments must still take place before He appears; does not this fact rob the great doctrine of its chief interest and moral power? To such a question God has given an answer, complete and final. Two apostles definitely knew that they would pass, not by translation, but by death, into the Lord's presence. Yet to both the Lord's Coming was the glorious event on which their hearts were set; the hope that lightened their labor and enriched their life. Peter joyously speaks of "the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"; he exhorts believers to endure because their faith shall be found "to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"; he persuades his brethren to "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" he consoles suffering saints with the prospect of being "glad with exceeding joy" at the unveiling of the glory of their Lord; he holds up before the elders the crown of glory," that the Chief Shepherd shall bestow at His appearing. Let these passages, from his first Epistle, and the whole triumphant and urgent third chapter of his second Epistle, be read and pondered, and it will be seen how little the moral power of the Lord's Coming over the believers is affected by a knowledge of preceding events. But more. We have said that the exact period when Paul first knew that resurrection and not rapture should be his lot, is not told us; but that he certainly knew it while at Ephesus. After leaving Ephesus he wrote, amongst others, the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians; the two Epistles to Timothy, and the Epistle to Titus. Yet in these Epistles we find no dimming of vision concerning the Coming; no less eager an expectancy of its approach; no less keen a sense of its appeal for holiness. His passionate earnestness was never more marked than in his Epistle to the Philippians: "This one thing I do," he cries vehemently; . . . "I press toward the mark for the prize." He knew the Lord would not come in his day, yet he still looked for Him:--"Our city-home" (such is Dr. Moule's beautiful translation of the word), he says, "is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be made like unto the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:20). In the Epistle to the Colossians, "the hope laid up in heaven" is still part of "the truth of the Gospel" (chapter 1:5), and the appearing of the saints with Christ in glory still an incentive to holiness (chapter 3:4, 5). In the letters to Timothy the charge to fidelity is enforced by the majestic utterance concerning the epiphany of Christ (chapter 6:14). It is "that day" to which he looks, as the day of final salvation (2 Tim. 1:12), the day of reward for his brethren (1:18) and for himself, as one who still "loves his appearing" (4:8). In the Epistle to Titus--written by the man who knew that no watch of evening, or midnight, or cock-crowing, or the morning, should bring to him the vision of the returning Lord--is found the phrase most endeared to lovers of the Lord's return: "looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (chapter 2:13).

"Looking for that blessed hope." It is the Coming itself, not the method of it, nor what lies between, that fills the vision of the believer. In that Coming is found the crown of all his blessing, the consummation of all that he has longed for. To reach that goal, "it were a well spent journey, though deaths oft lie between."

IX. Israel

In the background of the prophecies concerning the Lord's Return which we have passed in review, we have seen continually the shadow of the sorrows of Israel. Jerusalem "trodden down of the Gentiles"; the

"abomination of desolation" in the holy place; the "great tribulation such as was not since creation"; these are the sad words with which we have become familiar; words interwoven alike with the story of Israel and the Coming of the Lord.

In the parable of the Wedding Feast, recorded in Matthew 22, our Lord foretold the destruction of Jerusalem as a judgment directly resulting from the national rejection of the Gospel. "They made light of it, and went their way . . . and the rest laid hold of his servants, and entreated them shamefully, and killed them. But the king was wroth and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." The same sin, and the same judgment were foretold in the older prophecy of Daniel. "The anointed one (shall) be cut off, and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (chapter 9:26, R.V.). In the "cutting off" of Messiah we have a clear foreshadowing of the rejection and death of the Lord Jesus, while the "people who destroy city and sanctuary" are equally clearly the Roman forces, before whom Jerusalem and the Temple fell. With these two tragic events--the rejection of their King, and its terrible national sequel--the modern history of Israel began. Called out to be a channel of blessing to mankind; a people "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises "; they yet rejected their Savior, and fought against the purposes of God, till judgment came upon them to the uttermost; for, like Assyria of old, Rome was but God's battle axe and weapon of war. From that day onward Israel has been without king or country, without temple or sacrifice; wandering in all lands and finding a home in none.

But it is not always so to be. This nation, so highly honored, so deeply guilty, so sorely punished, is to be restored. In the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle is led of God to state this with a fullness and lucidity which admit of no question. He commences by propounding the great enquiry "I say then, Hath God cast away his people?" and answers with a vehement negative. "God forbid!" he cries, "for I also am an Israelite . . . God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew." His argument seems to be that the greater includes the less; if God has cast off the nation He has cast off every member of it; but this He manifestly has not done, for the Apostle was himself one of the chosen race. The true force of his answer, however, lies below the surface. As Saul of Tarsus he had been, in a peculiar sense, a type of unbelieving Israel. He had not merely refused the Gospel; he had bent all the passionate energy of his nature towards compassing its destruction. He had persecuted the saints, "even to strange cities." Yet the sovereign grace of God had laid hold of him and made him to be a preacher of the faith he once destroyed. "The chief of sinners" became the Apostle who "labored more abundantly than they all." And herein (so he declared later in writing to Timothy), he was again a type of those who should afterward believe (1 Tim. 1:16). As God had done for him so would He do, in His own good time, for Israel. He was one "born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:4), born that is, before his time; a pledge and earnest that his people also should be, in days to come, partakers of the saving grace of God; converted, as he, by the sight of the Lord, appearing in bodily glory.

This is his first answer. But he repeats his question in another form:--"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?" They had stumbled at Christ, as Isaiah had foretold; were they in consequence to fall utterly, to lose all place in the plan and history of redemption? "God forbid!" the Apostle cries again; "but

through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." The wedding feast was prepared, and when the bidden guests refused to come, the King sent his servants to gather in, from the highways of the Gentile world, as many as they could find; so that, if it were possible, the Jew might be filled with a holy envy. (Alas, that there should have been so little in Gentile Christianity to recommend Christ to the Jew!) "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world," he continues, "and the diminishing of them be the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?" God has overruled their defection for good; but what good shall He not effect through their repentance and restoration? The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the mightiest apologetic for the Gospel the world had ever seen. It became a factor of immeasurable force in the evangelization of mankind. If the winning of one member of the Chosen race to Christ was productive of such beneficent results, what shall issue from the conversion of the whole nation?

The Apostle resumes: "If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy so are the branches." The firstfruit of the dough, in the Levitical economy, consecrated the whole mass; and in Abraham the whole nation was sanctified, set apart for the redemptive purposes of God. Let the Gentile remember--so the Apostle goes on to say--that the "breaking off" of some of the unbelieving "branches" did not alter the divine method of saving mankind. "Salvation is of the Jews." The church of God is far older than the day of Pentecost. From Abraham, "the root," grew the "olive tree" of Israel; and the "mystery" of the Apostle's teaching was not that some new body was to be formed, separate from, and superior to, the old covenant saints; but that the Gentiles should be "grafted in" among them, and be partakers of "the root and fatness." If any man be Christ's then is he Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29). Let the Gentile remember this, and keep his place. "If some of the branches were broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches . . . thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. . . For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles"--the complete number whom grace, in this dispensation, shall save--"be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer" (or as in Isaiah 49, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion") "and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Such shall be the happy issue of the sorrows of Israel. But it is ever darkest before the dawn, and the breaking of Israel's day will be preceded by an hour of darkness, the most intense and awful that this suffering nation has ever known. We have already referred to the prophecy in Daniel 9:26, 27, in which the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is foretold. In the same passage the prophetic gaze sweeps onward to a period which, even in these late days, is still future. We read of "a prince that shall come," and this prince is none other than that sinister figure presented in vision to Daniel as the little horn springing up amid the ten; cruel, blasphemous and powerful. Of him, we are told (verse 27, R. V.), "He shall make a firm covenant with many for one week." (The word translated "week" means a period of seven, whether of days, weeks, months, or years; here evidently denoting seven years). The clear inference is that this king cruel as he shall be, will not appear hostile to Israel at first, but will enter into a solemn compact to protect them, and to encourage their worship according to their own law. "But in the midst of the week"--that is, after three years and a half--"he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of abomination shall be that which causeth

desolation" (R. V. margin)--in other words, the prince, in violation of his treaty, will forbid the worship of God, and set up in some conspicuous place in the temple, as other prophecies have shown us, an idolatrous image. From that moment begins the great tribulation which precedes the Lord's return.--It may here be observed that these prophecies all presuppose a restoration of Israel to their own land, in unbelief; a rebuilt temple, and re-established sacrifice. Every political, national, or social movement, therefore, which tends thitherward, is a finger steadily pointing to the end.

The prophecy concludes with a brief statement concerning the certainty of the prince's doom. "The consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolator." That he should be destroyed by special judgment of God we learnt from Daniel's vision of the four beasts, and from the Apostle Paul. In the Book of the Revelation, details of that judgment are given. "I saw," says the Apostle John in chapter 16:13, R.V., "coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as it were frogs; for they are the spirits of devils, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God the Almighty." This will be the last Satan-inspired effort of the terrible prince, as leader of the great confederacy of kings. Summoning their armies to Megiddo (the Armageddon of verse 16) to lead them against the barbarian "kings of the East," it will come into his heart to blot Jerusalem from the face of the earth; and marching them southward to the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3) he will seek to effect his deadly purpose. Then shall "the Redeemer come to Zion" (Isa. 49:20). Then shall "the Lord go forth to fight against those nations as He fought in the day of battle, and His feet shall stand that day upon the Mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:3, 4). "I saw," says John again, "heaven opened, and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth he judge and make war . . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army. And the beast was taken . . . and cast alive into the lake of fire . . . and the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat on the horse" (Rev. 19).

We see, then, the final form man's wickedness will take; the final abuse of ruling power entrusted to Gentile hands. It will all culminate in an effort to exterminate Israel--Israel, in whom are enwrapped God's purposes; Israel, who, penitent, converted, restored, shall be God's channel of grace to the nations in a measure as yet unknown. To seek Israel's destruction, therefore, will be a Satanic effort to turn back temporal and eternal salvation from the nations of the earth. This will be the sin that shall call forth the long-restrained anger of heaven; and He who died upon the Cross shall come again to tread the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God; and in that supreme moment of deliverance to turn the heart of Israel to Himself forever. "I will pour upon . . . the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn . . . and the land shall mourn, every family apart" (Zech. 12:10). Tribulation shall have done its bitter, but salutary, work; another Elijah-ministry shall have turned the people to God (Rev. 11); the Spirit of truth shall take the veil from their hearts (2 Cor. 3:16); and in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood shall their sin be washed away (Zech. 13:1).

Thus to that land, where a manger cradled Him; to that land where Jewish unbelief delivered Him to die

beneath Rome's iron hand, shall He return. Nor shall He come alone. As He descends He shall utter His voice that wakes the dead and transfigures the living. His mighty trumpet shall summon His saints to share His glory, and fall into rank beside Him. Inseparably linked with Israel's conversion is the fulfilment of the believer's hope. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory" (Ps. 112:16). The hour of Israel's deliverance is the hour when the saints shall be raised:--"At that time thy people shall be delivered, and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12:1, 2). When the veil is taken from Israel's heart, Isaiah declares, God shall "swallow up death in victory"--a prophecy coming to pass, Paul tells us, at the first resurrection (Isa. 25:7, 8, and 1 Cor. 15:54). Then, too, shall angelic ministers separate the true from the false, in every land where Christ's name shall be professed, casting the false into the outer darkness, and gathering the true, shining like the sun, to the side of the Lord; and with His glittering train He shall move onward to deliverance and victory. "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with Thee." All that has been seen in heavenly vision, all that prophecy and parable have foretold, shall surely come to pass. The Stone cut out without hands shall smite the Image on its feet; pride and cruelty, wicked power and lawless rule, shall be driven away, like the chaff of the threshing-floor; the Stone shall become a Mountain and fill the whole earth.

X. Endnotes

(1) The Image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream sets forth, primarily, the quality of rule exercised by the various world-powers with which the prophecy deals. Nebuchadnezzar's government was an absolute autocracy, and (so far) most like the government of God. The power exercised by the Medo-Persian kings was limited (contrast Daniel 5:19 and 6:14, 15) while, therefore the first was symbolized by gold, the second was symbolized by a less precious metal, silver. This process of limitation continued, till in the later stages of the Roman empire the form of government indicated by the mixture of iron and clay was reached. It is only in a very general sense that the Image is to be interpreted chronologically.

(2) Manifestly the kingdom here prophesied was not the spiritual "kingdom of God's dear Son" which was introduced among men by the Gospel, and which exists side by side with earthly rule, To be a subject of Christ's kingdom today in nowise interferes with submission to rightful human authority, The kingdom foreseen by Daniel was to displace all earthly rule, and to destroy it by violent and sudden judgment. The strong imagery admits of no other interpretation.

(3) See Tregelles on Daniel, page 70, (note).

(4) This sign is carefully to be distinguished from that given in Luke 21:20-24. An idolatrous image set up in the temple is given as the one; the encompassing armies outside the city, the other. The warning to flee is attached to both, but there the similarity ends. Moreover, if the destruction of Jerusalem was the fulfilment of Matthew 24:5-22, the Second Advent has already taken place, for we read "immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." That Christ did come a second time at that period, is indeed argued by some; but it is not admitted by most students of Scripture.

(5) This is the rendering suggested by the late Mr. B. W. Newton. The Greek is "eos ek mesou genetai," literally, "until out of the midst it become." The writer may venture to add that while he does not find himself in complete agreement with all that is to be found in Mr. Newton's writings, he regards his teaching on the subject of the Lord's Return (and on many other subjects) as singularly Scriptural and compelling.

(6) In every case where the typical significance of leaven is clearly stated in Scripture, it bears a bad sense. This fact, together with the general trend of teaching in the Parables in Matthew 13 compels us to regard leaven as the type of corrupting error in verse 33.

(7) The probable order of that swift and solemn judgment will be, first, the changing of true believers into the glorified image of Christ; then, the gathering of unchanged professors of religion out of their midst as tares, in bundles to burn them; " and, finally, the gathering of the ' wheat "--the true believers--into the barn."

(8) We believe these two parables to refer primarily to the governmental and doctrinal corruption of the church under the Roman bishops.

END

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