

GAEBELEIN

ARNO

CLEMENS

STUDIES IN PROPHECY

Arno Gaebelein
Studies in Prophecy

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Arno Clemens Gaebelein

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FOREWORD

BY C. I. SCOFIELD

The present interest in prophetic studies, due to a world-situation so unprecedented as to have no historic parallels upon which a shallow optimism may build futile hopes, is in every way to be welcomed and encouraged. It surely is a divine provision for such a day as this that for the last fifty years the prophetic word has been under the sane and patient study of so many men of devout and trained minds. Amongst these the author of this book has won a foremost place. At the farthest possible remove from fanciful and radical methods of interpretation, the conclusions which he has reached and which are set forth in this book are trustworthy. The reader may be assured that he will reach truly Biblical views of those things which are coming to pass with startling rapidity.

Douglaston, L. I., N. Y.

THE PRESENT AGE: ITS BEGINNING, PROGRESS AND END

Ecclesiastes i:9

The Book of Ecclesiastes is the Book in which the natural man speaks. The conclusion which the wisest man reached is that all is vanity, and there is nothing new under the sun. In this first chapter we read of generations which come and go. The sun rises and goes down; the wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about to the north again, according to its circuits. The rivers go into the sea, and to the place where they come from they again return. All moves in nature in cycles. What has been is always to be again, and what was done will be done again.

This is likewise true in respect to God's dealings with man and with the earth. That which has been shall be; and what was done will be done again.

The future will repeat the past,
As the first, shall be the last;
Ages of change between.

Once the earth was undefiled by sin. It was the Paradise of God. For a brief period it knew no sorrow, no suffering, no curse and no death. That is what has been; but it shall surely be again. Creation will have a second birth, and after its travail pains, death and the curse will flee away. Once peace reigned, no strife was known and no groans heard in all creation's realm. That is what has been; it shall be so again. Groaning creation will be delivered; peace on earth and glory to God in the highest will follow.

Once man, the first man, unfallen, reigned. All things were under his feet. That has been before sin stripped man of his inheritance. But what has been, is that which shall be. The second man, the last Adam, will appear, and under Him man redeemed will again have all things put under his feet. What has been in the past shall be in the future.

God executed his judgments in the past. He will do so again. The past has manifested His power and glory; so will the future. The heavens will not always be silent as they are now; for "Surely our God shall come, and not keep silence."

His blessed Son was once upon earth, making known the glory of God in His Person. That was in the past, and it shall be so again; for He comes back to the earth once more to make known His glory, so that the earth shall be covered with the glory of the Lord.

How near, how very near, these things that shall be are! The age in which we live is the last stepping stone towards the glorious consummation; and in this age there is but a little step left, and soon darkest night shall end and give way to the brightest and most glorious day the world has ever seen. In these studies of Prophecy we shall first consider the present age, its beginning, progress and end. Other studies will put before us from the infallible Word of God the coming glorious consummation and what leads up to it.

I

The Beginning of the Age. In dealing with man and the earth, to work out his own plan of redemption and restoration, God works in certain periods of time which are called ages. Each age has a definite beginning and a definite end. All the different ages which preceded our own age were ages of preparation, for the present age in which we live. In every past age God announced the coming of Him by whom He not only created all things, but by whom He made the ages, that is, His Son. He is the One in whom and for whom all is planned, and through whom the things which have been shall be again, and infinitely more.

He was first announced in the Garden of Eden as the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head. In the age after the flood Shem was singled out in whom the Name, that is, the Lord of Glory, should be revealed. Then Abraham, a son of Shem received the promise in the Patriarchal Age that He would come from his seed; and later in the Jewish Age He was promised as the Son of David, and David knew Him by the Spirit as his Lord.

And so in the fulness of time He came, born of a woman, made under the Law, the Son of God manifested in the flesh. His blessed earth life belongs still to the Jewish dispensation, the age which preceded our own age. He came as the minister of the circumcision; and as such He fulfilled the Law and moved exclusively among His own people Israel, bringing them the message of the Kingdom promised to that nation; a Kingdom in which righteousness and peace is to flourish, and into which all the nations of the earth are to be gathered.

The Jewish prophets had announced that Kingdom, but through God's foreknowledge it was also made known that Christ should suffer first, and be rejected by His people; and this came to pass. The nation instead of giving Him the throne to which He is entitled, delivered their own King into the hands of the Gentiles to be crucified. What Gabriel in his great message had communicated to Daniel, that Messiah should be cut off and receive nothing, happened, and that in the very time as revealed in the ninth chapter of Daniel. The Son of God died, rejected by His own nation, He died the sinner's death, He died for the ungodly, He died so that the flood-gates of Divine love and grace might be opened; and that a Holy God might be justified in saving believing sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, and making them the heirs of glory.

Our age then begins with this fact: Christ rejected by His own people, cast out by the world, finishing on the Cross the work of sin bearing. With this, and the associated events, our age started in. Let us see then what we find in the beginning of this age, and then see how the things we shall mention are affected as this age progresses and comes finally to its close.

First, as to the Lord Jesus Christ. As we have already stated, the Son of God came to this earth, was rejected by men, put to death on the cross, and after His burial God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. In due time He left the earth and ascended in His glorified human body into heaven, where He is seated now at the right hand of the majesty on high. It is a wonderful fact that in heaven, seated at God's own right hand, there is a Man. One who was born of the Virgin, lived on earth a holy life, died the sinner's death on the Cross, was buried and raised by the power of God. Before this age He was also in heaven, but not as man. He was ever in the bosom of the Father as the Only Begotten. Now as the Man Christ Jesus who has conquered He fills that throne, the Father's throne. He has not His own throne which belongs to Him, nor will He get this throne, the throne of His father David, as long as this age lasts. Exalted in the highest place He has all power, and exercises in behalf of His people, His priesthood and His advocacy, ministering to the needs of His own on earth.

Second, let us see next about the Holy Spirit in His relation to this age. He came to earth on the day of Pentecost. In the Old Testament times He visited the earth, but not to abide, as is now the case. He strove with men from the very beginning, He endued prophets, and priests and kings, and all who believed the Word of God, of which He is the Author; but after Christ died and had gone back

to the Father, He came as the other Comforter, the One who takes the place of the absent Christ. He is come to earth to accomplish God's purpose in this present age. Nowhere do we read in the New Testament that the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to convert the world, and establish universal righteousness and peace. These blessings are not promised for the age in which we live. The great purpose for which the Spirit of God came in the beginning of our age is for the out-taking of the Church, the Body of Christ. He is gathering together Jews and Gentiles who believe on Christ and puts them into this Body. On the Day of Pentecost this Body began; then all the gathered believers were baptised by the One Spirit into one Body. This work continues throughout this age. Then He Himself bestows the gifts which are needed for the upbuilding of that Body. In the beginning of this age He unfolded His special energy in sign gifts, confirming by these the truth of Christianity. These special gifts and signs were only confined to the beginning of the age. Nowhere is it stated that they were to continue to the end, for this age is an age of faith and not of sight.

Third, during this age there is preached a special message which was unknown in former ages. This message is the Gospel of Grace. It is true that before Christ died an innumerable company of people were saved, and salvation of course was always by grace. They believed God, confessed themselves sinners, trusted in the promise, and then they were saved. But the Gospel message as it began to be preached after Christ died and the Holy Spirit came to earth, was not known in Old Testament times. That Gospel not only offers remission of sins, but tells the believing sinner that he becomes in Christ a Son of God and a joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ; that eternal life is his present possession and that he is one spirit with the Lord, for the Holy Spirit makes His abode in him. This then is the great message which was preached with the beginning of this age, and which is to be preached to its very end. It is the only power of God unto salvation, and anything else is a miserable, good-for-nothing substitute and counterfeit, which not alone cannot please God, but upon which the curse of God rests; for anything short of the Gospel of Christ is an insult to God and a denial of His righteousness and love. And this Gospel is to be preached according to the word of our Lord beginning in Jerusalem, in Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost ends of the earth. This Divine program given by our Lord has been carried out; the preaching began in Jerusalem, that is where the Gospel stream started; from there it flowed into Judea and Samaria, and then Gentiles heard the Gospel and were saved. Our Lord indicated this world-wide sowing during this age in the first parable of Matthew xiii, when He spoke of the sower going out into the field, telling us that the field is the world. Israel in the preceding age was spoken of as a vineyard with a fence about, but in this age there is no more vineyard, no more special place where labor is to be done; but as John Wesley used to say, "The world is my parish."

Fourth, let us also notice that with the beginning of the age there is made known the full Truth of God by revelation. It is the faith which is once and for all delivered unto the saints. When our Lord was on earth He spoke repeatedly to His disciples that He had many things to say unto them, which they could not grasp, but that they should know them afterward. The "afterward" does not mean heaven, but it means the afterward of the Holy Spirit. He told them that when the Spirit came He would take of these things of Christ and show them unto them; and so when He came He brought with Him the fullest revelation concerning Christ Himself, the believer's position in Him and all the gracious truths connected with it. In this sense, the Word of God was completed in the beginning of this age. Nothing can be added to it, nor must anything be taken away from it. There is no such thing as progress in the Truth of God, that man by research can discover something for himself, as he attempts to do in the different sciences. The Truth and doctrine made known in the beginning of this age is a fixed Truth, it is eternal Truth, it is unchangeable Truth, and as such the only light which man has during this age.

Fifth, as to the moral characteristics of this age. The Apostle John tells us that the world lieth in the wicked one, and that the character of the world is antagonistic to the Word of God. The age therefore is branded in every portion of the New Testament as an evil age. Certain exhortations to

believers make this clear. All exhortations in the New Testament to Christians are exhortations to separate from this age. In the beginning of Galatians we are expressly told that the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us out of this present evil age. Then again we read what Paul wrote to Titus that the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men, teaching us that we should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. This shows that the present age is evil.

And nowhere is the promise made in the Epistles that this present age can ever be anything different than an evil age. It continues evil to the end.

Sixth, what is the relation of Satan to our age? He is the enemy of God, and seemingly achieved a triumph when he got man to reject the Lord of Glory. On this account He is called in the New Testament "the god of this age." He is the domineering spirit of the age in which we live, which is also called Man's Day. Christ is rejected, with no throne on earth, but Satan instead has his throne in this world and controls the affairs of the age. That this is so may be seen from the very events with which this age started. Persecution soon set in, believers were slain, and in every other way this dark shadow antagonized the work of the Spirit and counterfeited the Truth of God. Therefore the spiritual warfare of believers in this age is to stand against the wiles of the devil, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirits in the heavenly places. (Eph. vi:12). From this we learn that the age is ruled over by Satan and the wicked spirits.

Seventh, there is another item which needs to be mentioned in connection with the beginning of this age, and that is the Jewish people. Their measure of wickedness was filled when they delivered the Son of God into the hands of the Gentiles to be crucified. God in mercy lingered over the city for forty years before the announced judgment was executed upon the city and upon the nation. Thousands upon thousands repented and accepted the Gospel; in fact, the beginning of the entire Church was Jewish. But the nation hardened its heart, and finally the tears which the Lord had shed over Jerusalem were justified in the awful siege of Jerusalem, followed by the dispersion of the nation. Ever since they have been in fulfillment of the predictions of their own prophets, scattered amongst the nations of the world, and this is continuing throughout this age.

We see then that there is a marked difference between this age and the ages which preceded it. Christ as the glorified Man in heaven, the Holy Spirit on earth, a new message, a new work which the Spirit of God does, the full revelation of God given to men, the world in darkness, Satan its god, and the Jews no longer in their land but wandering amongst the nations with judicial blindness upon them.

II

The Progress of the Age. This present age is unrevealed in the Old Testament. When Daniel received the great prophecy which Gabriel carried from the Throne of God to the praying Prophet, he heard that at a certain time the death of Christ should take place, and that the city and the sanctuary should be burned, and the nation scattered. This was at the close of the sixty-ninth week, four hundred and eighty-three years after the command to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem had been given. As we have shown in our book on Daniel this has been literally fulfilled, and as all students of prophecy know there is an unfulfilled week, or seven years, which are yet to come to pass in the history of that nation. The space between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week is this present age. Nor is there anywhere in the Word of God a revelation which tells us of the duration of this age. There is no hint about it in the Old Testament; and when the disciples asked the Lord about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, which manifestly takes place at the close of this age, He told them, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons." It is therefore useless trying to find out about the duration of the age.

But when we come to the moral and religious characteristics, in connection with the progress of this age, it is different. They are fully revealed by the Lord and also by His Spirit. Especially is this true of the very end of this age. Twice our Lord spoke on these matters, once on earth when He gave the Kingdom parables in Matthew xiii and spoke of the progress of the age and what should take place during His absence. Again He spoke from heaven about these same things, when He gave the messages to the seven churches. In them He outlined the course of the professing church on earth, and reveals in it what is to take place during the progress of this age.

We shall cover the same seven things which we have mentioned in connection with the beginning of this age, and learn how they are affected as this age progresses and nears its end.

First, as to the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Enthroned in the highest glory He can never be affected by what is going on down here. Satan's power cannot reach Him. The Lord Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Whatever man does on earth, however great the hatred may be against Him, even if the nations unite to cast off His cords and bands, in the language of the second Psalm, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them and hold them in derision." But there is a comforting truth in connection with this, the comfort of which has been the blessed portion of all God's people as the age progressed, and its true character became more and more known. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me," was the word the Lord Jesus addressed to the persecutor of the Church of God. It shows His loving interest and sympathy for His suffering members on earth. And so as the age progressed in the pagan persecutions and the equally bad, if not worse, Papal persecutions, He has sustained His people on earth, He has never failed them, He has carried them through the water and through the fire. He has presented their petitions before the Throne of God, and answered their prayers. Nor will He ever fail His people until they are gathered home into His presence, the trophies of His grace.

Second. Nor can the Holy Spirit and His work be affected by what the progress of this age brings. He knows no failure. His Divine mission cannot fail. In every generation during this age, no matter how dark it may have been, He has continued successfully His work and added to the Body of Christ, in each generation those who believed on the Son of God.

Third and Fourth, as to the Gospel and the Truth of God it is different, for we shall notice here at once what the progress of the age has brought about in connection with what God has given to this age. Our Lord tells us in the second parable, in Matthew xiii, that no sooner had the wheat, the Truth, been sown in the field, which is the world, but that an enemy came and sowed the tares. Then He revealed this fact that the wheat and the tares were to grow together until the harvest, which is the end of the age. There is then a development in the progress of this age, a development in the wheat, which is ripening for the harvest, and the development of the tares. The Truth is to shine more brightly as the age progresses, and darkness becomes more dense. We see therefore that after a brief

period of purity the evil began in the professing church. The Gospel, even in Apostolic days was being denied, and the Apostles' doctrines corrupted.

What the Lord Jesus taught in the parable of the mustard seed came also to pass as the age progressed. The little mustard seed became a great tree, and the birds began to lodge in its branches to defile the tree. The professing church became a great world institution, and in alliance with the world where the throne of Satan is, became corrupted; instead of being the espoused virgin, she became the harlot and adultress. What the Lord Jesus announced in the Parable of the leaven came likewise to pass as this age progressed. The leaven, which is corruption, evil in every form, especially in Christian doctrine, has been introduced into the pure doctrine of Christ, the three measures of fine wheat.

And so we see that as the age progressed the rejection of every phase of Divine Truth set in. The Deity of Christ denied, the Virgin Birth, His atoning death, His physical resurrection, everything denied; the Bible as the revelation of God rejected; and with these denials there came the increase of unrighteousness and moral declension, till the age produced the condition which the Word of God clearly foresaw, a great professing church, with the harlot character, unfaithful to Christ and to His Word; while of course it is equally true that there is the true Church, which remains true to Christ and to His Word.

Fifth, as the age progresses there is no change seen in the condition of the world. It is true man has been developing Man's Day. As the age progressed great inventions and discoveries were made. These are often taken to be indications that the age is getting better. They point to the telephone, and wireless, the great engineering feats, the chemical discoveries, and everything else in these lines as evidences that the age is constantly improving. Before the war we were told that the age had improved to such an extent that a great war would no longer be possible. Everybody was lauding our great civilization to the skies. A few weeks after everything was knocked sky-high, and what is left of all these optimistic ramblings? No, this age does not improve, and everything which the Word of God has to say about it has been solemnly verified and confirmed by the roar of cannons and by the slaughter of millions. Our great inventions and discoveries have not made the world more righteous. On the contrary, unrighteousness and lawlessness have increased, and later we shall show how everything in these conditions points to the very end of this age.

Sixth, Satan. The world does not change, neither does Satan. He can never be anything else but the enemy of God, nor can his person and work be arrested by man's efforts. As the age continues his opposition becomes more marked. We know from the lips of our Lord that he is the liar and the murderer from the beginning. He has made good these titles throughout this age. He tried to stamp out more than once the Truth of Christ by instigating the cruel persecutions of the people of God. They were slain by the thousands and hundreds of thousands during the reign of the Roman Emperors. When he failed in this then he manifested his character as the liar from the beginning. He began to counterfeit the Truth, and partially succeeded in corrupting the professing church and putting a spurious system in control, where he makes good his title as the liar. When in the progress of this age the Spirit of God began reviving the Truth, when the noble men and women refused to bow before Rome, he again acted as the murderer. Thousands upon thousands were tortured, slain, and burned alive, until he discovered that the Truth cannot be stamped out by the fires of persecution, that he was failing again as he had failed in the first century of the age. Then once more he appears in the garb of an angel of light. Now he does his work through demon-cults like Christian Science, Spiritism, Mormonism and others. He manifests himself once more as the liar from the beginning in the New Theology and the Destructive Criticism, so widely accepted everywhere. And thus he continues his work as the age progresses; no change for the better.

Seventh, as already stated the Jews are wanderers amongst the nations. We know two things concerning the Jews. The first is that they are given the promise in earthly things, and though they are now blinded, God has not cast them away; and the other is that they are during this age under judgment. These two facts stand out in the history of that remarkable people as the age continues. If

we want to see the richest people, the most influential, the brightest, we must turn to the Jewish people. In that fact God witnesses that they are still His people. And then the greatest sorrow, the greatest suffering, the greatest poverty is found amongst them; the witness that they are under judgment. Over and over again in every century has solemnly come to pass what their forefathers cried, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children." We shall later point out the startling change which is coming upon them as a nation when the age ends.

III

The End of the Age. Like every previous age, our age will also come to a close. It is here we find one of the vital errors amongst Christians at the present time. They never think of this age of Gospel preaching and Gospel privilege as coming to an end. If one speaks to them about the end of the age, they think it means after the world is converted, and the passing away of the world itself. Peter has given us the witness that this would be one of the characteristics of the last days, when mockers shall come, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? for from the day the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." This is what we find so much in our day. In spite of the horrible conditions in which this age has been plunged, and the confirmation of the predictions of the Bible relating to this age, the mass of professing Christians expect that things will continue, and that after the war the age will speedily improve. We have seen before how impossible this is, for the Bible teaches us that this age is an evil age, and there is not a single passage which promises an improvement. On the contrary, everything in the Word shows that as the age ends, and its real end comes, all the evil conditions present in this age come to a head and climax. We find therefore a great deal said in the Scriptures about the end of the age. The Lord Jesus speaks of it in His parables in Matthew xiii. He has given also a complete panorama of the age-ending in His great Olivet discourse. Then when we come to the Epistles we find that the Spirit of God through every writer gives a warning and a witness about the end of the age. All these warnings and witnesses do not tell us of a converted world, and a world which is won to righteousness, of nations who lay down their armaments and no longer make war; nor do these warnings and predictions speak of a triumph of the doctrine of Christ. They tell us the very opposite. They give warnings that the faith is going to be rejected, that delusions and errors are going to multiply, that nation is going to lift up sword against nation and kingdom against kingdom, that lawlessness and unrighteousness are going to increase, and that the age itself is going to end in a time of trouble such as the world has never seen before.

If we turn to the last Book of the Bible we find also an argument concerning the age and its end. Before the heaven opens and He comes, whose right it is to establish His Kingdom over this earth, the wicked and wild conditions prevailing on this earth are described, and that on account of them the judgments of the Lord will be in the earth.

And now to follow the same line of thought as in our preceding meditations, let us again notice the same things which we mentioned before in connection with the beginning and progress of this age.

First, as this age comes to a close Christ is still on the Father's Throne. His ministry in behalf of His people both as Priest and Advocate continues unbroken. He has promised, "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age." We say again, He changes not. As He sustained His people in the beginning of the age and gave them victory, as He kept the feet of His saints in every generation and gathered them home into His own presence, so He will still minister to the needs of His members on earth. Let the age become as dark as it possibly can, His people who trust in Him and walk in His fellowship will be kept and preserved. We do not know all that is going on in glory. We know he is there as the upholder of all things. We know that the greater part of the children of God are as disembodied spirits in His presence. Some day a startling thing will happen in that glory. The hour has come when the redeemed are to have their resurrection bodies, and all the living saints shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. When that hour strikes He Himself will arise from the place at the Father's right hand and pass out of the third heaven, and then from the air give the shout which will summon all the redeemed to meet Him in the sky. For this the people of God are waiting in the end of this age.

Second, the Holy Spirit also remains the same. His energy is undiminished. The work He came to do and which He has done throughout this age, will be done by Him to the very end. Indeed, while darkness increases and the enemy becomes more active, God's people may confidently expect

that the Holy Spirit will also demonstrate His power in the behalf of those who love and walk in the Truth. Some day He will have finished the work for which He came, the Body will be complete as to numbers; and when that crowning event, the coming of the Lord for His saints, takes place, the Holy Spirit will have His part to do. Not alone Christ will present the Church but the Holy Spirit as well; and then He will leave the earth, no longer to be here to do the special work which He came to do on the Day of Pentecost. He has finished the work.

Third, the Gospel is still preached during the end of the age. As long as the Church remains here the true Gospel testimony can never be silenced, because behind it stands the omnipotent Spirit of God and the power of Christ. But as the age closes the true Gospel is being more and more rejected. We see this today; we hear on all hands that man no longer needs to be born again, that the blood of Christ cannot save, that character saves; that the soldiers who die on the battlefield bring a sacrifice like Christ brought on the Cross, and that the hero's death makes all things right in the past life and opens the gates of glory. On all sides we see these rejections; the Son of God is denied and every phase of His work is set aside. This is exactly what is taught in the New Testament, that men would turn away their ears from the Truth, and that the great mass of professing Christians would only have a form of godliness and deny the power thereof.

When at last the Church has ended her ministry the sound of the Gospel of Grace will no longer be heard. While this is true, on the other hand the Gospel still preached up to the end of the age brings about the completion of the Body of Christ. We see this today in a startling manner. While amongst the so-called Christian nations the Gospel is rejected, in heathen countries the Gospel is accepted by thousands upon thousands, and thus the Body of Christ, the true Church, is being made complete.

Fourth, when this age closes the whole body of the doctrine of Christ and the Truth will be rejected. The foundation for this has gradually been laid. It started over a hundred years ago in Germany, where the modern criticism of the Bible started. This criticism has constantly been growing, until everywhere throughout Christendom an infallible Bible is being denied. Thus the foundations of the faith have been undermined, and the way is prepared for the final apostasy, the complete falling away from the Truth.

Fifth, in regard to the world. As stated previously this age cannot get better, but becomes worse. We see it today, how all inventions and discoveries in which we used to boast as evidences of progress are being made use of in the most horrible catastrophe the world has ever seen. Europe is like a human slaughterhouse. Nations are against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms; and all this was started by a nation which boasted of having the most light in religious things and the best culture and civilization. And all along they denied Christ and the Truth of God; and when the outbreak came it was only a demonstration that behind their Christless civilization and culture there stood the domineering shadow of the prince of this world. When we look closer into the Prophetic Word we find that these conditions continue to the end of the age, and that finally there comes a tremendous crash, when the Lord Himself will deal with these horrible conditions and smite the wicked and the ungodly.

But some one might say, "What is the use of doing anything at all if this is the program?" "What is the use of us to fight as a nation?" But this is wrong logic. There are principles of righteousness and justice which must be maintained in this world, for which man must stand up, and as far as our nation is concerned we are on the side of justice and the defense of righteousness, which have the approval of God, for they are in line with His righteous government. When the time comes for the reckoning, not from the human side but from God's side, this will fall heavily into the scale when the nations are judged.

Sixth, as to Satan. Like a huge serpent he has been winding his way throughout this age, leaving everywhere his contamination. While Satan is not omniscient and perfect in knowledge, he has sufficient knowledge of his destiny and how soon that destiny will be accomplished, and so as the age closes he becomes fiercer in his wrath; like a serpent which is attacked and in danger of being caught, his hiss is heard on all sides. He is now actively engaged in counterfeiting the Truth, in putting

in his demon doctrines, in perverting the Truth wherever he can. And by and by after the true Church is gone he will put his masterpieces into the world, of whom we shall have more to say in these studies. Then he will blind the nations as never before and rush them on to the final climax of the age.

Seventh, as to the Jews. We have seen how they were scattered at the beginning of this age, and how they continued to wander amongst the nations as the age progressed. When we come to the end of the age a startling change takes place with His people. The figtree, once cursed, puts forth new leaves; the dry bones of the house of Israel begin to show signs of life. There is a movement amongst them, bone comes to bone, they organize, their faces are turned towards the east; they are getting ready for the greatest event in all history. The Lord Jesus Christ said that Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. When the end of the age comes the times of the Gentiles are about fulfilled; and the startling sign that the age ends is the movement amongst the Jews so prominent today. The capture of Jerusalem and the complete downfall of the Turk are significant signs. Palestine will be given to the Jews when the war ends. Then the stage is set, so to speak, for the predicted end of the age.

We have rapidly pointed out the leading features of the beginning, progress and end of this age. The real end is composed of seven years, the last prophetic week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. ix). The true church will then no longer be on the earth. Her translation has taken place. The Saints are with the Lord. But on earth the things will come to pass which are so prominently revealed in the prophetic Word. And when the seven years are over the Lord Jesus Christ will come back in power and glory to establish His Kingdom of righteousness and peace. Then that which has been shall be again and still greater glory added.

"THAT BLESSED HOPE"

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the glory of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," Tit. ii:13.

"That blessed hope" of which the Apostle writes is an exclusively New Testament revelation. The appearing of the glory of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ is fully revealed in the Old Testament prophetic Word. The Prophets had visions of the day of the Lord, a day in which the Lord will be manifested in power and glory; a day which will bring glory and peace when the Lord is enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Spirit of God has shown through the prophets what the appearing, the visible manifestation of the Lord will mean, for the people Israel, for the nations and for groaning creation. But nowhere do we find "that blessed hope" made known by the prophets. The Jewish Saints knew nothing of it as it is revealed to the church of God. True they had now and then a glimpse of the future. One of the greatest sufferers was Job. His darkest night was illuminated by the assurance of hope when he uttered his great testimony: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And if after my skin this body shall be destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job xix:25-27). But this is not "that blessed hope" the Lord has given to us His people.

Old Testament Saints knew of the resurrection of the dead. They knew nothing of a resurrection from among the dead. Yet Enoch and Elijah were taken to glory without dying. No prophet knew the typical meaning of their experience as we know it through "that blessed hope."

For the First Time

"That blessed hope" is for the first time mentioned by our Lord. But where in His earthly life did He give it to His disciples? It is not found in the records of the three first Gospels, generally called the synoptics. In these records He spoke often of His Return. He promised a Second Coming of Himself in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He revealed what should take place before His return. In His prophetic Olivet discourse (Matt. xxiv-xxv) He gave the signs of His Coming, the preceding great tribulation, the physical signs accompanying His visible manifestation, the regathering of His elect people Israel by the angels. He revealed how some would then be taken in judgment and others left on the earth to enter the Kingdom (Matt. xxiv:40-41). He also spoke in parables of how the conditions in Christendom would be dealt with by Him. And finally He gave a prophecy concerning the judgment of the living nations in the day of His appearing. But nowhere in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke did He speak of "that blessed hope."

It was in the upper room discourse that He spoke of it the first time. His eleven disciples were gathered about Him. Judas had gone out into the night to betray Him. For him of whom the Lord said it would have been better had he never been born, there was no blessed hope. The Lord had announced His imminent departure from them. He would leave them. When Peter said "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John xiii:30), the omniscient One told him, "the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice." How sorrowful this little company must have been! Despair was probably on all their faces. Their hearts were greatly troubled.

Then His beloved voice broke the silence and uttered the never to be forgotten words, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself that where I am ye may be also" (John xiv:1-3). In these words "that blessed hope" is mentioned for the first time in the Bible.

What It Is

Only those who belonged to Him heard this promise. It is therefore a promise not given to Israel, or to the world, but only for those who know Him as their Savior and Lord, who have believed on Him and are His own. The promise is twofold. He would come again and receive them unto Himself; and that He would take them to the place where He is. And this is "that blessed hope." His coming for His own to be with Him in the Father's house to occupy the mansions He has prepared by His atoning work.

The contrast of this promise of His Coming for His disciples with the promises of His visible return as given in the synoptics is striking. He does not say a word about any signs. He does not mention the great tribulation. Nor has He anything to say about judgment. He only gives the assurance that He, in person, will come again and then receive them unto Himself. They were not to look for certain signs and events as predicted in Daniel's prophecy, or wait for the great tribulation and the manifestation of the man of sin. His promise told them to wait for Himself.

His Prayer

A little while later after He had given this promise of His Coming for them they heard Him pray. This prayer is found in the seventeenth chapter of John. What a prayer it is! As they listened to His voice addressing the Father they had new glimpses of His great love wherewith He loved them. He prayed for their sanctification, for their preservation and finally for their glorification. He made a demand of the Father which confirmed the promise He had previously given to them. He prayed, "Father, I will that they, whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given Me, for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii:24). In these words He asks the Father to do what He had promised His disciples. His own are to be with Him where He is, to behold His glory.

An Unfulfilled Promise and an Unanswered Prayer

The promise of "that blessed hope" given so long ago is still unfulfilled; the prayer He prayed is not yet answered. Some say that when our Lord said "I will come again and receive you unto myself" He meant the death of the believer. This is positively wrong. When the believer dies the Lord does not come to the individual believer, but the believer goes to be with the Lord. "Absent from the body present with the Lord." When the believer dies his body is put into the ground, while the disembodied part goes straight into His presence. But the body is also redeemed and must be fashioned like unto His glorious body. The disciples died and generations upon generations of believers passed away and the promise is still unfulfilled and His prayer not yet answered.

The Full Revelation

The disciples, though they knew the promise of "that blessed hope" had no knowledge whatever how the Lord would come again and receive them unto Himself. He did not reveal the manner of His Coming when He spoke to them. The Lord singled out the Apostle Paul to give to him the special revelation as to the manner of His Coming for His Saints and how "that blessed hope" would some day be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul is the instrument through whom the Lord was pleased to give the highest revelation in the Word of God, so that he could say that it was given to him "to fulfil (complete) the Word of God." To him the full glory of the church, the body of Christ, was made known, and through this chosen vessel, who called himself less than the least of all the Saints, the full revelation of "that blessed hope" is given.

The first Epistle he wrote was the Epistle to the Thessalonians. The great revelation of the blessed hope is found in the first Epistle. "But we do not wish you to be ignorant concerning them that are fallen asleep, to the end that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For this we say to you in the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, are in no way to anticipate those who have fallen asleep: for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. iv:13-18, – corrected translation). These words, so unique and precious, give the full revelation about "the blessed hope." Some of the Thessalonian believers had died and those who were left behind feared that their departed ones had lost their share in the coming glorious meeting with the Lord. On their account they sorrowed like those who have no hope. And so the Lord gave to the Apostle this special revelation to quiet their fears and to enlighten them as to the details of the coming of the Lord for all His Saints, those who had fallen asleep, and those who live when He fulfills His promise. The little church of Thessalonica with these sorrowing Saints was made the recipient of this great and comforting message which is for the whole body of Christ as well.

Let us examine it. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." Here is first the blessed fact that "Jesus died." Of the Saints it is said that they fell asleep; but never is it said that Jesus slept, when He gave His life on the cross. He tasted death, the death in all its unfathomable meaning as the judgment upon sin. For the saints the physical death is but sleep.¹ And He who died rose again; as certainly as He died and rose again, so surely shall all believers rise. God will bring all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus with Him, that is with the Lord when He comes in the day of His glorious manifestation. It does not mean the receiving of them by the Lord, nor does it mean that He brings their disembodied spirits with Him to be united to their bodies from the graves, but it means that those who have fallen asleep will God bring with His Son when He comes with all His saints; they will all be in that glorified company. When the Lord comes back from glory all the departed saints will be with Him. This is what the Thessalonians needed to know first of all. Before we follow this blessed revelation in its unfolding we call attention to the phrase "fallen asleep through (not in) Jesus;" it may also be rendered by "those who were put to sleep by Jesus." His saints in life and death are in His hands. When saints put their bodies aside, it is because their Lord has willed it so. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxvi:15). When our loved ones leave us, may we think of their departure as being "put to sleep by Jesus."

¹ Some have perverted the meaning of "sleep," and instead of applying it, as Scripture does, to the body, they apply it to the soul. Soul-sleep is nowhere taught in the Bible and is therefore an invention by those who handle the word deceitfully.

But blessed as this answer to their question is, it produced another difficulty. Hearing that the saints who had fallen asleep would come with the Lord on the day of His glorious manifestation, they would ask, "How is it possible that they can come with Him?" Are they coming as disembodied spirits? What about their bodies in the graves? How shall they come with Him? To answer these questions the special revelation "by the Word of the Lord" is given, by which they learned, and we also, how they would all be with Him so as to come with Him at His appearing. "For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, are in no wise to anticipate those who have fallen asleep." He tells them that when the Lord comes for His saints, those who have fallen asleep will not have an inferior place, and that, we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. When Paul wrote these words and said "We, the living, who remain," he certainly considered himself as included in that class. The two companies who will meet the Lord when He comes, those who have fallen asleep and those who are living, are mentioned here for the first time. How the living saints will not precede those who have departed and the order in which the coming of the Lord for His saints will be executed is next made known in this wonderful revelation.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then, we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." This is the full revelation of the blessed hope in its manner of fulfilment. Nothing like it is found anywhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. In writing later to the Corinthians Paul mentioned it again: "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 Cor. xv:51-52).

The Lord *Himself* will descend from heaven. He is now at the right hand of God in glory, crowned with honor and glory. There He exercises His Priesthood and advocacy in behalf of His people, by which He keeps, sustains and restores them. When the last member has been added to the church, which is His body, and that body is to be with Him, who is the head, He will leave the place at the right hand and descend from heaven. He will not descend to the earth, for, as we read later, the meeting-place for Him and His saints is the air and not the earth. When He comes with His saints in His visible manifestation, He will descend to the earth. When He comes for His Saints He comes with a shout. It denotes His supreme authority. The Greek word is "Kelusma," which means literally "a shout of command," used in classical Greek for the hero's shout to his followers in battle, the commanding voice to gather together. He ascended with a shout (Ps. lxxvii:5), and with the victor's shout He returns. The shout may be the single word "Come!" "Come and see" He spoke to the disciples who followed Him and inquired for His dwelling place. Before Lazarus' tomb He spoke with a loud voice, "Come forth." John, in the isle of Patmos, after the throne messages to the churches had been given, saw a door opened in heaven and the voice said "Come up hither" (Rev. iv:1). "Come" is the royal word of grace, and grace will do its supreme work when He comes for His own. But there will also be the voice of the archangel (Michael) and the trump of God. The archangel is the leader of the angelic hosts. As He was seen of angels (1 Tim. iii:16) when He ascended into the highest heaven, so will the archangel be connected with His descent out of heaven. All heaven will be in commotion when the heirs of glory, sinners saved by grace, are about to be brought with glorified bodies into the Father's house. Some teach that the voice of the archangel may be employed to summon the heavenly hosts and marshal the innumerable company of the redeemed, for "They shall gather His elect together from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew xxiv:30-31). But this is incorrect. The elect in Matthew xxiv are not the church, but Israel. Dispersed Israel will be regathered and angels will be used in this work. Furthermore the angels will do this

gathering after the great tribulation and after the visible manifestation of the Lord with His saints. The coming of the Lord for His saints takes place before the great tribulation.

The trump of God is also mentioned. This trumpet has nothing to do with the judgment trumpets of Revelation, nor with the Jewish feast of trumpets. Some teach that the trumpet is the last trumpet of Revelation. But note the trumpet here is the trumpet of God; in Revelation the last trumpet is blown by an angel. It is a symbolical term and like the shout stands for the gathering together. In Numbers x:4 we read, "And if they blow with one trumpet, then the princes, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee." The shout and the trump of God will gather the fellow-heirs of Christ. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." This is the resurrection from among all the dead of those who believed on Christ, the righteous, dead. All saints of all ages, Old and New Testament saints, are included. This statement of the resurrection of the dead in Christ first disposes completely of the unscriptural view of a general resurrection. As we know from Rev. xx:5 the rest of the dead (the wicked dead) will be raised up later. He comes in person to open the graves of all who belong to Him and manifests His authority over death which He has conquered. The dead in Christ will hear the shout first and experience His quickening power; they shall be raised incorruptible. What power will then be manifested! "Then we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." All believers who live on earth when the Lord comes will hear that commanding, gathering shout. It does not include those who only profess to be Christians and are nominal church-members, nor are any excluded who really are the Lord's. The question, "Who will be caught up into glory?" is answered elsewhere in these studies. But see 1 Cor. xv:23 for an answer. The change will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv:52). Then this mortal will put on immortality. It will be that "clothed upon" of which the apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "For in this tabernacle we groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed (death) but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. v:4). Then our body of humiliation will be fashioned like unto His own glorious body. It is the blessed, glorious hope, not death and the grave, but the coming of the Lord, when we shall be changed. And it is our imminent hope; believers must wait daily for it and some blessed day the shout will surely come.

When He descends from heaven with the shout and the dead in Christ are raised and we are changed, then "we shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It will be the blessed time of reunion with the loved ones who have gone before. What joy and comfort it must have brought to the sorrowing Thessalonians when they read these blessed words for the first time! And they are still the words of comfort and hope to all His people, when they stand at the open graves of loved ones who fell asleep as believers. Often the question is asked, "Shall we not alone meet our loved ones but also recognize them?" Here is the answer: "Together with them" implies both reunion and recognition. These words would indeed mean nothing did they not mean recognition. We shall surely see the faces of our loved ones again and all the saints of God on that blessed day when this great event takes place. The clouds will be heaven's chariots to take the heirs of God and the joint-heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ into His own presence. As He ascended so His redeemed ones will be taken up. Caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; all laws of gravitation are set aside, for it is the power of God, the same power which raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead and seated Him in glory, which will be displayed in behalf of His saints (Eph. i:19-23). Surely this is a divine and a wonderful revelation. "How foolish it must sound to our learned scientists. But, beloved, I would want nothing but that one sentence, 'Caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air,' to prove the divinity of Christianity. Its very boldness is assurance of its truth. No speculation, no argument, no reasoning; but a bare authoritative statement startling in its boldness. Not a syllable of Scripture on which to build, and yet when spoken, in perfect harmony with all Scripture. How absolutely impossible for any man to have conceived that the Lord's saints should be caught up to meet Him in the air. Were it not true its very boldness and apparent foolishness would be its refutation. And what would be the

character of mind that could invent such a thought? What depths of wickedness! What cruelty! What callousness! The spring from which such a statement, if false, could rise must be corrupt indeed. But how different in fact! What severe righteousness! What depths of holiness! What elevated morality! What warmth of tender affection! What clear reasoning! Every word that he has written testifies that he has not attempted to deceive. Paul was no deceiver, and it is equally impossible for him to have been deceived."²

And the blessedness "to meet the Lord in the air"! We shall see Him then as He is and gaze for the first time upon the face of the Beloved, that face of glory, which was once marred and smitten on account of our sins. And seeing Him as He is we shall be like Him. How long will be the meeting in the air? It has been said that the stay in that meeting place will be but momentary and that the Lord will at once resume His descent to the earth. We know from other Scriptures that this cannot be. Between the coming of the Lord for His saints and with His saints there is an interval of at least seven years before the visible coming of the Lord and His saints with Him. The judgment of the saints, by which their works and labors become manifest must take place. There is also to be the presentation of the church in glory (Ephes. v:27; Jude verse 24). Furthermore the marriage of the Lamb takes place not in the meeting place in the air, but in heaven (Rev. xix:1-10). He will take His saints into the Father's house that they may behold His glory (John xvii:22). But what will it mean, "So shall we be forever with the Lord!"

² *Our Hope*, February, 1902.

Its Power and Blessedness

Such then is "that blessed hope," blessed indeed, and an imminent hope. It is a hope which if really held in the heart will shape the life and conduct of the believer, and fill, we make bold to say, every need he has in the wilderness down here.

1. That blessed hope will keep the person of the Lord Jesus Christ constantly before the heart. If we really look for Him, wait for Him, pray and long for His Coming, to see Him face to face, He will ever be fresh before our hearts. This hope will keep us in closest touch and fellowship with Him as nothing else. Oh! the blessedness of knowing we shall see Him – see Him in all His glory! Each day ought to be begun with this thought, "I may meet Him today!" Each day should have for its last thought the blessed anticipation that the coming morning may find us in His presence.

2. The blessed hope is a purifying hope. "He that has this hope set upon Him purifieth himself even as He is pure" (1 John iii:3). It is the power for a consecrated and separated life. He prayed in His high-priestly prayer, "They are not of the world as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy Word is truth" (John xvii:16, 17). He has redeemed us from the curse, from the guilt of our sins and from this present evil age. We are saints, no longer of this world, though still in the world. With this comes the responsibility to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. If a child of God lives a worldly, carnal life it is a denial of the power of the Gospel. If a believer in that blessed hope lives an unholy life it is an evidence that he has never known in his heart what this hope is. It is a hope which teaches us to walk in the light as He is in the light. No believer who knows that blessed hope and waits for its fulfilment can go in the ways of the world to enjoy its hollow pleasures. It is a separating, purifying hope.

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