

An Exposition of Matthew Twenty-Four on the Second Coming of Christ

AN EXPOSITION OR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

"What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"—
DISCIPLES.

"When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.—
JESUS.

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INTRODUCTION

NO truth of Inspiration is more clearly stated than that God reveals his designs to his prophets, so that men and nations may be warned of coming events before their accomplishment. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the Prophets." Amos 3:7. Before visiting the world with judgments, God has uniformly sent forth warnings sufficient to enable the believing to escape his wrath, and to condemn those who have not heeded the warning. This was the case before the flood. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world." Heb. 11:7.

In the days of Lot, when the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had become so sunken in idolatry and crime that the destruction of these cities was determined, the Lord revealed to Abraham, his righteous servant, what he was about to do. Gen. 18:17-33. Lot also was warned, that he might escape. And through Lot the ungodly inhabitants of Sodom were warned, but they made light of the warning. Gen. 19:14. Thus also when the Lord determined to overthrow Nineveh, he sent Jonah with a message of warning. The people in this great city took an opposite course to that of the men of Sodom. They humbled themselves before God, and repented of their wickedness; therefore the Lord spared them, and their city was not destroyed until a later time, when the people had returned to their wicked ways.

John the Baptist was raised up by a special providence, at the first advent of Christ, to announce his immediate com-

iv

ing, and thus prepare the way before the Lord. The righteous in that generation were not only expecting him to come soon, but they knew that that generation would not pass away till he did come. Read Luke 2:25, 26, 36-38.

Before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, its inhabitants were warned, and the way of escape was pointed out. Jesus had said, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." And, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of "desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains." Luke 21:20; Matt. 15, 16. All who accepted the warning, and gave heed to the sign given them by Christ, improved the opportunity given them for escape by the providential withdrawal of the Roman army, after it had for some time surrounded the city, and fled in haste to a place of safety.

Such has been the dealing of God in past ages, in reference to all important events; and so has he promised to deal with his people. Then we may inquire, Can anything be learned from the Bible relative to the time of the second advent? This is a grave

inquiry, and, from the very nature of the subject, is worthy of close and candid investigation. We accept the Bible as a revelation from Heaven. What God has made known in that book ceases to be a mystery. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." Deut. 29:29. If the Sacred Scriptures have revealed nothing concerning the time of the coming of our Lord, then we can know nothing concerning it. But if they have definitely informed us that we may know when "it

v

is near, even at the doors," then these things belong to us and to our children. Believing that he has given all the Holy Scriptures for a wise purpose,—for our learning and benefit,—we consider it not merely our privilege, but our duty, to search the Scriptures, with an earnest desire to know the whole revealed will of God.

By careful and prayerful attention to the prophetic discourse of the Son of God, given in answer to the inquiry of the disciples, the reader will, we trust, receive light upon this important question. And as he reads the following pages, may the Holy Spirit open to his mind the beautiful harmony of the subject in its several parts, as fulfilled in the experience of the church from the time of the first advent of Christ to the close of human probation.

EXPOSITION OF MATTHEW XXIV

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Disciples—"What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

Jesus—"When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

Probably there is no chapter in the Bible which speaks more fully and more definitely on the second coming of Christ, than Matthew 24; and there is no chapter in the entire Bible which has been the subject of greater controversy. But the nature of the controversy has almost entirely changed within the last forty years.

Forty years ago the controversy was between the Universalist and orthodox Christians. The Universalists denied that there is to be, any future judgment and punishment. Of course they referred the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew altogether to the destruction of Jerusalem—to the past. Evangelical Christians then denied that it referred solely to the destruction of Jerusalem; they affirmed that it taught a personal coming of Christ, to reward his saints and to justly punish his foes. Those commentators who referred it in general to the destruction of Jerusalem in their expositions, still admitted that it had a further reference to the second advent

8

and the end of the world. They uniformly applied a part of the Saviour's discourse in chapters 24 and 25 to the latter event.

The Universalists now take a different position; they have mostly become restorationists, admitting that there will be *some* punishment, even in the future. But they contend that it will be disciplinary or reformatory. They still maintain their former position that Matthew 24 has no relation to that future punishment, but refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The opponents of Universalism, in the churches, have also changed their base, in part. While they yet contend that there will be a future judgment and eternal punishment, they now deny that Matthew 24 proves anything in regard to that day; or event, and affirm that it was all fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem. They are also extensively changing their position in regard to the nature of the second advent, many of them agreeing with the Universalists, saying that the advent is figurative or spiritual and has already taken place. From present indications we think that this will very soon be the prevailing opinion in all the popular churches. Many of their ablest and most influential men now advocate this view. A little more change in the same direction will unite them fully with the Universalists in a denial of the future coming of Christ, of a personal, literal advent, and of any real tangible punishment of the wicked. They find it no more difficult to spiritualize the judgment and punishment, than the coming of the

Lord. Very many of them now assert that the Bible expressions concerning the perdition of the wicked, such as those in 2 Thes-

9

salonians 1, and 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 20, are to be taken figuratively—not at all literally.

we are very confident that Matthew 24 reaches to matters beyond the destruction of Jerusalem, and into time yet future; and that it refers to a literal, personal, visible coming again of our glorified Saviour. But the instruction which it contains was not given to prove this truth—that his coming will be personal or literal. This, now, has become the chief point of controversy on the chapter, whereas if it is not made a point at all in the chapter. To this we shall call further attention hereafter.

VERSE 1: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple; and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple."

Jesus had been addressing the multitude, in the presence of his disciples. He had reproved the scribes and Pharisees for their sins, and had declared the doom of the Jews, their city, and their temple. Chapter 23. The disciples supposed that the temple would stand forever. And they called the attention of Christ to its magnificence and strength, as if to convince him that he was mistaken.

VERSE 2: "And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

This statement from the Master could but deeply interest the disciples. And whether they supposed that the destruction of the temple, the coming of Christ, and the end of the age, would all occur at the same time, or at different periods, it matters not, since Christ, in his answer in this chapter, has dis-

10

tinctly spoken of each separately, and has given each its place in the prophetic history of events.

VERSE 3: "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these

things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

These questions relate, first, to the destruction of Jerusalem; and second, to Christ's second coming at the end of the Christian age. Both were distinctly answered by our Lord. Jesus did not censure the disciples for desiring to look into the future, but answered their questions fully. As Christ was here speaking to his disciples, and not to the promiscuous multitude, his words in this prophetic discourse are addressed to the church.

Two questions were asked by the disciples:—

I. "When shall these things be?" On this no controversy has ever been raised. It is universally conceded that it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, or the overthrow of the temple, of which he had but recently spoken.

2. "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" This is but one question. The coming of Christ and the end of the world are so closely related that they may properly be embraced in one statement. See a parallel case in the first letter to the Thessalonians. The writer speaks of the coming of the Lord (the Lord himself), and adds: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." The "times and seasons" of the advent, and the resurrection

11

of which he had just spoken, are identical with those of the day of the Lord. This phrase, "the day of the Lord," covets a period immediately subsequent to "the day of salvation," this latter being applied to this present dispensation.

Several points of query, must be noticed:—

.I. "The end of the world." It is asserted that this is a wrong translation; that it should be, "the end of the age," and that it refers to "the Jewish age." But, allowing that it should be rendered "end of the age," it does not follow, by any means, that it refers to the Jewish age, or past dispensation. It certainly does not in Matt. 28:20. The promise that he will be with his ministers "until the end

of the age," certainly refers to that age in which they are to preach the gospel, for these words are in the gospel commission. It is the end of this same age to which Matt. 24:14 refers. The question was in regard to the end of the world (or age, if preferred). He said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; *and then shall the end come.*" This is decisive on the point for (1) they were to tarry at Jerusalem, after receiving their commission, until the day of Pentecost, and then they were to be his witnesses to the nations; (2) the Jewish age ended before the preaching to the nations commenced; therefore it is impossible that Matthew 24 and 28 should refer to that age.

An effort has been made to put forward the ending of the Jewish age to the destruction of Jerusalem. But it is exceedingly lame. To prove that, it will be necessary to show that the Christian dispensation was

12

not fully opened until the destruction of Jerusalem! This is disproved by the whole body of the teachings of the New Testament. Paul settles the question in affirming that the peculiarities of that age were taken out of the way,—*nailed to the cross.*" Col. 2:14. If the gospel dispensation was not opened by the preaching of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and afterward by turning to the Gentiles to preach the gospel to them, then it has not yet been opened.

That is a settled question. The end of the age, or end of the world, in Matthew 24, is the utmost limit of the gospel dispensation. And we shall offer proof most positive that the second coming of Christ is at the end of this dispensation:—

In connection with the claim set forth in regard to "the end of the world," another is presented, as follows:—

2. The disciples associated together all that the question contained, and placed "these things," that is, the overthrow of the city, with the coming of Christ and the end of the world, or age.

But that is only conjecture. No one has a reason for affirming that such was the idea of the apostles. Here we might safely leave

the affirmation, for no one is bound to disprove a conjecture. But we will further notice it.

If it, were something more than conjecture,—if it were possible even to prove that such was their idea the order of events then future,—that fact would not be evidence that they were or are to be fulfilled at the same time. For *we know* that at that time the disciples were laboring under mistakes in regard to the

13

time and order of the fulfillment of future events. Take as proof of this the parable which the Lord spake when he was going into Jerusalem. Luke 19. They thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. To correct this impression, the parable of the nobleman was spoken. If they understood the parable at the time when it was spoken, it did not fully do away with the impression in their minds, as is proved by what they did when they entered Jerusalem. We cannot believe that they would have hailed him as the Son of David, and rejoiced before him as a King in his triumph, if they had realized that he was going into the city to be condemned and crucified, and malefactor. Palm branches and shouts of trim did not attend the steps of the lowly and the condemned.

Again, after his resurrection, he reproved two of his disciples, who, though they had trusted that he would redeem Israel, were then sad and disheartened. They did not then understand that Christ ought "to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory." The suffering part was still a mystery to them. And some of the apostles were so slow to realize that which he had spoken to them, that they could hardly be persuaded that he was indeed risen from the dead. And after he had been with them full forty days, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom, they did not yet understand "the times and the seasons," and therefore asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Would it, then, be surprising if they had been mistaken in the order of the events of which the Saviour

14

spoke, at the time of his speaking, as recorded in Matthew 24? It would be quite natural for them to suppose that the holy city and the temple of the Most High would stand until the judgment and the final consummation. As we now see, had such been their opinion, it would not be proof that such was the chronological relation of these events. But, we repeat, that cannot be proved; it is only conjecture.

.3. It is necessary to notice that prophecy is not always fulfilled in the order in which it is given. This is often seen in the Old Testament, where the two advents are sometimes spoken of in such close connection that the reader might suppose they would occur nearly together. It is seen in the book of Revelation, which contains several lines of prophecy, each reaching down to the close of the present dispensation. So in Matthew 24, and parallel chapters; we can only learn the correct application of some of the statements contained therein by comparing them with other scriptures. There is no dispute that they refer to the destruction of the temple and the overthrow of the city as well as to the second coming of the Lord.

VERSES 4, 5: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

Mark the caution given by our Lord as he commences to answer these questions. Jesus knew the hearts of men, and that many impostors would arise, and deceive multitudes. He here warns his disciples, and guards them against the deceptions of corrupt and ambitious men.

NATIONAL CALAMITIES

VERSES 6-8: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

No point has been argued in favor of the past complete fulfillment of Matthew 24, with greater show of plausibility than this. Yet it remains decidedly against that view. Dr. Adam Clarke, for whose honesty and ability we entertain the highest respect, says: "This portended the dissensions, insurrections, and mutual slaughter of the Jews, and those of other nations, who dwell in the same cities together;" etc. We say we respect Dr. Clarke, and it is no disparagement of him to believe there is more light now shining out from this chapter, with the greater investigation, and the later fulfillment of prophecy, than he saw in his day. We insist that all that he produced in regard to the dissensions among the Jews, their insurrections, etc., does not meet the demands of this text. On the latter part of the verse he says: "This portended the open wars of the different tetrarchies and provinces against each other."

In this chapter the Saviour refers us to Daniel the prophet, by whom we learn, what indeed we can learn from any history, that *the kingdom of Rome was* universal in power at the time of which we are speaking. The dissensions and insurrections of tribes and provinces were not sufficient to meet the prophecy.

But the Saviour further says: "And ye shall hear of

16

wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet." The overthrow of Jerusalem was caused by an insurrection of one of the provinces of the Roman kingdom. But these are not even connectives of the final event which was mentioned by our Saviour. These things—wars and rumors of wars—shall come, "but the end is not yet." And kingdom rising against kingdom—which, we insist, was not fulfilled by provincial insurrections—"are but the beginning of sorrows"—"the end is not yet." This point will be yet more clearly settled when others are considered.

Wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes have occurred at different periods since these words were spoken. Therefore, these, as they have existed, cannot be regarded as the special signs of the end. It maybe urged, however; with a good degree of consistency, that the Scriptures teach that these calamities would exist in the last

days to such an extent as to constitute a sign of the approaching judgment. We wish to keep the important fact distinctly before the mind, that the Sacred Scriptures do teach when men may not, and when they may, look for the second appearing of Christ.

The prophets had so uniformly associated such judgment as war, famine, pestilence, and earthquake with the last judgment, that the disciples were in danger of concluding that the end would immediately follow the list appearance of these calamities; hence the caution given: "These things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Here the disciples were clearly taught

17

that they should not expect the end in their day. This fact is worthy of the candid attention of those who object to the proclamation of the second advent of Christ in the form of a special message. These sometimes assert that it was right for the disciples to look for Christ in their day, and that it has been scriptural and right for all Christians of each successive generation to look for his second appearing in their time. And they affirm that no more can be learned and believed upon this subject in our time than by the Christians of past generations, and that the public mind should not now be agitated upon this great question, any more than in all past time since the first advent of Christ.

We have seen that this position is incorrect so far as the early disciples were concerned. They are cited to the distant future as the time when their Lord should come. They are assured that they need not be troubled at hearing of wars and rumors of wars: "For all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Our Lord then guides the minds of his disciples, as we shall see in the examination of this chapter, down over the time of the great apostasy, and the long period of the rule of Papal Rome, before mentioning a sign of his second advent. He does not intimate that his people, during these long periods, may expect the end. No, not once. But when he comes near our time, the Lord gives signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, and adds, "When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

Mark this: Our Lord does not mention wars, fam-

ines, pestilences, and earthquakes as signs of his second advent, but rather as events of common occurrence all the way through the Christian age; and history attests the fact that these calamities have covered at least seventeen centuries. The following is from a work of Noah Webster, LL.D., published in 1799: ¹1 –

"By famine and sword, 580,000 Jews were destroyed between A. D. 96 and A. D. 180.

"In Antioch, from A. D. 96 to A. D. 180, earthquakes destroyed 13 cities and over 100,000 lives.

"In Rome, A. D. 169 pestilence destroyed 10,000 daily.

"In Rome, A. D. 187, pestilence appeared and continued, three years.

"In London, A. D. 310, by famine, 40,000 died.

"In A. D. 446, September 17th, an earthquake shook down walls of Constantinople, and 57 towers fell.

"In Rome, A. D. 539, in one district 50,000 died.

"In Antioch A. D. 588, an earthquake killed 60,000.

"In A. D. 542, the plague killed 10,000 daily in Turkey.

"In A. D. 679, a severe famine in England, three years.

"In A. D. 717, in Constantinople, 300,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1005, earthquakes three months, followed by pestilence, by which it is said one-third of the human race died.

"In A. D. 1077, in Constantinople, so many died by plague and famine the living could not bury them.

"In A. D. 124, in Italy, there was such famine that the dead lay in the streets not buried; and in England one-third of the people died of plague.

"In A. D. 1294, in England, thousands died of famine.

"In A. D. 1346, in London, 50,000 died of plague and famine, and were buried in one grave-yard; in Norwich, 50,000; in Venice, 100,000; in Florence, 100,000; in Eastern nations, 20,000,000. It was called the black death.

"In A. D. 1352, in China, 900,000 died of famine.

"In A. D. 1450, in Milan, 60,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1570, in Moscow, 200,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1572, in Lyons, 50,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1625, in London, 35,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1656, in Naples, 300,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1665, in London, 68,000 died of plague.

"In A. D. 1755, an earthquake destroyed the city of Lisbon, killing 50,000. In Mitylene, and the Archipelago, it shook down 2,000 houses. It shook all the Spanish coast. The plague followed, which destroyed 150,000 persons in Constantinople."

VERSES 9, 10: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."

Here is a brief description of the afflictions and martyrdoms of the church of Christ. Thousands of the faithful followers of Jesus were most cruelly put to death by Pagan Rome; yet the prophecy doubtless applies more particularly to the long period of papal persecutions, in which many millions of Christians were put to death in the most cruel manner that wicked men and demons could invent. In these verses we are brought down over the long period of the martyrdom of the church of Jesus Christ, to near the present generation.

FALSE PROPHETS

VERSE 11: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

In the common use of the word, a prophet is one that foretells; but the word sometimes means simply a teacher. True and false prophets may be known. The prophets of God are teachers of purity, reprovers, of sin, and faithful in warning the people of coming dangers. The duties of those whom God calls to

20

speak in his great name are clearly expressed by the sacred writers. We here quote from three of them:—

"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Isa. 58:1.

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Joel 2:1.

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4:1, 2.

False prophets do not reprove the people for their sins, and do not warn them of coming danger; but they proclaim peace to the sinner. Their teachings lead from God and his word, and are such as please the unconverted mind. The inspired writers have also spoken definitely of the testimony and work of false prophets. We here give several for example:—

"And mine hand shall, be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar." Eze. 13:9, 10.

"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my peo-

21

ple slightly, saying, Peace, peace: when there is no peace." Jer. 6:13, 14.

"Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them."

After stating the duty of the faithful servant of God to preach the word, to reprove, to rebuke, and to exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, the apostle says:—

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves

teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn, away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.

That time has now fully come. The people choose pleasing fables, which do not disturb them in their sins, rather than the reproof, searching declarations of the word of God. They love to be deceived by the teachings of false prophets, and "say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Isa. 30:10.

The ears of the people are filled with the pleasing fables of the world's conversion, a good time com-

22

ing, and that we are just entering the golden age. The threatenings of God's word on the proud, the haughty, the vain, the rich, the sinners in Zion, and those out of Zion, are kept back by the false teachers these times. Many of them even dare to teach that the moral code of the ten commandments is abrogated. And as the result of such a course and such teaching, we see in the professed church of Jesus Christ that

INIQUITY ABOUNDS

VERSE 12: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." It is evident that both the abounding of iniquity and the waxing cold of the love of many, are fulfilled in the professed church of Jesus Christ. Men must first experience the love of God and of heavenly things before that love can grow cold. Hence, common, unconverted sinners are not here referred to as apostatizing. And, again, the prevalence of iniquity in the unconverted world alone, should stimulate the church to greater diligence and more godliness, instead of being a cause of apostasy. Hence, the iniquity here mentioned is in the very heart of the professed church, diffusing its chilling influence through the whole body. As the result, the love of many has grown cold. With this agree the words of the apostle:—

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters,

proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more

23

than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

Here is a catalogue of eighteen sins, all resting upon those who have a form of godliness. These are not infidels and common worldly sinners, for they have not a form of godliness; but they are men and women professing to be followers of Jesus Christ. And although they make a profession of piety as high as heaven, these very sins lie at their doors. And by reason of their example, and their chilling influence, many are led from the humble path to heaven, and their love waxes cold.

THE END OF THE AGE

VERSE 13: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

The word *end*, wherever used in this chapter, refers to the end of the ages, and to nothing else. It is the end associated in the New Testament with the second appearing of Jesus Christ. If it be urged that the word *end* has reference to the close of mortal life, then we reply that the disciples did not ask their Lord when they should die, but, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" See verse 6. And it would be strange indeed to suppose that the word *end*, in verse 14, meant death. If any think such a position admissible, let them read it into the text, as follows: And' this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall death come. absurdity!

24

VERSE 14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

This is the first sign of the end given by our Lord in answer to the question, What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end

of the world?" But this verse is supposed by some to prove that all men will be converted, and that there will then follow one thousand years in which all will "know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." But the text does not say that every individual will receive this gospel, or even that all will, hear it. It does not state that anyone will be converted and made holy by it, and we find it far from intimating that the world will be converted, and remain so for a period of one thousand years. The text simply states: (1) "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world;" (2) "for a witness unto all nations;" (3) "and *then* [not one thousand years later, nor three hundred and sixty-five thousand, but then] shall the end come."

If we understand the phrase, "this gospel of the kingdom," to be the gospel in the common acceptation of the word, is not the work very nearly accomished? What continent or island is there where gospel has not been preached? Where is there a nation that has not heard it? The Bible has been translated into more than three hundred languages and dialects, and has been carried to every quarter of the globe. Wherever the mariner has discovered an inhabited island, or the explorer has found a new tribe, there missionaries have followed with the gospel.

But if the term, "this gospel of the kingdom," be

25

understood as applying to the proclamation of the second advent of Christ, and the establishment of his everlasting kingdom, as the grand consummation of the gospel, the fulfillment is nearly as evident. And it seems necessary so to understand the passage, as it was given in answer to the question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

There is abundant testimony to show that the good news of the soon appearing of Christ has been preached in all parts of the world. During the present century, the book of Daniel has been unsealed, knowledge of the prophecies has increased, and many have "run to and fro" proclaiming that the advent of Christ is near at hand. In both Europe and America, men of faith and prayer have been led to study the prophecies, and, tracing down the

inspired record, they have found convincing evidence that the end of all things is at hand. The Spirit of God has urged them to give the warning, and far and near has been proclaimed the message of the everlasting gospel," "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come."

In 1821, Joseph Wolff, the well-known missionary to the world, began to proclaim the doctrine of the second advent. Wolff was a German Jew, the son of a rabbi. He early became a Christian, and determined to go as a missionary to his people. After studying at Rome and other places, under the supervision of the Catholic Church, he came to England, and joined the English Church, in 1819. After two years' study, he entered upon his mission, and for twenty-four years he traveled and preached untiringly

26

penetrating as far east as India. Among Jews, Turks, Parsees, Hindoos, and many other nationalities and races, he preached the coming and reign of the Messiah.

In Germany, the doctrine of the second advent had been taught in the eighteenth century by Bengel, a minister of the Lutheran Church, who, from the study of the Apocalypse, arrived at the belief that the coming of Christ was near at hand. Through Bengel's writings, many embraced the doctrine of the Lord's soon coming. Colonies of Germans carried the belief into Russia, and it is still largely held by the German churches of that country.

Hundreds of pious men have proclaimed the doctrine in England and America, and publications on the subject have been sent to every missionary station on the globe.

E. R. Pinney, in his "Exposition of Matthew Twenty-four," published in the year 1848, says:—

"As early as 1842, second-advent publications had been sent to every missionary station in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, both sides of the Rocky Mountains. We find this doctrine in Tartary, about twenty-five years ago, and the time for the coming of Christ to be in 1844. This fact is obtained from an Irish missionary in Tartary to whom the question was put by a Tartar priest when Christ would come the second time. And he made answer that he knew nothing at all about it. The

Tartar priest expressed great surprise at such an answer from a missionary who had come to teach them the doctrines of the Bible, and remarked that he taught 'everybody who had a Bible might know that.' The Tartar priest then gave his views, stating that Christ, he thought, would come about A. D. 1844. The missionary

27

wrote home a statement of the facts, which was published in the *Irish Magazine*, in 1821. The commanders of our vessels, and the sailors, tell us they touch at no point where they find this proclamation has not preceded them, and frequent inquiries respecting it are made of them."

The *Advent Shield*, pp. 86, 87, says:—

"We look upon the proclamation which has been made as being the cry of the angel who proclaimed, '*The hour of his judgment is come.*' Rev. 14:6, 7. It is a sound which is to reach all nations; it is the proclamation of 'the everlasting gospel,' or 'this gospel of the kingdom.' In one shape or other, this cry has gone abroad through the earth wherever human beings are found, and we have had opportunity to hear of the fact."

But it will be asked, Is the news that such a truth is preached a sufficient proclamation to fulfill the prophecy? Rev. 14:6, 7; Matt. 24:14. The answer is, If it was sufficient in the days of the apostles, it is now. That it was then, is clear from Acts 19:8-10, where Paul preached or taught in Ephesus two years, so that all they in Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord Jesus. They could not all have heard a sermon, but they heard the sound of the gospel. In this sense, no doubt, the gospel of the kingdom has been preached in all the world.

We still wait for the approaching end. And when the purpose of God in the proclamation of the coming reign of Christ shall be fully accomplished, *then* will the end come.

Our Lord having passed over the important events, in the Christian age down to the end, in verses 6-14, goes back and introduces the destruction of Jerusalem,

28

in verse 15, in answer, to the inquiry, "When shall these things be?"

VERSES 15-20: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whose readeth, let him understand); then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains; let which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day."

The "abomination of desolation" is called "armies" in Luke 21:20, and refers to the Roman army. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." This desolating power is spoken of by Daniel as follows:—

"And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. . . . "And for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." Margin, "desolator." Dan. 9:26, 27.

Here is a clear prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. Our Lord referred to the book of Daniel, and taught his disciples to understand that when they should see what was there predicted take place, they must make their escape.

The flight of the Christians of Judea to the mountains would be attended with difficulties. And their subsequent condition would be that of hardship and suffering. The Lord knew this, and gave them the

29

instructions and warnings necessary. The statement of verse 19 was given to save them from unnecessary woe.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

VERSE 21: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not, since the beginning of the world to this tune, no, nor ever shall be."

It is contended that the greatest tribulation that ever befell the Jews was in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Against this we interpose two objections:—

I. It is by no means clear that the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans was the greatest tribulation the Jews ever suffered. All the scenes of horror described by historians, as occurring at that time, are by the inspired records ascribed also to the conquest of the Babylonians. See the Lamentations of Jeremiah, especially chap. 4:10: "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children; they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people." Also, Daniel 9:11-13: "The curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us; by bringing upon us a great evil; for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us."

2. At the coming of Christ, as noted in Matthew 24, the elect of God, the saints of Christ, will be

30

gathered "from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Verse 31. This *cannot* be referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. Nothing occurred at that time to which it will possibly apply. Paul, speaking of the coming of Christ, mentions the same fact, as follows: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by *our gathering together unto him.*" 2 Thess. 2:1. How did the Lord come to Jerusalem at the time of its overthrow? We are answered, "It was a figurative coming." If it was not literal and actual, what was the nature of the figure used? It is said that he visited the Jews in judgment; that Titus, or the Roman army, really executed the judgment upon the doomed city. Then the coming of Titus, or of the Roman army, is represented as the coming of Christ? Was it a fact, then, that the saints of God, the followers of Christ, from the four winds, were *gathered together unto Titus*, in that day? This must have been so if the coming of Titus represented the coming of Christ, or if Christ came figuratively in

the person of Titus. It is as sure as the Scriptures are true that the saints will be gathered unto Christ in the day of his coming; which did not occur, even in a figure, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; for the saints, instead of being gathered unto Christ, or to any person or thing which came to Jerusalem as his representative; were scattered from the city, fleeing from the presence of that which represented Christ! So absurd is that theory.

The fact of Christ's coming, and the gathering of the saints at that time, being stated alike in Matthew

31

24 and 2 Thessalonians 2, proves that these chapters refer to the same time and event. We therefore in this connection notice a circumstance mentioned by Paul, as one to take place before the Lord comes. And to this point we call the special attention of all who deny the literal advent of our Lord. Paul cautions his brethren not to look for the coming of Christ until the man of sin is revealed. Who, or what, is that man of sin? Paul wrote this about eighteen years before Jerusalem was overthrown. What arose within these eighteen years which filled the outline of this prophecy?—Nothing at all. The, old and well-accepted view of the reformers Protestants—that this man of sin is the "supreme pontiff" of Rome, is every way reasonable, and to produce a harmony of the prophetic scriptures, is unavoidable. Notice these point:—

(I.) Paul wrote only eighteen years before the overthrow of Jerusalem, but he looked forward to the future for the revealing of the man of sin. The elements were then already operating, but hindering causes had to be removed. Consequently, as he said, the coming of the Lord was not "impending" in his day.

(2) It was not merely a sinful man to be revealed, there were many such then; "*that man of sin*"—who legalizes and enforces sin, not merely one who breaks law, but one who overrides and breaks down law—such has been the character of the Roman pontiff. Many readers will remember his indictment on this point by Alexander Campbell, in his debate with Bishop Purcell.

32

(3) Exalting himself above God. This he has done, not, merely by assuming the prerogatives of but by legislating on the law of God, which can be done only by a superior, in fact or assumed.

(4) Claiming to be God. See the titles which have been given to, and assumed by, the pope; and most recently, the assumption of infallibility.

These, and other specifications of prophecy, have been fulfilled by the popes of Rome, and by no other. And we shall find that the proofs grow even stronger and clearer as we proceed.

The "great tribulation" mentioned in verse 21 is that of the church of Christ, and not the tribulation of the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem. We offer the following reasons:—

I. It is a fact that the tribulation of the Christian Church, especially under the reign of the Papacy, was greater than God's people had suffered before "since the beginning of the world." The tribulation of the Christian church has been greater than it will ever be again. True, a time of trouble "such as never was," spoken of in Dan. 12:1, is coming upon the wicked; but we find in the same verse this blessed promise, "And at that time thy people shall be delivered." The tribulation of the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem was not greater than the world will ever witness. The vials of Jehovah's unmingled wrath are yet to be poured out, not upon the people of one nation only, but upon the guilty inhabitants of all nations. "The slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried." Jer. 25:33.

33

2. If this tribulation be applied to the Jews, or to any other class of unbelieving men, it cannot be harmonized with Dan. 12:1, which speaks of the time of trouble such as never was, when Michael shall stand up. Certainly there cannot be two times of trouble at different periods, greater than ever was or ever would be. Therefore the "tribulation" spoken of in Matt. 24:21, 29, applies to the church of Christ, extending down through the 1260 years of papal persecution; and the "trouble" mentioned in Dan. 12:1, to the unbelieving world, to be experienced by them in the future.

3. The period of tribulation was shortened for the elect's sake. This cannot refer to the Jews, for their house had been pronounced desolate. They were left of God in their hardness of heart and blindness of mind: Says Paul, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles." The elect were the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. And where were they when tribulation was upon the Jews?—They had fled to the mountains. It is absurd, then, to say that the days of tribulation of the Jews in the city of Jerusalem, were shortened for the sake of the elect, who had fled from the place of tribulation.

4. The connection between verses 20 and 21 shows that the tribulation was to commence with those Christians who were to flee out of the city. "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day; for then shall be great tribulation." Our Lord here speaks of the tribulation which his people would suffer from the time of their flight onward. We follow them in their flight to the mountains, and then pass along down through the

34

noted persecutions of the church of God under Pagan Rome, and we see, indeed, *tribulation*. And when we come to the period of papal persecution, we see them suffering the most cruel tortures and dying the most dreadful deaths that men could inflict. This last period is especially noted in prophecy.

5. The prophet Daniel saw the Papacy, its blasphemy, its arrogance, its work of death on the saints, and its duration as a persecuting power, under the symbol of the little horn.

"And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall 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 and times and the dividing of time." Chap. 7:25.

It is generally admitted that "a time and times and the dividing of time" is 1260 years. Commencing A. D. 538, the 1260 years reached to A. D. 1798, when Berthier, a French general, entered Rome in triumph. The pope was taken prisoner, and died in exile. Note that time the Papacy has had no power to wear out the saints

of the Most High. Here ended the days of the tribulation spoken of by our Lord.

THE DAYS OF TRIBULATION SHORTENED

VERSE 22: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

The Papacy was clothed with civil power to punish heretics for 1260 years; and had not the period of tribulation of the elect in the providence of God been shortened, the martyrdom of the church would have continued to 1798, in which event, according to the

35

Scriptures, no flesh of the elect would have been saved. But the reformation under Martin Luther and those associated with this great reformer, modified this tribulation, and continued to restrain the rage and consume the power of the Papacy until 1773, when the suppression of the Jesuits put an end to the tribulation. In this prophetic discourse of our Lord, we are brought down into the eighteenth century, very near the present time. We should naturally expect, then, that the instructions and warnings of the next verses would be applicable to this generation.

LO, HERE AND LO, THERE

After speaking of the great tribulation, the Saviour said: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Verses 23-27.

This is a very important and much-abused part of this great prophecy. Its connection and obvious intention are generally quite disregarded; when it is used, it mostly so applied as to teach the

opposite of the idea presented by the Saviour. Because of the importance of its testimony on the question under consideration, we feel warranted in noticing it at some length.

36

1. When offering proof from the Bible that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," we are often met with the remark that "we are commanded not to follow the lo here's and lo there's." That this is a perversion of the Scriptures is easily shown. The only text in the Bible from which it is professedly drawn is that above quoted; and the only caution given in the text is against those who say, Here is Christ." But Seventh-day Adventists never say so. To argue in favor of his future coming is to argue that *he is not here*—that he has not yet come. Therefore the caution is not against us or against our doctrine.

2. They who deny our position, and contend for a figurative or spiritual coming of the Son of man, are the very ones against whom the warning is spoken. Some say the Lord came in A. D. 70, at the overthrow of Jerusalem. Then in that day they could in truth say, "Lo, here is Christ." But our Saviour said, Believe it not;" and we obey his word,—we do not believe it. And some say his coming is at the death of a saint,—that the coming of Christ to each one is at his death. Even learned ministers say so. If that be so, his coming is not a public event, but is literally "in the secret chambers." To this also the Saviour says, "Believe it not." And again we heed his word,—we do not believe it. We hope that they who contend for such forced and unnatural constructions of the Saviour's language do not intentionally make nonsense of his words, but that such a construction is nonsensical it is easy to show.

When the Lord said of John, "If I will that he tarry [literally, abide or remain] till I come, what is

37

that to thee?" the disciples thought that John *should* remain till he came, and therefore thought *he would not die*. That is to say, that so far from the coming of Christ meaning the death of his servants, *they who remain till his coming will not die at all*: For further proof of this, see John 24-26; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17. But if it

were so that John should live till Christ's coming, and if it were also true that Christ's coming would be when John died, then the language of the Lord, correctly interpreted, would read, "If I will that he live till he die, what is that to thee?" Sure enough, what is that to anybody, even to John himself? We wish that a view of its absurdity would lead those who teach thus to correct their theology and confess their error.

3. Adventists, or literalists, are the only ones who cannot be deceived by false christs. They who take the Scriptures literally, who believe the coming of Christ is a literal, personal, visible coming; that it is yet future; that it will be with wondrous power and glory, such as to strike his enemies with awful dread; that "all kindreds of the earth will wail because of him," when every eye shall see him; "that at his coming the graves will be opened and the dead will be raised; that the living saints will be changed to immortality, and all be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,—they, we say, who believe these things *cannot* be deceived by false christs and by counterfeit comings, because *they cannot counterfeit these events*, while they who spiritualize his coming, or make it mean *anything whatever* but a person visible coming, are open to the deceptions against which the Saviour warns us.

38

4. The fact or event against which the Saviour wants us is fulfilled by those who spiritualize the coming of Christ, who say *he is here*, coming at death or in any other event past or present. But most notably is it fulfilled in these last days by Spiritualists, who assign the name or title of Christ to a *class*, and deny that it specially belongs to an individual, or to Jesus of Nazareth. We have conversed with those who professed to be christs, and they actually "show great signs and wonders." Multitudes are deceived by them. Christ said that if possible they would deceive the very elect. Many who consider themselves of the elect—who profess to love the Lord and to believe the Scriptures—are deceived by them, because they have imbibed the erroneous views of the nature of the second coming of Christ, and of the nature of man, and of the true source of immortality.

5. As has been noticed, they who say the coming of Christ was at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, assert that his coming was figurative—he came in judgment to the Jews. The judgment was inflicted by Titus and the Roman army; therefore Titus and that army *represented* Christ in his coming. To suit such a supposed fact we will read the caution given by our Saviour: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Roman army, believe it not,—go not forth. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth unto the west, so shall the coming of the Roman army be." But we insist that the Roman army never came to Jerusalem in any such manner. Yet in such manner will the coming of the Son of man be. For he shall come in power and great glory (Matt.

39

24:30); he shall come in the glory of his Father (chapter 16:27), and in the glory of the holy angels (Luke 9:26); all the holy angels shall come with him (Matt. 25:31). His coming will be as glorious and resplendent as the lightning. When Jesus revealed himself to Saul of Tarsus, there was a light above the brightness of the sun (Acts 26:13); of the angel who appeared at the tomb after the resurrection of Jesus it is said, "His countenance was like lightning" (Matt. 28:3); and Ezekiel says of the messengers of the Most High, they "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning" (Eze. 1:14).

When Jesus comes in the glory of his Father, with such a glorious train attendant, his coming will indeed be as the lightning coming out of the east and shining to the west, and no one will have more occasion or opportunity to say to his fellow, "See here," than one would to call another to behold a flash of lightning coursing through the heavens. What a pity that men will so mystify the truth of God as to denude this precious doctrine of all the glory with which the Scriptures have invested it.

THE ADVENT WILL BE LITERAL

The advent of the Lord will be literal and personal. It is *literal* in distinction from a supposed figurative or representative coming,

either at Jerusalem's overthrow or at any other time. It is *personal* in distinction from any supposed spiritual, secret, or intangible coming, for which many now contend.

1. Analogy calls for a literal, personal coming. His first coming was literal. It is claimed, and with

40

much show of reason, too, that his first coming had mostly to do with the spiritual condition of men. Yet his coming was literal and physical. His second coming will have mostly to do with the physical condition of men. Why, then, shall not his second coming be also literal—in the flesh? No repentance or pardon is offered at his second coming. It will be for "the redemption of our body;" the resurrection and translation of the saints, and the overthrow of his enemies. We say further:—

2. The resurrection of the dead will take place at his coming. That is not spiritual it is literal. Many now attempt to spiritualize the resurrection, but we can see neither reason nor propriety in the effort. (1) Jesus said that he was the resurrection, and proved the truth of his assertion, and showed the nature of the resurrection, by immediately calling Lazarus from the grave. (2) When Jesus himself was resurrected, he left the tomb vacant where he had lain, and the angel who said he was risen invited the disciples to examine the place where he lay, to be thus assured that he was not there but had risen. (3) They who deny the bodily resurrection assert that the resurrection means the rising of the spirit out of the body at death, which *cannot* be true, for Jesus was raised the third day after death. It did not take his spirit three days to leave his body after he died! (4) When Jesus referred to own resurrection under the figure of raising the temple, "he spake of the temple of his body." John 2:19-21. (5) After his resurrection he showed them his hands and his feet to identify himself to them, and invited them to handle him,—to examine the wounds

41

in his hands and his side. What more could be done to prove his bodily identity, and the physical nature of the resurrection? But his resurrection is the surety—he is the first-fruit—of the resurrection of

them that are his. As was his resurrection, so will be theirs. At that day "this mortal shall put on immortality." We leave it with the spiritualizers whether that is spoken of the spirit or the body.

3. The Scripture expressions demand a personal coming. (1) Jesus said he came down from heaven, was going back to his Father, and would come again. If his coming and returning were literal, so will be his coming again. (2) The angel said when he ascended on high, and a cloud received him out of their sight, "*This same Jesus*, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. We cannot imagine how anything but a bold perversion of language, or a peremptory denial of it, can make of this other than an actual, real, and bodily coming. (3) Paul said, speaking of his coming, "*The Lord himself* shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." 1 Thess. 4:16. This was not fulfilled by Titus, nor yet even by the Lord himself; but it will be.

4. Paul said, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Col. 3:4. The saints were not glorified at the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter said, "And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 1 Peter 5:4. No saint received a crown of glory at the destruction of

42

Jerusalem, for the Chief Shepherd did not then appear. Jesus said, speaking by his servant John, nearly thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12. This agrees with his words in Luke 14:14, that recompense shall be given at the resurrection of the just, which, as has been shown, takes place when the Lord comes.

5. Taking the negative, we inquire if the coming of the Lord, with all its attendant glory, the resurrection and translation of the saints, the gathering of the saints unto the Lord himself, the bestowing of fadeless crowns of glory to the faithful,—if all this took place at the destruction of Jerusalem, what have we to hope for in

the future? All the promises of redemption, glory, and immortality, cluster around the coming of the Lord. If that is already past, what is our hope? It is not difficult to show that they who have no part in the second coming of Christ have no part in his glory, no crown of life, no recompense of reward. Giving that away, they rob themselves of all.

SIGNS OF THE LORD'S COMING

We have now come to the more direct answer to the question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" This answer is given in verses 29-31: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all

43

the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

This contains the most specific answer, though another class of signs has already been noticed, which are fulfilled in modern Spiritualism. The close connection of the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, to the coming of Christ and events related to it, show that here we have the answer to the question of the disciples. As we hold the advent of Christ to be a literal coming, so we hold that these signs are literal, according to the first and obvious meaning of the terms used.

1. There is no consistency in the view that they are figures or symbols. A teacher in a theological college in one of the Western States told us, when asked, of what they were symbols, that the sun meant the civil power of the Jews; the moon, the ecclesiastical power; and the stars, the great men of that nation. This would make the Saviour say, in the year A. D. 29, under the reign of

Tiberius and, Pilate, that sometime in the future, or when Jerusalem was destroyed, in A. D. 70, the civil power of the Jews should be obscured or lost!. The absurdity of this declaration it is difficult to equal, for everyone must know that they had not even a vestige of civil power at that time to lose. They had not power to punish one whom their highest tribunal had judged worthy of death, and they acknowledged Cesar as their only king.

44

2. It has been urged by those holding the Universalist view," that great signs were shown just before the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, and that these fulfilled this prophecy. Dr. Clarke mentions some in his notes on verses 6, 7. But so far from these being signs of his coming, or of the end, the Saviour distinctly says of them—"the end is not yet"—"these are the beginning of sorrows." The signs of verse 29 are closely related to his coming, and therefore here is found the answer to the question under consideration.

3. We are told by authors that certain signs and omens did take place *before* the destruction of Jerusalem. See Clarke's Commentary. And then they also claim that "the tribulation" of this chapter was the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. But that *cannot* be true, for the text says, "Immediately *after* the tribulation" these signs shall appear. It is supposed that the signs denoted the coming destruction, or tribulation. But that is not the case. The signs are *after* the tribulation, and denote the approach of another event. The theory which we are calling in question would make it appear that the signs of Christ's coming are given after his coming! But neither his coming nor that tribulation relate to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Scriptures are not so inconsistent as that view would make it appear.

4. If it be indeed true that the signs of verse 29 are literal, that must decide the controversy; and that they are literal there is one point of proof which seems quite conclusive. In Luke 21:25 the same things are spoken of in the following manner: "And there shall

45

be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity." The signs in the sun, moon, and stars, are distinct from the things upon the earth,—they are not fulfilled among the nations of the earth. Here is a fact the conclusion of which is unavoidable. Compare Acts 2:19, 20.

We will now notice the harmony of the literal view. 1. Paul said there should come a great apostasy before the coming of the Lord. Christ said the same in Matthew 24. 2. Paul said that at the coming of Christ the saints will be gathered together unto him. The Saviour said the same in Matthew 24. 3. Paul said that when the Lord comes, the holy angels will come with him. 2 Thessalonians 1. The Saviour said the same thing in Matthew 24, and in 16:27, and in 25:31.

Again, in speaking of the apostasy and its fruits, Paul said that a great antichristian power should arise, which should continue till the time of the Lord's coming. Daniel speaks of the same power, gives it the same characteristics of self-exaltation and blasphemy, says it shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and practice and prosper till the time comes that the saints possess the kingdom. The Saviour speaks of the same persecution,—the great tribulation upon "the elect,"—and says that the saints will possess the kingdom when he comes. Compare further Matt. 25:31, 34 and 1 Cor. 15:49-53. The saints were not called to "inherit the kingdom" at the destruction of Jerusalem; "all nations" were not gathered at that time to have judgment passed upon them.

46

The signs in the heavens came *after* the tribulation. The greatest tribulation the saints of Christ ever suffered, was under the Roman power. It was severe unnder Pagan Rome, but far more terrible and destructive, as it was of longer continuance, under Papal Rome. Under the influence of the German Reformation in the sixteenth century, this tribulation began to wane. It ceased early in the eighteenth century. In the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century, the signs in the heavens were fulfilled. They are not signs of the tribulation, nor is the tribulation connected with the coming of Christ. They are signs of his

coming, and they stand between the tribulation and his coming. His coming is now near, for these signs are fulfilled.

FULFILLMENT

1. The sun shall be darkened." We have but little to say on this point—not that there is not much to say, but that so much has already been said. The dark day is a common phrase to denote the 19th of May, 1780. Not long since a few were living who saw it. The writer well remembers that, in his boyhood, aged people made frequent mention of it in relating notable points in their experience. Four testimonies only we here give, from authorities of indisputable reliability. A publication of the American Tract Society, entitled, "Life of Edward Lee," says:—

"In the month of May, 1780, there was a very terrific dark day in New England, when 'all faces seemed to gather blackness,' and the people were filled with fear. There was great distress in the village where Edward Lee lived, 'men's hearts

47

failed them for fear' that the judgment-day was at hand; and the neighbors all flocked around the holy man, for his lamp was trimmed, and shining brighter than ever, amidst the unnatural darkness. Happy and joyful in God, he pointed them to their only refuge from the wrath to come, and spent the gloomy hours in earnest prayer for the distressed multitude."—*Tract No. 379 of American Tract Society—Life of Edward Lee.*

Had the author and publishers of this work intended to give a forcible illustration of the fulfillment of this prophecy, they could not better have chosen their language for that purpose. But they had no such intention—they had not this prophecy in view at all, which makes their testimony all the more emphatic as evidence on the question.

Dr. Tenney, in 1785, in writing to the Historical Society concerning that day, says:—

"Although the *uncommon darkness* which attracted the attention of all ranks of people in this part of the country on the 19th of May, 1780, was a phenomenon which several gentlemen of considerable literary abilities have endeavored to

solve, yet, I believe, you will agree with me *that no satisfactory solution has yet appeared.*"

Herschel, the great astronomer, says:—

"The dark day in Northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of nature which will always be read with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain."

2. "And the moon shall not give her light." In New England, where the sun's darkening was most noted, the moon, though full, was totally obscured till midnight, when it came out with brilliancy. Here is the evidence that the darkness lasted fourteen hours—from 10 A. M. of the 19th till the midnight following. Many descriptions have been given of the

48

intense darkness of the night. One said that if every luminous body had been struck out of existence, he could not imagine that the darkness could have been more intense.

"Almost, if not altogether alone, as the most mysterious and, as yet unexplained phenomenon of its kind in nature's diversified range of events during the last century, stands the dark day of May 19, 1780, a most unaccountable darkening of the whole visible heavens and atmosphere in New England, which brought intense alarm and distress to multitudes of minds, as well as dismay to the brute creation, the fowls fleeing, bewildered, to their roosts, and the birds to their nests, and the cattle returning to their stalls. Indeed, thousands of the good people of that day became fully convinced that the end of all things terrestrial had come; many gave up, for the time, their secular pursuits, and betook themselves to religious devotions."—*Our First Century.*

It was startling, and overpowering, and even painful to the senses, because of its intensity. And *learned men say it cannot be explained or accounted for.* We think it admits of just one explanation,—the God of heaven—the Ruler of nature—hung out these signs in *the* heavens to teach the student of his word that the Son of God would soon make his second advent to this world. And we are thankful that the warning has not been in vain. The marked fulfillment of the prophecies has led thousands to look, to hope for,

and to rejoice in, the "blessed hope" of the coming of the dear Redeemer.

3. "And the stars shall fall from heaven." We may be permitted to notice this more particularly, as efforts have been made to show that no past fulfillment can meet the requirements of this part of

49

the prophecy. We believe that it was fulfilled in the fall of 1833.

Professor Olmstead, of Yale College, said that they who were so fortunate as to witness the falling stars on November 13, 1833, probably beheld the greatest display of celestial fire-works that has ever been since the creation of the world—certainly the greatest that has ever occurred within the time covered by the annals of history. It was more than a "shower," as it has been called. They began to fall as early as 11 o'clock, and increased until they truly resembled a showery but of many hours' continuance. We witnessed them in all their glory for nearly three hours, till they were obscured by the dawning day. And when the day dispelled the appearance, they were still falling as numerous as ever, as was proved by their being visible in the west when the advancing light of the sun rendered them invisible in the east. During their fall, the largest and brightest would leave a mark of light down the heavens like a mark of phosphorus on a wall in a dark room. When it became so light that the mass of them could no longer be seen, one would occasionally make its presence known by such a penciling of the sky.

We here give an extract from an article written by Henry Dana Ward, in regard to the falling stars of November 13, 1833, published in the *Journal of Commerce*, November 15, 1833:—

"At the cry, 'Look out of the window,' I sprang from a deep sleep, and with wonder saw the east lighted up with the dawn and meteors. The zenith, the north, and the west also, showed the falling stars, in the very image of one thing, and

50

only one, I ever heard of. I called to my wife to behold; and while robing, she exclaimed, 'See how the stars fall!' I replied, 'That is the wonder!' and we felt in our hearts that it was a sign of the last days. For, truly, 'the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is

shaken of a mighty wind.' Rev. 6:13. This language of the prophet has always been received as metaphorical. Yesterday, it was literally fulfilled. The ancients understood by *aster*, in Greek, and *stella*, in Latin, the smaller lights of heaven. The refinement of modern astronomy has made the distinction between, stars of heaven and meteors of heaven. Therefore, the idea of the prophet, as it is expressed in the original Greek, was literally fulfilled in the phenomenon of yesterday.

"And how did they fall?—Neither myself, nor one of the family, heard any report; and were I to hunt through nature for a simile, I could not find one so apt to illustrate the appearance of the heavens, as that which St. John uses in the prophecy before quoted.

"The stars fell 'even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' Here is the exactness of the prophet.

"The falling stars did not come as if from several trees shaken, but from *one*; those which appeared in the east, fell toward the east; those which appeared in the north, fell toward the north; those which appeared in the west, fell toward the west; and those which appeared in the south (for I went out of my residence into the park), fell toward the south. And they fell not as the *ripe* fruit falls. Far from it; but they flew, they were *cast*, like the unripe fruit which at first refuses to leave the branch, and when, under a violent pressure it does break its hold, it flies swiftly, *straight off*, descending; and in the multitude falling, some cross the track of other, as they are thrown with more or less force; but each one falls on its own side of the tree. Such was the appearance of the above phenomenon to the inmates of my house."

No description can give any conception of the grandeur and glory of the scene. As our memory recalls it, we feel that the power of God was manifest to make known to the student of prophecy that the coming of the Son of man is near.

By comparing the testimony of the evangelists we find these signs still more definitely located. We have noticed that the greatest tribulation, or affliction, whichever befell the church of Christ was under the papal; Roman power. This power was symbolized by the

"little horn" of Daniel 7, into whose hands the saints of the Most High were given for a thousand two hundred and threescore prophetic days—1260 years. This period commenced A. D. 538, and ended when the civil power fell from the hands of the Papacy by The imprisonment and exile of Pius VI., in 1798. For more evidence on this point see "Thoughts on the Revelation." The persecution began to wane under the German Reformation, and ended in the first half of the eighteenth century. To this the Saviour doubtless referred when he spoke of shortening the days of affliction for the elect's sake. The affliction ceased before the expiration of the days spoken of by the prophet. And Mark says, "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun, shall be darkened." Mark 13:24. This was actually fulfilled, in that order. The days of the prophecy closed at the very close of the eighteenth century. The power was still in the hands of the Papacy, but unused; the affliction was passed; the long, dark night of persecution upon the church of Christ had come to an end; there was a respite "for the elect's sake," lest no flesh should be

52

saved—lest the faithful witnesses for Jesus should be exterminated by the power and malice of the Inquisition. And in this time of respite, while yet the power lingered in the hands of the man of sin, the sun was "darkened—God's "signs in the heavens above" commenced their fulfillment. The darkening of the sun in 1780 was the greatest that ever was known, and it took place at the very time specified in the "sure word of prophecy."

"ALL THESE THINGS"

It is suggested that there are other things besides the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, which took place, according to this prophecy, and we are to look for "all these things" before we are to expect the coming of the Lord. If the reader will look carefully at the connection, he will see that following these signs five things are mentioned before the parable of the fig-tree is given: (1) The shaking of the powers of the heavens; (2) the appearing of the sign

of the Son; of man; (3) the mourning of all the tribes of the earth (4) the coming of the Son of man in power and great glory; (5) sending his angels to gather his elect. Surely no one will contend that "all *these* things" shall take place before we have a right to expect the coming of the Lord as an event near at hand. We cannot say his coming is yet near in the future when he *has come* and gathered his saints to himself in glory.

Thus it is seen that we have to draw a line between those things which are signs of his coming; and those things which take place *at his coming*. Where

53

shall this line be drawn? We say between the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the things which follow. All that follow the three signs are connected with the immediate coming of the Lord. We need notice only the first—the shaking of the powers of the heavens.

1. Paul teaches, in Hebrews 12, that as the voice of God once shook the earth, in the days of Moses, so once more will the voice of God shake both earth and heaven. *Once more* the voice of God from heaven will be heard, and heaven and earth will be shaken thereby.

2. In Revelation 6, following the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, it is said, "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together;" and this is accompanied with an earthquake so great that every mountain and island are moved out of their places. Thus the heavens and the earth are shaken, and the people upon the earth call to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. They will understand at that time that the Lamb of God he who has been their intercessor—has taken vengeance into his hands, and no probation remains for the impenitent. Compare 2 Thess. 7-10.

3. In Rev. 16:17-21 we learn that the voice of God is heard from heaven, and the consequent commotion of the elements takes place, under the seventh and last plague, "in which [the plagues] is filled up the wrath of God." Under this plague the battle of the great day is fought. Heaven's artillery is the great hail-storm.

Compare Ezekiel 13. Under the sixth plague the Saviour announces his coming as future, but very near.

54

4. Isaiah, in chapter 2 and also 13, prophesies of the same shaking, and the dismay of the inhabitants of the earth, who seek a hiding-place in the rocks for fear of the majesty of the Lord, locating it in "the day of the Lord."

5. Jeremiah, in chapter 25, locates the speaking of God from heaven at the time of the great battle, when all the kingdoms of the earth shall drink of the cup of God's fury, and fall and rise no more; when "evil shall go forth from nation to nation," because the Lord has a controversy with them, and he "will give all the wicked to the sword." The destruction of the wicked shall be so complete and universal that "they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground."

6. Joel also speaks of the time when the voice of God is heard from heaven, and says it is when the battle of the nations is come, when the sickle is put in because the harvest is ripe. Joel 3:9-16.

7. Jesus said, "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels;" and also that at the harvest the Son of man shall send forth his angels to separate the wheat from the tares. Matt. 13:37-43.

8. John also says that the harvest is reaped when the Son of man appears upon the great white cloud. Rev. 14:14-18.

9. A message—a most solemn message—of warning is given before the Son of man appears upon the white cloud to reap the harvest of the earth, and the seven last plagues are poured out after this message and before the advent,—after the message, for the first plague is poured out upon the very ones denounced

55

in the message (compare Rev. 14:9-12 and 16:1, 2): and before the advent, for under the sixth plague the Lord warns of his coming near, and the great battle is fought under the seventh, which is just at the period of his coming.

Inasmuch as he comes in the glory of his Father, and all his holy angels with him, it is certain that there will be such glory and

splendor as this world has never yet beheld. We believe the distant appearance Of this cloud, of this most resplendent glory, far, far, beyond the brightness of the sun, will be that "sign of the Son of man" which will cause all the tribes of the earth to mourn. They will have heard and rejected the evidence of his near coming. Then, when too late, they will realize their terrible mistake and hopeless condition. This will cause them to seek a hiding-place from the dazzling, and to them fearful, sight.

We do not here take time to fully develop the argument concerning the shaking of the powers of the heavens; but from this brief view we think it must appear conclusive to all that the shaking of the powers of the heavens is not a sign to prove to the waiting church that the Lord's coming draws near, but is an event which takes place in immediate connection with the Lord's appearing. It therefore follows that the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, are the only signs here given whereby we may feel the strongest assurance that his coming is near. And these *are* already fulfilled. Therefore *now* is the time to *watch*, for his coming is near indeed.

We do not say there are no more prophecies to be

56

fulfilled before the Lord comes. The warning of the angel of Rev. 14:9-12 must do its work,—must lead the people of God to that perfect obedience to "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,"—to that preparation and consecration which will insure their being sealed with the seal of God in their foreheads, that they may be preserved from the evil to come, in the day of the Lord's anger,—in the pouring out of the plagues of his wrath. See Zeph. 2:1-3.

The Son of man will be seen "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." But before his coming a great work must be done for his people. Should he suddenly burst upon them now, they could not endure the "power and great glory" of the scene. This subject is well illustrated by the following words of the prophet: "Then shall, we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hosea 6:3. The morning is a beautiful figure of the opening glory of the

day of God. The day-star first appears, then the dawn of day. And as the light of day increases, our eyes are enabled to endure it, and view the sun, shining in his strength. But should the light of the sun burst upon the world suddenly at midnight, no human eye could endure it.

So will the people of God be prepared to meet their coming King. They must first break away from the love and cares of this world, and consecrate all to the Lord. Then will they, in due time, share the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "as the rain, as the latter and

57

former rain unto the earth." The day-star will arise in their hearts. 2 Peter 1:19. Those who have taken heed to the sure word of prophecy through the dark, watching night, then raise their heads in triumph. They are filled with faith and with the Holy Spirit. Glory is poured upon them till they can gaze on Christ and angels. The trumpet sounds, the angels hasten to the graves of the righteous dead, and the voice of the Son of God awakes the sleeping saints of all ages. They come forth in immortal perfection; and, as they leave the earth, the living saints are changed. The "elect from one end of heaven to the other," with angels bright and strong to lead the way, are caught up to meet the Lord, who waits in mid heaven to receive the purchase of his blood. Language would fail to describe what follows; dear reader, we pray you to contemplate it, and may we be prepared to participate in this happy meeting.

PARABLE OF THE FIG-TREE

Verses 32, 33: "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it ["He," margin] is near, even at the doors." The parable of the fig-tree is probably the most forcible figure that could be used by our Lord to illustrate this subject. When the trees of the field begin to put forth their leaves, and the tender grass springs up, and the

ground is being covered with its green velvet carpet, we know that summer is nigh. It is a certainty with us that summer is coming when we see these signs in nature.

58

We *know* that summer is nigh. "So, likewise," or with the same certainty, we may *know* that Christ's coming is at the doors when the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, are fulfilled.

Our Lord has stated the object of these signs, which is that we may know when his coming is at the doors. But we are told by some that the church is not to know anything of the period of Christ's second advent. Then we inquire, Why did our Lord give signs of the event? Are they given to deceive us, to lead the honest Christian to look for Christ's coming when, in fact, nothing is to be known of the time of the event?—Certainly not. The fact that Christ foretells signs of his coming, and then states the object of those signs, that the church may *know* when the event is near, even at the doors, is sufficient proof that it is the will of Heaven that the church should understand the period of the second advent.

Our Lord says (Luke 21:28), "And when these things *begin* to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." The signs began to come to pass with the dark day of 1780. Then it could be said that redemption draweth nigh, and from that time the humble follower of Jesus might look up in expectation of witnessing his glorious appearing. But (verse 31) when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

The signs in the sun, moon, and stars are all that were given to base faith upon. All the other events mentioned in connection with these, have their fulfillment after the faith of God's people is perfected, and

59

the doom of all sinners is fixed; therefore their cannot be embraced in the phrase, "all these things," of Matt. 24:33. The three signs having come to pass, we may now learn the parable of the fig-tree, and know that Christ's coming is near, even at the doors. The phrase, "all these things," does not embrace the

mourning of the tribes of the earth, and the sign of the Son of man. Neither does it embrace the shaking of the powers of the heavens; for that does not take place until the seven last plagues are poured out. But the faith of God's people is perfected, and the doom of all sinners is forever fixed, before the pouring out of the first plague. The parable of the fig tree was given to inspire faith in the minds of those who hear the reasons of Christ's soon coming. But it is most absurd to suppose that this parable is to be learned after it is said, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; . . . and he that is holy, let him be holy still." No! The phrase, "all these things," in verse 33, embraces the three great signs in the sun, moon, and stars, given to strengthen the faith of God's people while merciful warnings are being given to the world. Here, then, since the falling stars of 1833, the parable of the fig-tree has force, and we may know that Christ's coming is near, even at the doors, with all the certainty that we know that summer is, nigh when the trees put forth their tender buds and leaves.

THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS

Verses 34, 35: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall

60

not pass away." Many suppose that our Lord here speaks of the generation then living, who listened to his teachings. That such are in error on this point, the following facts clearly prove:—

1. It is certainly true that what is embraced in the phrase, "all these things," was not fulfilled in that generation.

2. It could, not be the generation living in the days of his flesh, for he said to them (Luke 11:29). "There shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. Read also Mark 8:12.

It is evident that our Lord refers to the generation which would see the signs fulfilled, and would be instructed by the parable of the fig-tree. In this prophetic discourse, he leads the minds of his disciples down over the events of the Christian age, mentions the

signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and then declares that this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.

In like manner, Paul carries his brethren forward to the resurrection, when he says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." 1 Cor. 15:51, 52. Or, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." 1 Thess. 4:27. The things here mentioned by the apostle did not take place in his day. They have not yet taken place. Notwithstanding, he speaks of them as though they would take place in his day, and as if he were to have a part in them.

61

Christ is given to the last generation. God sent Noah to the last generation before the flood, not to any preceding one. The very generation which was destroyed by the waters of the flood saw Noah build the ark, and heard his warning voice. So God has raised up men to give the solemn warning to the world at the right time to give force to the warning. And the very generation of men that live after, the three great signs are fulfilled, and who hear and reject the warning message of Heaven, will drink the cup of the unmingled wrath of God. And those of this very generation who receive the message, suffer disappointments, and endure the trials of the waiting position, will witness the coming of Christ, and exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have *waited* for him, and he will save us." Isa. 25:9.

With what emphasis our Lord gave utterance to this sentiment! It is a rebuke upon our unbelief. As read it, God help us to believe it: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these thing be fulfilled." And as though this were not enough to lead us to unwavering faith, he adds these forcible words: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

"OF THAT DAY AND HOUR KNOWETH NO MAN"

Verses 36, 37: But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." The day and the hour, and even the year, of the second advent are purposely hidden. Some of the prophetic periods

62

reach to "the time of the end," while others extend still further down, very near the end itself; yet none of them reach to the coming of the Son of man. Many seem to suppose that the text proves that nothing may be known concerning the time of the second advent. But in this they greatly err, as has been abundantly shown in this chapter. The reader will call to mind the following points:—

1. The disciples inquired of the Saviour in regard to *the sign of his coming*. Let it be remembered that his answer embraced this as a matter which he would have his people understand.

2. He gave a brief sketch of events covering the whole dispensation, by means of which the people of God might know something of their position all the way down to the end.

3. In direct answer to their question he gave *three signs*, namely, in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, so great, and fulfilled in such a manner, that they can neither be counterfeited nor mistaken.

4. It is right for us to regard the information that he gave as he himself regarded it. That he considered it a complete and sufficient answer to their question is proved in this: he said, "When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." And he considered it clear enough to be the basis of a duty, for it is given in his words in the form of a commandment, "know that it is near." In the original it is in the imperative form; it is necessary to our safety that we know, and he requires us to know.

Reference is often made to this verse with as much confidence as if it were a sufficient refutation of every

63

argument in favor of the truth that Christ's coming is near. We accept the declaration of this verse; we accept all the Scriptures. May we ask the objector, Do you believe this scripture? Perhaps he

will say, "Yes; I believe that no man can tell the day nor the hour of his coming." We also believe that; but that is not all that the Saviour said. *Do you believe his word?* Do you believe that you may know, by the signs which he has given, when his coming is near, even at the door? Here is the test of your confidence in the teachings of our blessed Lord. We have this confidence; we fully believe we may know. "Nay, more; we believe we *must* know,—that we are *commanded to know*, and not to slight the Saviour's warnings. And we believe it to be just as fatal for us not to know as it was for the inhabitants of the earth in the days of Noah not to know when the flood was coming. Matt. 24:36-39.

It is quite possible to know that an event is near without knowing the day and hour when it will occur. Plain as this distinction is, the objectors seem to overlook it altogether. An illustration of this is afforded in an incident which occurred a few years ago. We were holding meetings in the northern part of Ohio; it was in the spring of the year. Having one evening presented the Bible evidences that the coming of the Lord is near, we were hailed next morning by a gentleman who was planting his garden, and requested to tell him *at what time* we thought the Lord would come. Of course we told him we knew nothing about that; we left it where the Scriptures leave it, that it is near, *but just how near* we have no knowledge. But he

64

insisted that, inasmuch as we were very confident that his coming is near, we must have formed *some idea of the definite time*, and he would not be satisfied unless we told him. So it often is that the idea of definite is firmly fixed in the minds of opposers, while it never is in ours. Failing to satisfy him by denials, we changed the conversation to his work. He was planting corn. We asked him if he expected that the corn would soon "come up." He answered, Yes." "And why?"—"There is good reason to expect it. The season is well advanced; the ground is moist and warm." "Then you feel assured, even to a certainty, that it will come up soon?" Again the answer was, Yes." Then we continued: "As you are certain that it will come up soon, please tell *at what exact time* you think it will come up!" By

pressing the point a little, he was led to confess that his request was not a reasonable one,—that we may be certain that an event is near, and not know the exact time when it will occur.

And why not be equally positive in both cases? Our Saviour's parable is based upon the very facts which led this man to feel assured that his corn would come up soon. This parable is given in Luke 21:20-31, where it is said of the trees, "When they now shoot forth, ye see and *know of your own*, selves that summer is nigh at hand." That is, the evidence is so conclusive that you need no argument; you ask no farther proof when you see the signs which he has given, that his coming is nigh, "even at the doors." "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, *know that it is near*, even at the doors."

65

The only way imaginable in which this certainty can be evaded, is to say that the parable itself is based on certain facts which are yet matters of dispute, and therefore matters of uncertainty. But then the question arises, Would the Saviour build a parable of such certainty, and command us *to know* it as a certainty, and rest the whole fabric. on uncertainties?—Impossible! We insist that the signs are not uncertainties. They are made uncertain only by a mystifying process which leaves everything in doubt and obscurity to which it is applied. By the working of this process we have no "*sure* word of prophecy" left to us. But by taking the statements of our Saviour as *literal truths*, we have harmony in statement and certainty in fulfillment.

"THIS GENERATION"

Different views are taken of the Saviour's words in Matt. 24:34, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." One is, that the generation means *the race*, or Jewish people. This we consider a forced construction. It seems to be as unnecessary as it is unnatural. And it leaves everything indefinite where every declaration of the context tends to definiteness. It adds nothing whatever to the force of the general statement of the chapter.

Another is, that the individuals then present, or the generation living at that time, would continue till all these things were fulfilled. This has far more appearance of plausibility than the other theory. It might well be considered the truth were there no opposing considerations. But opposing considerations exist,

66

which are not only weighty, but, we think, insurmountable. This view is not *necessary*, because another and more reasonable one can be presented. The facts and reasons which we have set forth do tender our conclusion necessary, namely, that the chapter speaks of a personal, literal coming of the Saviour, which has not yet taken place. We have no idea that these facts will ever be met, and these reasoning refuted.

Another view, which we hold to be the true one, is that the language is prophetic, and uses the present for the future, as is common in the prophecies Isaiah 9 speaks of the birth of the Messiah as already having taken place, and chapter 53 in like manner speaks of his sufferings and death as being then in the *past*, more than half a millennium before he appeared on earth. If these prophecies were treated as Universalists and others of late years treat Matthew 24, the evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus would be entirely destroyed. Yet Matthew 24 is as certainly a prophecy as Isaiah 9 and 53.

Compare the language of our Saviour with that of Paul, who, in speaking to the Corinthian church, said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," or translated, at the sound of the last trump. The pronoun "we" naturally refers to the speaker and those to whom he speaks. But the trumpet has not yet sounded, the resurrection has not yet come, the translation of the living righteous to immortality without their seeing death has not yet taken place, and Paul and the church of Corinth have all fallen asleep. But *Paul's brethren have not*. Paul was speaking by

67

prophecy as surely as was Isaiah in chapter 9, when he said, "Unto, *us* a son is given." When Isaiah uses language which refers so directly and unmistakably to those then living, as taken

according to the natural application of the terms, why do all so readily apply it to a generation centuries then in the future? It is only because *the facts* compel us to recognize this usage in the prophecies. So the words of Paul can refer only to the last age of the church, to those of his brethren who shall be living when Christ comes, who shall be saved from death, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

And so also in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Here he says:—

"We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [go before] them which are asleep." He explains what he means by those who are *asleep*, for he says, "The *dead* in Christ shall rise." Universalists uniformly refer the resurrection to a *moral change*, to a rising or passing from moral or spiritual death. But to speak of those who are morally *or spiritually dead in Christ* is to use language very, strange and inappropriate. The Scriptures plainly teach that they who have fallen asleep in faith, who have died in Christ, shall have part in the first resurrection, which will take place when Christ comes.

Of Paul and his brethren in Thessalonica we can say, as we said of those in Corinth, They, are not alive, they do not remain; "the day of the Lord has not yet come, for the 'day of salvation' still continues;" the voice of the archangel has not been heard; the saints have not risen from the dead, and the living: saints have not been caught up in the clouds to meet the

68

Lord in the air; and worldlings and worldly-minded professors still cry, "Peace and safety." As Paul spoke here also by the spirit of prophecy, to *some of his brethren* all these words will be fulfilled; not one word will fail.

And so of the words of the Saviour. Having carried the minds of the disciples forward to the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, he said, "When ye shall see all *these things*, know that it is near, even at the doors." Will anyone pretend that *these things* there referred to were *then present*?—By no means. But do not *these things* refer to things in the presence of the speaker?—Not necessarily. But "this generation and "these things" belong together, for "this generation

shall see "these things" (see verse 34), though all were then in the future. And when these things are fulfilled, this generation to which these things are present facts, will not pass till *all* be fulfilled, even to the coming of the Son of man. It is a solemn to contemplate, yet we firmly believe it is truth, the signs have been fulfilled, and that the generation which saw the wonderful shower of falling stars in 1833, the last of the signs, will not pass away till the Lord himself shall descend from heaven.

On the term "this generation," we might have noticed the parallels to this in the Scriptures, to justify our conclusion. We will yet notice one, and use the language of E. B. Elliott, A. M.:—

"Our Lord might mean by '*this* generation' the generation of the time he was then speaking of, just as in Luke 17:34, where, speaking of the time of the second coming, he says, 'On *this* night shall two be in one bed; one shall be

69

taken,' etc., meaning thereby the slight of his coming, and so rendered in our English version 'in *that* night.'

There is the most perfect harmony between the teachings of the book of Revelation and the view we have presented of Matthew 24. We refer especially to the seals of chapters 5 to 8. In the first eleven chapters of Revelation there are three series of seven, which cover the entire gospel dispensation. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the letters to the churches. These embrace a history of the church of God from the first century to the coming of the Son of man to gather his people into his kingdom. The seven trumpets of chapters 8 to 11 cover about the same period of time but give a history of the nations of the earth in their conflicts with one another. The seven seals of chapters 5 to 8 are intermediate between the other series; giving a history of neither the church nor the nations separately, but a history of the church in its experiences and conflicts with the wicked nations of the earth. All these end together at the judgment, or the introduction of the day of wrath, unless it be that the last trumpet, the third woe, may be considered to prevail upon the earth after the saints are caught up to meet the

Lord in the air. That they all reach the coming day of reward and retribution there can be no reasonable question.

In chapter 6, the signs in the sun, moon, and stars are placed under the sixth seal, which reaches to the end of time, as the seventh seal barely announces a single fact connected with the ushering in of the advent of the Lord. The harmony of this with our location of the signs in Matthew 24, is at once apparent. In

70

Revelation 6, after the darkening of the sun and moon and the failing of the stars, the record says the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and the nations of the earth vainly endeavored to hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb, for the day of his wrath has come. In Matthew 24, exactly the same facts and the same order are given. The sun and moon are darkened, the stars fall, and the powers of heaven are shaken, and then the tribes of the earth mourn, because they see not only the sign of the Son of man in heaven, but they see the Son of man himself coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. They mourn because, as John says, the great day of his wrath is come.

Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 1 that he shall come to take vengeance on them that know not God, obey not the gospel. But the Lamb does not take vengeance in his hands until his advocacy and intercession for sinners cease. At the time spoken of by these prophecies, his intercession for sinners will have ceased, for "the great day of his wrath" will have come. Not one of them will call for mercy, for will then be made to realize that their probation is ended, and the time for the offer of mercy to them is past. They then only seek to be hid from his terrible presence. And in Revelation 14, after the warning of the third angel is given, the Son of man appear, and the harvest of the earth is reaped, and the wicked gathered as tares to be burned (Matthew 13), or as the clusters of "the vine of the earth," to be cast into the wine-press of the wrath of God. Can anyone say this is in the past, and yet profess to maintain respect for the Bible as a revelation?

71

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper, a commemorative institution of the gospel, is a witness to the doctrine of the future coming of the Lord. In "the great commission," Jesus told his disciples that he would be with them in the preaching of the gospel, and the practice of its ordinances, until the end of the *world*, or age,—the gospel age. But Paul says that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we do show forth the Lord's death *till he come*. When the Lord instituted the supper, he pointed their minds forward to his coming and kingdom, and said he would not thenceforth drink of the fruit of the vine till he drank it new with them in his kingdom. If Christ came at the destruction of Jerusalem, it is remarkable that, of all the apostles and servants of God, no one has yet found out that the ordinances of the gospel have been obsolete since the year A. D. 70! And if that be so the commission of the gospel, the authorized preaching of the gospel to every creature, also expired in A. D. 70. And thus by logical sequence we have the blessings as well as the curses, the promises and the threatenings, all confined to *that generation* which lived in the time of the Saviour! Some may be willing to risk this conclusion in order to save their premises, but we shall take no part with them. To us the coming of the Lord is still "that blessed hope;" to meet our friends in the resurrection still comforts our hearts while we sorrow for them that sleep in Jesus. And still we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." Rev 22:20.

A striking point of similarity between Matthew 24 and those parts of the book of Revelation which

72

refer to the closing scenes of this dispensation, is that which refers to the working of miracles to deceive. These are the words of the Saviour:—

"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matt. 24:23, 24.

In Rev. 13:11-17 is a prophecy of these wonders, wrought by a certain power called the beast, with two horns like a lamb, by

means of which he deceives the world, and fastens upon the people a system of false worship. Against this work of deception and falsehood, God causes a warning to be proclaimed, which is found in chapter 14:9-12; and this warning is given just before the Son of man appears to reap the harvest of the earth, which takes place at the end of this dispensation. See Matt. 13:38, 39 and Joel 3: 9-15.

These miracles are again shown at the very conclusion of their work, in Rev. 16:12-14. Here also is shown the object of the deception which is wrought by "the spirits of devils working miracles." It is to gather the kings and the people of the earth to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. And at this point of time the Saviour says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth."

The "great day of God" mentioned in this text is that "day of the Lord," "day of his wrath," or "day of the Lord's anger," so often spoken of in the Scriptures, and which immediately succeeds "the day of salvation." By comparing the texts to which reference has been made, it evidently appears that Mat-

73

thew 24 refers to the same period of time that is referred to in Rev. 13, 14, 16; Matt. 13:38, 39, and Joel 3:9-15. The deceptions are put forth, and the world is deceived, the Son of man appears, the harvest is reaped, the battle is fought, and the enemies of God are overthrown.

We believe all that our Lord has said. We accept his word that of that day and hour no man knows, and we just as readily accept his assurance that we may know when it is near; nay, we acknowledge that it is our duty to know and to prepare for that day. To enforce this duty our Lord gave a most forcible illustration from the Scriptures.

NOAH'S TIME AND OURS

VERSES 37-39: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in

marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

A picture of the present condition of the mass of mankind is here, drawn. The people of the last generation will be like that before the flood, while the ark was preparing.

This shows that *we cannot innocently be ignorant on the subject of the Lord's soon coming*. It will be a terrible calamity in that day to those who do not know, even as it was to the world in the days of Noah, because they did not know of the approaching time of the flood. If they had had no means of knowing, they would, of course, have been innocent, and have escaped destruction.

74

But they might have known, for Noah warned them by his preaching, and yet more forcibly in building the ark. In this he "condemned the world." Heb. 11:7. He proved his faith by his works. They proved their unbelief, and were justly condemned. They turned away from his warnings, and forgot his words, and so the flood came when they did not expect it,—they did not know,—and took them all away. *So will it be when the Son of man is revealed*. Matt. 24:39.

Noah preached and warned the people of the coming flood, and they mocked. He built the ark and they scoffed. He was a preacher of righteousness. His works were calculated to give point to, and set home to the heart, what he preached. Every righteous sermon, and every blow struck in building the ark, condemned a careless, scoffing world. As the time grew nearer, they grew more careless, more hardened, more bold and impudent, and their condemnation surer. Noah and his family were alone. And could one family know more than all the world? The ark was a matter of ridicule, and Noah was regarded as a willful bigot.

But the Lord calls Noah into the ark, and says to him, "Yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth;" and by the hand of Providence the beasts are led into the ark, and the Lord shuts Noah in. This is regarded at first by the scoffing multitude as something wonderful; but it is soon explained away by the wiser ones, so as to

calm their fears, and they breathe easier. But the day arrives. The sun rises as usual, and the heavens are clear. "Now where is

75

old Noah's flood?" is heard-from a thousand impious lips. On this very day some are being joined in marriage. It is a day of unusual feasting and sports. The farmer is planting and sowing, and the mechanic is heard pursuing his work of building. And while all are looking over long years of future prosperity and happiness, suddenly the heavens gather blackness. Fear fills every heart. They think of Noah, and as they turn to look toward the ark, the windows of heaven open, and the rain descends in torrents. "The fountains of the great deep are broken up," and here and there come gushing up rivers of water. The valleys are fast filling, and thousands are swept away in death. Some flee to the highest point of land, but the waters fast follow them. Men bear their wives and children to the mountains, but are obliged to leave them there to drown, while they climb the highest trees. But soon they too are covered with water. Not a scoffer remains. All are still in death. Horrible death! made still more horrible by being the consequence of slighted mercy! But where is Noah?—Ah! safe in the ark, borne upon the billow. Safe from the flood, safe, for God "shut him in."

OBJECT OF MATTHEW 24

Now we have a most important consideration to present to the minds of the readers. We think we have given facts and reasonings to prove that the coming of the Lord, mentioned in Matthew 24, is a literal, personal, visible coming. We have no idea that these facts can be controverted, or that these reasonings can be refuted. But if the question be asked of us,

76

Do you, then, believe that the instruction of this chapter was given to prove that the second coming of Christ will be literal and personal, even as his first was? we answer, No, we do not. No such object was in view; no question concerning the nature of his coming was asked. Mark well this point. The disciples did not ask him, Master, will you actually come to this world again, that we

may behold you personally as we see you now? No, no; this was not yet a matter of query. The Universalist, or spiritualizing, view of the second coming was not yet invented. Nor did the Saviour say, When ye see these things, then ye may know that my coming is personal and visible.

The question was, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" It was a question concerning a certain event, and the time of its fulfillment; and the answer was to this question, and to no other. And to this it was direct: "When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

Thus is shown the great mistake made by a majority of those who study this chapter. They appear to think that the sole object of the Saviour was to guard his followers against the idea that they can know anything about the time of his coming. But, to the contrary, he leads our minds down through a series of events and signs with the special object that we may know the time, not, indeed, the day nor the hour, but the time when it is near,—very near, even at the doors.

Verse 36 is often perverted when it is used to justify

77

the oft-repeated assertion that "we cannot tell anything about the time of the Lord's coming." When our opposers quote this verse, we accept its statement fully and cheerfully. They seem to have exceeding strong confidence in our Saviour's words, that we cannot tell the day nor the hour. We have equal confidence in this declaration. But will they accept, with the same confidence, the statement in verse 33, which gives assurance that *we may know when it is near?* If they accept this as they do verse 36, then the controversy of this chapter is ended. If they do not accept it, but still insist that we cannot know, then *how* can they consistently claim to be believers of the Saviour's words? We invite all readers to look candidly at this point, and answer to their own hearts before God this question: For what was the instruction of this chapter given? If the Lord did not intend that his people shall know anything about the time, what is the meaning of the words in verse 33? He says

that we may know when his coming is near, and we have too much reverence for, and fear of, his word to contradict him.

And more than this, we believe that verse 33 is not merely *instructive* but also *preceptive*. It contains not only a statement, but a commandment. It does not barely inform us that we may know, but it commands us to know. The original shows, but the English does not plainly show, that the Saviour spoke in the imperative; and therefore no one can justly claim exemption, and say it makes no difference whether we know or do not. To say that we cannot know is to slight the words of the Lord. To refuse to diligently

78

and prayerfully search in order to know, is to disobey the Lord's commandment. Reverence, humility, and a spirit of obedience, all call for a careful examination of our Saviour's teachings, and a reception of the evidence of his near coming.

By many the evidences of the soon coming of Christ are considered insufficient to base faith upon. But mark: the testimony and acts of one man condemned the people destroyed by the flood. The evidences then were sufficient, otherwise the world would not have been condemned. But behold the evidences which come pouring in upon us on all sides that the day of the Lord is near, and hasteth greatly. We follow down the numerous prophetic chains of Daniel, and of the Revelation, and we find ourselves in every instance standing just before the day of wrath. We see the signs spoken of by prophets, by Christ, and in the Epistles, fulfilling or fulfilled. And at the right time, and in the right manner, to fulfill certain prophecies, a solemn message arises in different parts of the world: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Joel 2:1. Wherever we look, we see prophecy fulfilling. And while the knowledge of God and the spirit of holiness are departing, spiritual wickedness like a flood covers the land.

But these evidences are considered insufficient to rest faith upon. Well, what kind of evidence is required? "When the signs of the

end," says the skeptic, "are fulfilled, they will be so plain that no one can doubt." But if the signs are of such a nature,

79

and are fulfilled in such a manner, as to compel all to believe in the coming of Christ, how can it be as it was in the days of Noah? Men were not then compelled to believe. But eight believing souls were saved, while all the world beside sunk in their unbelief beneath the waters of the flood. God has never revealed his truth to man in a manner to compel him to believe. Those who have wished to doubt his word, have found a wide field in which to doubt, and a broad road to perdition. Only those who wish to believe find solid rock on which to rest their faith. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. He will find but little. It will be as in the days of Noah. A few will believe, and stand complete in God amid all the perils of the last days. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32.

Just before the end, the world will be hardened in sin, indifferent to the claims of God, careless about heeding warnings of danger, blinded by cares, pleasures, and riches; an unbelieving and infidel race, eating, drinking, marrying, building, planting, sowing. It is right to eat and drink, but the sin is in excess and gluttony. The marriage covenant is holy, but God's glory is seldom thought of. Building, planting, and sowing, necessary for convenient shelter, food, and doing, are right, but the world has gone wholly after these things, so that they have no time nor disposition to think of God, heaven, Christ's coming, and the judgment. This world is their god, and all their energies of body and mind bow down to serve it. And the evil day is put far away.

80

The faithful watchman who sounds the alarm as he sees destruction coming, is considered a "fanatic," a "teacher of dangerous heresies;" while a long period of peace and prosperity is predicted from the popular pulpit. So the churches are quieted to sleep. The scoffer continues to scoff, and the mocker mocks on. But their day is coming. Thus saith the prophet of God: "Howl ye; for

the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt; and they shall be afraid; pangs and sorrow shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth; they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, tote day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it." Isa. 13:6-9.

Most dreadful day! And is it near, and hasting on as fast as the rapid wheels of time can bring it?—Yes, it hasteth! It hasteth greatly! What a description given by the prophet! Read it, and as you read, try to feel how dreadful will be that day. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their

81

blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy; for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." Zeph. 1:14-18.

Now we hear the cry from the pulpit, and all the way along down to the grog-shop, "Where is the promise of his coming?" But the scene will speedily change: "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them. . . . and they shall not escape." The scoffing of the haughty scoffer will soon be turned to wailing and howling." "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." Isa. 2:11,

12. "And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground." Jer. 25:33.

The last plagues, in which is filled up the wrath of God, waiting for mercy to finish her last pleadings; will be poured out. See Rev. 15:1, and 16 entire. Unmingled wrath of Jehovah! And not one drop of mercy?—Not one! Jesus will lay off his priestly attire, eave [*sic.*] the mercy-seat, and put on the garments of vengeance, never more to offer his blood to cleanse the sinner from his sins. The angels will wipe away the last tear shed over sinners, while the mandate resounds

82

through all heaven, Let them alone! The groaning, weeping, praying, preaching church on earth, who in the last message use every means within their reach, and employ every power of their being, to sound everywhere the loud cry, lest the blood of souls be found on their garments, are now hushed in solemn silence. The Holy Spirit has written within them these prophetic words of their soon-expected Lord: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Rev. 22:11.

Now the ministers of truth have a message for the people, and gladly speak the words of life; but then they will have no message. Now their prayers and strong cries go up to Heaven in behalf of sinners; then they will have no spirit of prayer for them. Now the church says to the sinner, Come; and Jesus stands ready to plead his blood in his behalf, that he may be washed from sin and live; but then salvation's hour will have passed, and the sinner will be shut up in darkness and black despair.

83

It will be a day of mourning and lamentation, and famine for hearing the words *of* the Lord. "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will

make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they be a

84

witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." James 5:1-3. Now silver and gold may be used to God's glory, for the advancement of his cause, but in that day "they shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels; because it is the stumbling-block of their iniquity." Eze. 7:19. Now they may lay up a treasure in heaven, in bags that wax not old. Now they may deposit in the bank of heaven, and deliver their souls, Then, overwhelmed with terror, they will cast their wealth into the mire of the streets; but "their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord."

OUR DUTY TO WATCH

VERSES 42-44: "Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

They who hide themselves behind the saying that that day will come as a thief, and that therefore they cannot know, will find when it comes that they have only insured their own destruction by willfully placing themselves beside those who did not know that the flood was, coming, because they refused to heed the counsel God sent by the mouth of his prophets.

85

They were destroyed because they knew not; and they knew not because they would not heed the warning. And is the word of the Son of God of less consequence than that of Noah?—By no means.

If they were destroyed who refused the testimony of Noah, how shall they escape who shut their eyes and ears against the words of warning given by the Lord Jesus? Oh, that men would be wise, and listen to the Saviour's counsel to watch, to observe the signs, and to know when the day is near, that they might not be taken away in the Lord's anger!

"Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:28. None would look for him—none would be watching and waiting for him—if they could have no knowledge that he was near to come. None would sound an alarm, and call upon the inhabitants of the earth to tremble because the day of the Lord is near, if they had no evidence from the words of prophecy that it is near. Joel 2:1. We are thankful that our heavenly Father, in the greatness of his mercy, has given us signs, and warnings, and such strong assurances, that we may know when the day is near, so that it shall not come as a thief upon the believing soul; thankful that we are thus afforded the means of escaping from the ruin that- is impending, and of sharing in the triumph of the redeemed followers of the Lamb.

The present watching, waiting position requires much faith and patience. Says Paul: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that ye have done the will of God [in proclaiming the

86

coming of Christ], ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; that if any man, draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw hack unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Heb. 10:35-30.

Says James: , "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and utter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Chap, 5:7, 8.

The present position and present duty of God's people are defined in Rev. 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

THE FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT

VERSES 45-47: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom the lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods."

In this figure, Christ is represented as the Lord of the household of faith (see Mark 13: 34; Heb. 3:6), leaving his house, and committing to his servants the work of caring for his church. They are to feed the flock of God, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made overseers. Acts 20:28. They must preach the Word. 2 Tim. 4:2. They should watch for souls as

87

they that must give account. Heb. 13:17. They will not only give meat to the household, but they will give it in due season. They will preach the *present* truth. Their last work before the return of their Master will be to proclaim his coming, and to teach the necessary preparation. They will sacrifice the society and blessings of home, and go everywhere, preaching the word, suffering fatigue of body and burden of spirit. But such will have great reward in the kingdom of God. Who is that faithful and wise servant? Where shall we find him?—It is he who is faithfully and wisely attending to the interests of the household of faith. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

1. *He is faithful.* As a faithful watchman, he will give timely warning when he sees the sword coming. His work just before the end is seen in the following scriptures. Joel. 2:1: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Isa. 58:1: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their

transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." 2 Tim. 4:1-5: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who I shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves, teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn

88

away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

2. He is wise. "He that winneth souls is wise." He will expose error, then hold forth the truth in its harmony and beauty, and thus win men to the truth. When it becomes his duty to reprove and rebuke, it will be at a proper time and place, and then with all "long-suffering and doctrine." He will study to show himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Tim. 2:15.

THE EVIL SERVANT

VERSES 48-51: "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and 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."

What the evil servant says and does shows most dearly the position and work of the faithful and wise servant. The reason why the evil servant says, "My Lord delayeth his coming," is that the faithful servant is proclaiming the coming of his lord. The evil servant smites the faithful servant, because he teaches the speedy coming of his lord. The faithful servant, true to his commission to preach the "gospel of the kingdom" to a fallen church and a

scoffing world, toils on, and the evil servant smites on. One is laying up

89

treasure in heaven, and is preparing to go home to his eternal reward, while the other is calling down upon his head the displeasure of the high and holy One, and is getting ready to receive the unmingled cup of the fury of the Lord. The faithful servant is turning some to righteousness, to shine forever as stars in his crown of glory, while the evil servant pursues his downward course and work of death, making the bitter cup of woe which awaits him still more bitter. But the separating day is coming. The Lord will come, and cut asunder the evil servant, and appoint him his portion with the lost. In the general wailing and gnashing of teeth, with hypocrites he will receive the portion due him for his works.

That this application is correct is shown by the words of the Saviour in the closing part of this chapter. Both parties are professedly "servants" of God. The "evil servant" says, "*My* lord delayeth "his coming." But when, because of his unfaithfulness because of his refusal to heed the instructions and warnings of his lord, and of his ill-treatment of his fellow-servant who is sounding the alarm, the lord shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites, it will avail him nothing that he has called the lord *his lord*; that he has been looked up to as a leader of the flock. They have the duty laid upon them, as servants, to give meat in due season; to sound the alarm; to proclaim the message of the advent near, even at the doors. But they are "evil servants," recreant to the trust committed to them, unmindful of the "sure word of prophecy." They do not want to think, nor to have the people think, of the Lord's coming. All

90

scriptures which speak of that day call for watchfulness, diligence, and earnest zeal to be prepared to meet him. But these are worldly-minded, selfish servants. They love their ease; they cry, "Peace and safety," when sudden destruction is impending. 1 Thess. 5:1-3. They love to slumber; they say, to-morrow shall be as this day, and

much more abundant." Isa. 56:10-12. They join the idle throng in singing, "There's a good time coming." In the words of the Saviour, they "eat and drink with the drunken," "walking after their own lusts." The sociable, the festival, the fair, the supper for feasting—these have attractions for them which their selfishness cannot resist. By these is piety dethroned; zeal is extinguished; cross-bearing and self-denying become distasteful graces; to hunger and thirst after righteousness is a burden; the "form of godliness" is retained, but "the power thereof" is gone. What a condition for a servant of God to be found in when his Master appears! And yet this is a fitting description of the mass of feasting professors who turn away with scorn from the unwelcome thought of the Lord's near coming. How different the lot of those who bear the cross, and give the household of faith meat due season! "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

We invite the attention of the reader to the following list of points made plain in our examination of this chapter:—

1. The Saviour gave definite and plain signs which are to precede his coming.

91

2. He told the effect which these things would produce. See Joel 2:1 and other prophecies.

3. He said that by these signs we might know when his coming is near, even at the doors.

4. And the language is stronger than that of permission or the expression of ability to know. It is imperative; we are commanded and required to know when it is near.

5. The signs are so easy to understand that we may know when it is near, just as we may know that summer is near when the trees put forth their leaves.

6. That we are commanded and required to know is confirmed by the illustration of the time of Noah. (1) Noah knew the time that the flood was near. (2) He preached its coming. (3) He prepared for

the event. (4) It was fatal to all those who did not (would not) know the time. "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

7. The Saviour says it will in like manner be a fatal error on the part of those who do not know when the Son of man is coming. But this could not be so (1) if we could not know the time, or (2) if it makes no difference whether we know or do not.

All this teaches us that the doctrine of the second advent is

A PRACTICAL DOCTRINE

The truth on this subject is important; it is important to us that we understand it. The oft-repeated saying that "it makes no difference," is not applicable here.

But many evade the truth on this subject by refer-

92

ring to the good and pious of former generations, to whom the warning message of Rev. 14:9-12 was not given. They were accepted of God, and died happy; we will live as they lived, and go to heaven also. To this there are two just replies:—

1. Professors of this day are not living as their fathers lived. Even one generation ago Christians professed a simplicity of godliness which is ignored by the mass of professors in this day. The church suppers and festivals, the gambling devices to obtain money, the church theatricals, and other profane amusements now foisted upon the name of Christianity "for pious uses" (to quote a term of the mother church), would not have been tolerated for a moment by our fathers of past generations. The earnest vital godliness of a half century ago is now known to the few,—a "little flock" when all told. Our fathers, in the denominations, will rise up to condemn this pleasure-loving age. The objection we are noticing is a reproach to the piety and zeal of our fathers, as their lives are a rebuke to the cold formality of present-day religion.

Let us in turn ask, Why was it that Seth, Enoch, and others before the day of Noah, were not required to build an ark? Enoch was so godly as to receive the testimony that his ways pleased God, and to be translated without seeing death. Could not Noah as live

as Enoch lived and be saved, without the cross and labor of building an ark? The answer is nigh unto everyone. He could not, and why?—Because *Noah lived in the time of the flood and Enoch did not*. Enoch could not preach Noah's message; he lived at a

93

time too early for that. Noah could not be accepted of God and do only that which Enoch did, as he lived under different circumstances. Extraordinary events require extraordinary preparations; and those preparations are suited to no other time but their own.

And so with the preaching of the Lord's coming. To past generations it was not "present truth." They could not give the message of warning. But we, who have seen the signs of his coming, who know the time (Rom. 13:11, 12), who see the day approaching (Heb. 10:25), must proclaim this truth, sound the alarm, as Noah proclaimed the approach of the flood. As it was necessary in order to be saved to receive the message of Noah, so it is necessary in order to be prepared for our Lord's advent that we accept the truth in regard to his near coming.

THE FAITHFUL REWARDED AT HIS COMING

It will not be in vain that they look for him, for shall appear to their salvation. Heb. 9:28. It is in vain that they love his appearing, for a crown righteousness is laid up for such. 2 Tim. 4:8. Their faithful waiting shall be rewarded, for when he appears they shall appear with him in glory. Col 3:4. Their names may be cast out as evil, they may suffer reproach and scorn here, but when he comes they shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. 1 Peter 5:4.

Words cannot describe that glory. Finite man cannot fathom its greatness; for, truly, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

94

We cannot understand why any who take the Bible for their teacher, and profess to love the Lord Jesus, can have a prejudice

against his second coming. He promised his followers that they should be recompensed at the resurrection of the just, which takes place at his coming, and will never take place unless he comes. Luke 14:14. Speaking of the signs of his coming he said: "And when these things begin come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads;

your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:28. The saints, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, are groaning for the redemption of the body. Rom. 8:23. This is the redemption which will be accomplished at the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the just. The joy of that day is unspeakable. "Behold, I come quickly," says the Saviour, "and my reward is with me." Fervently our hearts respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Rev. 22:12, 20.

¹ The plagues are corrected by the Encyclopedia Britannica.