
Strom over Israel

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Preface

WHAT will the world be like as this present age draws to a close? What will be the state of things in Israel, among the nations, and in the Church? What signs, if any, will there be of the second coming of Jesus Christ? What does the Bible say about the end of the age?

These are the very important and interesting questions we will consider in this book.

We have given the title *Storm over Israel* for a good reason. It seems quite clear that the nation Israel will be at the very centre of world events in the last days.

However, along with Israel, we will consider other themes of Bible prophecy as they relate to the time of the end. Of course, in so brief a space we cannot hope to examine in detail all that is in the Bible about even the one subject of Israel. That has not been my purpose. Rather, I have tried to survey what the Bible says about world conditions in general just before Christ's return.

I make no attempt to predict the future. I only wish to see what God has revealed about the future. I believe that the prophets whose writings we have in the Bible were uniquely inspired of God. God's Spirit overcame their natural inability to know the future, and enabled them to write of coming events. Thus what they wrote is true.

There are good reasons to believe this.

There is the character of the prophets themselves. They were neither vain boasters nor deceived dreamers. They were holy men of God who were willing to suffer and die for the things they proclaimed. And they certainly claimed to write the very words of God. Again and again, with great boldness and authority, they used the words, "Thus says the Lord". Very often they spoke unpleasant truth that got them into considerable trouble with their fellow men:

"They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy):

they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:37, 38).

All this, but there was one thing they would not do. They would not keep quiet when it came to the truth of God; and they would not deny that God had spoken by them.

There is also the fact that many of their prophecies have already been exactly fulfilled. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus Christ they foretold His coming and many details associated with it.

They foretold He would be born of a virgin. They named the place of His birth — Bethlehem. They spoke of His anointing by the Spirit of God and His ministry of compassion. They described His sorrow. They prophesied of His betrayal at the hands of Judas. They even named the price of betrayal — thirty pieces of silver. They set forth how He would be crucified, and recorded many details to do with His crucifixion. They wrote that His hands and feet would be pierced, that some would cast lots for His clothing, that He would be given vinegar to drink, that not one of His bones would be broken. They declared the reason for His death — as a sacrifice for man’s sin. They proclaimed His resurrection from the dead.

These, and many other prophecies concerning various matters, have taken place as the prophets said they would. They obviously revealed things they could not have known without the inspiration of God’s Spirit. The reason that some of their prophecies have not been fulfilled is simple. The time of fulfillment has not yet come. But that time may be very near, even at the door.

Moreover, we have the word of Jesus Christ Himself concerning the prophets. After His resurrection from the grave He told His disciples: “These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). In the Sermon on the Mount He said, “Till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). On another occasion He said, “The scripture [by which He meant the whole Old Testament] cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He said of His own prophecies “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall

not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

These reasons for believing the writings of the prophets may seem unimportant to some. I confess they seem conclusive to me. I believe in the wisdom and truthfulness of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, and I believe the writings of the prophets. What I have to say in this book is based on this belief.

Some readers may feel that I have not always interpreted the writings of the prophets well. They may disagree with a number of things I have written. Let these take what they can, and leave what they must.

May God be gracious to us all and more and more open our understanding that we might grasp what the prophets have written. I have made use of the King James Version of the Bible and other translations as well. When a version other than the K.J.V. is used I have indicated it with the text. The use of a version here or there is not meant to be a sweeping recommendation of it. But I have found the Berkeley version and the New American Standard Bible very helpful in most places.

Preface to Second Edition

Since this book was first published Israel has fought another war with Egypt and Syria (October 1973). But nothing has happened in Western Asia that causes me to change any basic interpretation in this book as it goes again to the press. That war just brings us a step nearer to the final fulfillment of many prophecies. God will fulfill His Word in His own time and way. We should watch prayerfully and expectantly, and serve our Lord Jesus Christ heartily and faithfully until He comes.

Secunderabad, A.P., India
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1 Prophecy/a light in a dark place

IN this book we shall survey something of the Bible's teaching about world conditions at the end of the age. We shall look at Israel, and the nations of earth, and the Church as they appear in prophecy. But before we do so perhaps it will be well to think briefly about the nature of prophecy itself.

The following quotation from the Word of God is a good place to begin. This is the Berkeley Version of 2 Peter 1:16-21:

16 For when we acquainted yon with the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ we were not accepting the authority of cleverly devised fables. On the contrary, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty,

17 for as He was receiving honor and glory from God the Father, such a voice was borne to Him from the supreme glory, "This is My Son, My Be-loved, in whom I am delighted".

18 And we heard this voice borne to us from heaven, when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message reaffirmed, to which you do well to pay attention as yon would to a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the Daystar arises in your hearts,

20 with this most clearly understood, that no prophetic Scripture can be explained by one's unaided mental powers.

21 Because no prophecy ever resulted from human design; instead, holy men from God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The heart of prophecy

Prophecy principally concerns the "power and coming of our Lord Je-

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sus Christ”—verse 16. Although it deals with a great many other subjects He is the centre of them all. He came once to die for sinners. He will come a second time in power and glory.

The second coming of Christ is referred to scores of times in the Bible.

The prophets of the Old Testament wrote of the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13, 14).

Jesus Himself spoke more than once of the same event: “when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory” (Matt. 25:31).

The angels told of His coming again: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The apostles of Christ said He would come again: “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout” (I Thess. 4:10).

The second coming of Christ is the last promise of the Bible: “Surely I come quickly” (Rev. 22:20).

Jesus is certainly coming again.

The personal, bodily, glorious appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ is the supreme event of the end time. Everything else either runs toward that event or flows from it. This is not human speculation. It is not myth or fable cleverly invented

to deceive the superstitious. It is the word of the living God.

Christ’s glory

The glory of Christ seen on the “sacred mountain” was a foretaste of the coming glory—verses 16-18.

Peter refers to the incident In the earthly life of our Lord Jesus we call the transfiguration. It is recorded in three different Gospels. This quotation is from Matthew 17:1-6:

Six days after this, Jesus took Peter and James and his brother John, and led them up on a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And in their presence His appearance was changed and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes turned as white as light. 3 Then Moses and Elijah appeared to them and kept talking with Him. 4 And Peter interrupted, and said to

Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here! If you consent, I will put up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah".

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud cast its shadow over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Beloved, in whom I am delighted. Keep on listening to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard it, they fell upon their faces, for they were terribly frightened. (Williams)

This was the one time during His life on earth when Christ's glory and majesty were seen. Peter, remembering the glory of Christ, does not write of His resurrection from the dead (glorious as that was), but of His transfiguration. What Peter and the others saw was a preview of Jesus Christ coming in His kingdom, filled with the glory of God, His face shining as the sun in its strength.

See who it is that shall come again. "The Lord". He who received "honor and glory from God the Father". "My Son, My Beloved". The Man Christ Jesus is none other than the Lord from heaven. He is the one above all others exalted and glorified by God. He is the Son of God Himself, in a unique sense, eternally One with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The glory that flamed on the face of the "Man of sorrows" for a brief moment on the holy mount is His by right. And the apostles saw this glory. They were "eye-witnesses", they heard the voice from the supreme glory. No; they were not following some fantastic story when they made known to others "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".

More proof

But, Peter continues, we have more evidence for the glorious coming of Christ than the transfiguration. We have "the prophetic message reaffirmed", Or, as in the K.J.V., "we have a more sure word of prophecy". He refers to the great body of prophecy in the Old Testament that, speaks of the coming of the Lord. It is more clear in its teaching concerning the coming glory of Christ than even the things they saw and heard on the holy mountain. The transfiguration simply confirmed the sure message already spoken by the prophets. The translation by the American Bible Society (T.E.V.) gives the sense of it like this: "So we are even more confident of the message proclaimed by the prophets".

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Yes, we have a sure word of prophecy. It is infal-ible in its leaching. It will certainly be fulfilled. And we are even more sure of this because of what happened at the transfiguration of Christ. As surely as glory appeared then on His face, so will the whole earth soon shine with His glory.

Pay attention

Now, the apostle says, this “prophetic message” or “word of prophecy” is something to which we should pay attention—verse 19.

Some believers seem to think that prophecy is not very important. They believe that if we hold the basic doctrines of the Christian faith and live good Christian lives that is enough, and we need not trouble our heads about the mysteries and difficulties of prophecy. By all means we must believe, love, and hold fast the fundamentals of the Bible. Certainly we must do our utmost to live holy and fruitful lives for God’s glory. But we dare not neglect the sure word of prophecy. The Holy Spirit through the apostle here urges us to “pay attention” to it.

To this agrees the word of our Lord Jesus. In the one fully prophetic book of the New Testament He tells us “Happy is the man who reads, and happy are those who listen to the words of this prophecy, and heed what is written in it” (Rev, 1:3). And does He pronounce a simple blessing on any other book?

Prophecy is of great importance in the revelation of God to man. On the day that man llrst fell into sin, God began to give the word of prophecy with His own lips (Gen. 3:15). All through the days before the first coming of Christ. He sent one prophet after another, “daily rising up early and sending them” (Jer 7:25). And as God began .so He completed the word of pro-phycey when He gave to John the mighty revelation recorded in the last book of the Bible. And everywhere in both Old and New Testaments He repeatedly used prophecy to instruct His people and prepare them for things to come.

More than one-fourth of the Old Testament is taken up directly with books of prophecy—Isaiah to Malachi. In addition, there are many prophetic portions in other bonks. And the whole contains pictures and types of coming events and the coming Redeemer. So. in a real sense, the

complete Old Testament is prophetic.

Yes, we shall make a big mistake if we do not pay attention to the prophecies of the Word of God, It will be said that some spend too much time and effort on the study of prophecy and neglect other subjects of the Bible, True. But that is no reason to go to the opposite extreme and neglect prophecy altogether. As in all things, we need to maintain a balance here.

A lamp in the dark

Peter tells us that prophecy is a light shining in a dark place—v. 19. It is a lamp that will shine on through this dark world till the day of Christ's coming dawns in all its splendour.

No doubt prophecy has its difficulties and obscurities. There are some things hard to understand. About some parts of the word of prophecy we may hesitate to express an opinion. And we may always be careful even with those prophecies we feel more sure about. In the study of this great subject we should avoid too much dogmatism. But we must not forget, that Peter here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, compares prophecy to a light. It is a lamp given by God to provide illumination in the darkness of the world.

Now what does a lamp in the dark do?

It gives light on activities going on around us. It does not perfectly reveal all the details of our surroundings. But at least the general outline of things near at hand appear. In other words, if we know prophecy we shall be able to discern something of the real meaning of what is happening in the world. That is, if it is a subject of prophecy, at all. We shall be

able to bring events to the light and analyze them. But if we are ignorant of prophecy we shall be in darkness as regards world events.

A lamp in the dark also gives some indication to travelers as to where they are along the road. They will be able to see the mileposts as they pass them. The true Church of Christ is a pilgrim on the path to glory. It is not camped somewhere in a desert. The body of believers is moving along the road to the completion of God's plan for this age. And as the Church draws near its destination, the lamp of prophecy will reveal certain signs of the end.

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This was true as the Old Testament age came to its end (Matt. 16: 1-4). The Jews of Jesus' day asked for a special sign from heaven that Jesus was indeed the promised Redeemer. Jesus called them "a wicked and adulterous generation" because they sought for a sign, and refused to believe the signs of the times already appearing. The signs were there if only they could behold them in the light of prophecy.

I believe it will be like that at the end of this age. For God in His wisdom and goodness, has given us in the word of prophecy certain signs that will mark the approaching end of the road. He has given us an outline of world conditions as they will appear just before the return of His Son.

Some people insist that there will be no signs at all of the return of Christ. They believe His coming will be so sudden and unexpected that no one can have the least idea when it will take place. Others seem to think that almost everything is a sign. They draw up long lists of events in the world today they think prove the coming of Christ is very near. But His nearness is not proved by some of the events found in their lists. No doubt the whole subject requires caution and close and diligent study.

The Bible itself nowhere says there will be no signs, and it, is my conviction that there definitely are signs of the end revealed for our enlightenment. At least the apostles of our Lord thought NO. "Tell us", they asked Jesus, "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24.3). Jesus did not rebuke them. Rather, He went into some detail in describing conditions as they would be prior to His second coming. He even said, "When you see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

In the following chapters we will be enquiring into the subject more fully. We will look at those matters which, I believe, will appear as signs of the end.

So a lamp in the dark gives light on one's surroundings, and it reveals the mileposts along the way. But it does more—it enables us to walk without stumbling; it makes it possible for right action. The word of prophecy is intended for something more than mere instruction for the mind. It is to contribute to holy living. It is not there to satisfy the curious, but to teach us how we should live and serve in these times. If this is not one of

the principal aims of prophetic study then such study is vain.

Prophecy and holiness of life are linked together in God's Word, and let no man divide what God has joined together.

Peter in the third chapter of this same letter puts it like this: "Since all these things are thus to be destroyed, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, looking for and hastening the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, Therefore, beloved, since you look for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:11-14).

John wrote that everyone who has the hope of Christ's coming "purifies himself as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Jesus warned, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34).

Prophecy is therefore very practical. The doctrine of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is meant to stir us up to watchfulness (Matt. 25:13); to faithfulness (Luke 19:12-26); to patience (Heb. 10:36, 37); to abide in Christ (1 John 2:28); to devoted service (2 Tim 4:1, '2), and to much more.

Prophecy helps to produce men like those of David's day, "Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32).

But if our knowledge of prophecy stops at our heads it is all in vain. For "knowledge puffs up but love builds up". If we understand all prophecies and have not love, and if we know all mysteries and all hidden wisdom and do have no holiness of life it will profit us nothing.

Finally, let us think of the last two things Peter said about the word of prophecy.

No private interpretation

Prophecy cannot "be explained by one's unaided mental powers"—v. 20. No one can interpret the prophecies of the Bible according to his own

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fancy. By the mind alone, without the enlightenment of God's Spirit, we can neither fully understand nor clearly explain what God has revealed. Other versions translate this somewhat differently. The NASB has more literally "no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." To understand prophecy much prayer - and careful study are required and comparing scrip-ture with scripture. Humbly, as little children, we a must go to our heavenly Father and ask Him to teach us. If we make too much of our mere human reason, or if we try to fit everything into some system of interpretation devised by men, we shall make many mistakes. So let us, with unprejudiced minds and simple hearts wait on God to show us the truth reveal-ed in the word of prophecy.

Inspired of God

Prophecy did not come by man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God— v. 21.

This is the reason Peter gives for saying prophecy is not of "one's own interpretation". Just as it did not come by man's speculation so it cannot be understood by man's speculation. The Holy Spirit who inspired it then must also help us to understand it now.

Observe what the apostle says about the prophets of the Bible. "Holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit". He evidently teaches the full inspiration of these men of God. Paul spoke of the full inspiration of their writings: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Notice in passing that prophecy, which is a large part of "all scripture", is profitable to make a man of God perfectly equipped for every good work.

The prophets were fully inspired. They wrote as they were "carried along" by the Holy Spirit. They were instruments in His hand to write what He wanted written. This does not mean that they were mere puppets. The inspiration of the Bible is not mechani-cal. God did not use them as an inanimate pen might be used. But He did write with them. He chose living, feeling, thinking men and breathed His word into their minds and

hearts. They experienced that Word, burned with it and uttered it. They spoke, they wrote; but what they spoke and wrote were words of the Holy Spirit of God.

That is why Jesus when quoting from one of the psalms of David said, “David himself said by the Holy Spirit”—(Mark 12:36).

Those who believe in the full inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit are in good company—prophets and apostles believed it. More importantly, Jesus Himself taught it, And Jesus is the Truth. It is safe to be on the side of the Son of God. It is not safe to oppose Him. It is not foolish superstition to believe what He believed and taught. Rather, it is folly to reject it.

Since, then, holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit how carefully we should listen!

Through Ezekiel God speaks, “I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass” (Ez. 12:25).

“O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord”.

2. Light on Israel

WHO are the people called Israel? What are they doing in Palestine? What do the prophets say about them? What situation will that nation find itself in as the age draws to a close? May we interpret present-day events in Western Asia as a sign of Christ's soon coming? These are the questions we will examine in this chapter.

In order to have before us somewhat of a full picture of Israel in the last days I have chosen a rather long passage of Scripture from the prophet Zechariah, written nearly 2500 years ago. The following verses have been selected from the Berkeley Version of the last three chapters (12, 13, 14) of that book.

The prophecy

12:1 "The oracle of the Lord's word regarding Israel. It is affirmed by the Lord, who stretches out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, who fashions the spirit of man within him: 2 Behold, I shall make Jerusalem as a cup that causes reeling for all the nations around it, and also against Judah will it go in the seige against Jerusalem. 3 In that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome boulder for all people; all those who lift it shall be severely injured. All the nations of the earth shall be gathered against her."

8 "In that day the Lord shall defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David and the house of David like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. 9 In that day I shall seek to exterminate all the nations that come up against Jerusalem. 10 Then I shall pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look upon Him, whom they have pierced; they shall wail for Him as one wails for an only son, and they shall be in bitterness for Him like the bitterness for the first-born. 11 In that day the mourning in Jerusalem shall

be like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddo. 12 The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by themselves and their wives by them-selves; the family of Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; all of the families that remain, each family by itself and their wives by themselves. 33:1 In that day a fountain shall be opened to the house of David and to the dwellers of Jerusalem for cleansing from sin and uncleanness.”

14:2 “For I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to wage war. The city shall be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished; half of the city shall go into captivity; but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go forth and wage war against those nations, as He fights in a day of war. 4 His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is on the east side of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in the middle eastward and westward by a very great valley; half the mountain shall move north-ward and half southward.”

Future fulfilment

I am convinced the prophet in this section, is speaking of a literal Israel, a literal Jerusalem, literal nations which will come against her, a literal conversion of the houses of Israel, and a literal coming of Christ, all at some future time. My reasons for this are given in some detail in the Appendix, “Israel’s Conversion”.

In the last three chapters of Zechariah the words “in that day” or “at that day” occur 17 times, but only rarely in the previous eleven chapters (4 times). In these closing chapters he is, I believe, describing events at the end of this age: and each of these references to “that day” refer to the same general period of time. In 14:1 we have the phrase, “day of the Lord”. This is the day of God’s wrath and judgment that closes the age. And that day is still future (Acts 2:20; I Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10. etc.).

It is plain that the prophecies in these chapters have never had a literal fulfilment. For example, both 12:9 and 14:2, 3 speak of the Lord destroying the nations that come to fight against Jerusalem, and 12: 3 suggests

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the same thing. And the nations are described as “all nations”. In that same time He will give repentance to the house of Israel (12:10-14). (v. 10 should also be compared with Rev. 1:7—still future). And His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which shall split into two parts. The whole setting of these chapters is the time of the second coming of Christ. For up to very recent days it has always been the nations who have destroyed Israel and Jerusalem and not the Lord who has destroyed them when they came. And to this present hour the Jews, for the most part, remain in hardness and unbelief. And, of course, Mount Olivet is still all in one piece.

So these prophecies await their literal fulfilment. I am not saying there could be no spiritual lessons for us here and now in passages of Scripture like this. But I am convinced that this does not exhaust the meaning of them.

Conditions for fulfilment

In order for these Scriptures, and others like them, to be literally fulfilled certain conditions are required.

First, the Jews must be preserved as a distinct people. Second, some of this people must be in control of part, at least, of the land of Palestine at the time of the end. Third, they must still be in unbelief, for the most part, regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Fourth, they must be surrounded by enemies. Fifth, they must also be in Jerusalem. And Sixth, they must at last repent of their rejection of Christ and receive Him as Lord and Saviour and Messiah. These are the matters that will be the subject of this and the next two chapters.

A unique people

First, according to the prophets, the Jews must be preserved as a distinct people.

This is a simple enough statement and perhaps we are so used to the idea that it has lost its wonder. But the preservation of the people of Israel is an absolute miracle of God—Let us remind ourselves who these people called Israel are. Israel is another name for Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son

of Abraham. Out of Jacob came the twelve tribes that formed the nation later known as Israel.

God chose this people from all the peoples of the earth to be His own special people. These are the words He spoke to them, “For you are a holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7: 6).

With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with their seed after them. God made a gracious promise that concern–ed the land of Palestine. This is the land to which God led Abraham in the beginning, and this was the land promised to him and to his seed for a possession as long as the earth should last. “After Lot had detached himself from Abram, the Lord said to Abram: Now raise your eyes and look from where you stand north–ward, southward, eastward and westward, for all the land you are viewing I will give you and your off–spring forever” (Gen, 13:14, 15, Berkeley). When that promise was made, Abraham was near Bethel, just north of Jerusalem. And this promise was repeated again and again.

Palestine is Israel’s

The land of Palestine belongs to the Jews for one simple reason—God gave it to them. After all, this is God’s world. He created it and He formed the various lands to be inhabited. He has a perfect right to give any land to whomever He chooses (Acts 17:26). He has given other lands to the Arabs to dwell in. But Palestine He has given to Israel. And not, as it might be in the case with some people in other lands, tempo–rarily, but for ever.

I know that the Problem of the Arab refugees who fled from Israel is a terrible one. There has been much suffering and despair. But this does not change the fact that God actually did give Palestine to Israel.

Through most of their history Israel has actually been out of the land. It has been theirs, but more by promise than actual possession. For God plainly told His people that if they would not obey His command–ments He would remove them from the land and scatter them throughout the earth.

But He likewise told them that He would eventually regather them and

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cause them to inherit the land permanently. For He has called them to be His people, and He has given them, the land. And God does not change His mind about either His calling or His gifts (Rom. 11:29).

God and the Jew

Through the centuries God has dealt with no other race as He has this one. For Israel did rebel and transgressed the commandments of God. Because of this no people in history has been so punished for its sins. This is God's Word through the prophet Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

Great privileges bring great responsibilities. Great responsibilities realized bring great reward. But great responsibilities unfulfilled bring disaster. So has it been with this people. None has been so despised by others, so scattered throughout the whole world, so frequently hounded from country to country. And with no other race have there been such repeated attempts to destroy it from the earth. Hitler's determination to kill every Jew in sight was not the first of its kind.

The Bible foretold it

Now all of this was described in advance by the servants of the Lord. Here are a few verses from the 26th chapter of Leviticus written by Moses well over 3000 years ago. God is speaking through His servant and warning the people of Israel of things to come. The quotations are from, the Berkeley Version.

"But if you will not listen to Me and will not practice all these commandments; if you despise My laws; if your soul abhors My injunctions, so that you fail to put all My orders into practice and break My covenant, then I will do this to you—I will visit you with terror, with consumptions and burning fever that destroys the eye and saps the life. You will sow vainly for your enemies will eat it. I will set My face against you and you will be beaten when facing your enemies. Your haters will lord it over you. You will flee when no one pursues you", (verses 14-17)

"And if by this discipline you do not turn to Me, but still walk adversely

to Me, then I will personally walk adversely to you and I Myself shall punish you seven-fold for your sins. I will bring a sword upon you that shall administer retribution for the Covenant”, (verses 23-25)

“If in spite of all this you do not listen to Me, but behave in opposition to Me, then I will with indignation take measures against you; I will personally punish you sevenfold for your sins”, (verses 27, 28)

“I will personally so thoroughly lay waste the land, that your enemies who settle in it shall be astonished at it. But you I will disperse among the nations, unsheathing the sword after you. Your land shall be desert and your cities ruins”, (verses 32, 33)

(Let me suggest in passing that the facts of Israel’s victories over present enemies and their fruitful land today may indicate that the times described in these verses are now ending.)

Preservation in peril

All these threatenings have been literally fulfilled through the centuries on a disobedient and rebellious nation. This people has been removed from their home-land far longer than they have been in it. Yet in spite of persecution and punishment and hatred and scattering to the four corners of the earth, they have been preserved. History has swallowed up many races and nations which did not face a tenth part of what the Jews have faced. But Israel, in the plan of God, has been kept for thousands of years a unique, distinct race of people.

This, too, was clearly and exactly foretold by the prophets.

“And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God” (Lev. 26:44). God plainly declares that even though they break the covenant He will not. And He promises He will not utterly destroy them.

“For I am with you, saith the Lord, to save you: though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet will I not make a full end of you: but I will correct you in measure, and will not leave you altogether unpunished” (Jer. 30:11).

“Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the ordi-

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nances of the moon and of the stars for light by night, who stirs up the seas so that its waves roar, the Lord God of hosts is His name. If these ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the descendents of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer. 31:35, 36, Berkeley).

This last reference is a negative way of saying a very positive thing. God deals with individuals. He also deals with nations and races, and He emphatically declares that the Jews will be preserved as a distinct people. Remember that these words were written 2500 years ago. What a witness to the fact that “holy men from God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”.

“When Frederick the Great asked the court preacher for an unanswerable proof in one word of the inspiration of the Bible, he replied, ‘The Jew, your majesty’ “ (Oswald J. Smith).

More than preserved

Not only have they been kept as a distinct race, they have made a tremendous contribution (for good and ill) to the shape of the world’s culture. It is not possible now to go into all the history of that, fascinating as it is. But an example from modern times shows the impact the Jews have made when conditions were favorable. Someone has pointed out that fully 12 per cent of Nobel prizes in physics, chemistry, and medicine have gone to Jews—but they are less than half of one per cent of the world’s population.

In the world of science no one has towered higher than Albert Einstein, a Jew. In medicine, the name of the Jew Sigmund Freud, the developer of psycho-analysis, is world-famous. In philosophy another Jew, Baruch Spinoza, has had considerable influence. And the founder of Communism, Karl Marx, was a Jew.

It is no wonder that Max Dimont, who has written a popular history of his people, says with pride: “Two-thirds of the civilized world is already governed by the ideas of Jews—the ideas of Moses, Jesus, Paul, Spinoza, Marx, Freud, Einstein”. (Jews, God and His-tory, published by The New American Library.)

So Israel, according to the prophets must be (and have been) preserved as a distinct people.

Israel in Palestine

But not only so. To fulfil the language of the prophets, some of them must be in control of at least a part of Palestine at the time of the end. For very evidently from the passage in Zechariah we have been considering (and other Scriptures), they are there when Christ returns, and they are in possession of it.

Now until very recent times the Jews did not control Palestine. In fact, they were not even there in significant numbers. Before 1880 there were only about 12,000 Jews in the whole of that land. For the most part these were older people who had come to live out their few remaining years and be buried in the holy land. But between 1880 and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 there were five distinct periods of Jewish immigration into Palestine.

The Jew, Max Dimont, puts it like this: “World events and the needs of the Zionists embraced each other at the most propitious moments as if on a divinely prearranged ‘planned parenthood’ schedule, fostering five Palestinian immigration waves at the right times and in the right succession” (op. cit).

In a way not planned by men just the right people to build a nation came at just the right times.

Zionism

The Zionists Dimont refers to were Jews who, at the close of the last century, began to seek a homeland for the world’s Jews. Zion is another name for Jerusalem, and “Zionism” meant a return to Palestine. The movement was started by a European Jew named Theodore Herzl, and the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897.

Zionism gave a mighty impulse to Jews to return to the holy land. Between 1880 and World War I 115,000 returned. Between 1918 and 1936, 150,000 more. During World War II 113,000 managed to land in Palestine in spite of the opposition of the British who then controlled the area.

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Many of these Jews settled on land they purchased from Turkish and Arab landholders, sometimes at very high prices.

At last on May 14, 1948, in accordance with a decision by the United Nations, Israel declared itself an independent state. At that time there were 758,700 Jews in Palestine. For the first time in many, many centuries that go back before the time of Christ, the Jews were a completely free and sovereign nation in their own land.

Immediately five surrounding Arab nations, in defiance of the United Nations' decision, tried to destroy this new state—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. They were not only unable to carry out their design, they lost some more of the territory of Palestine to the victorious Israelis. The story of the victory then is perhaps even more remarkable than the victory they achieved in June, 1967.

The regathering of Israel

Now the question of great importance in this—is the present return and establishment of the Jews in Israel the regathering promised in the prophets? Some think so, others think not. Let us look briefly into this.

Back in the 7th century before Christ, the Babylonian armies came into Palestine, captured Jerusalem, and took the people of Israel into captivity. The prophets before and at the time of this captivity foretold the regathering of the people from Babylon. For example, the Lord said to His people through Jeremiah —"After seventy years be accomplished I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer 29:10). This return of the Jews to Palestine began at the time of Cyrus, King of Persia. During the first regathering 42,360 Jews returned home.

But Israel was scattered again by the Romans beginning in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus exactly as Jesus had foretold. So after the first regathering they were scattered again, and this time their scattering was far more widespread and of far longer duration.

However, the prophets wrote of a second regathering.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be

left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the Islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:11, 12).

This evidently refers to a gathering of the people not fulfilled in any previous return of Jews to Palestine. The time of it is “in that day”—that time spoken of in the preceding verse. And that verse speaks of the appearance of Messiah. Moreover, when the Jews came back from Babylon they did not come from all the other places mentioned. These verses reveal a worldwide dispersal and a regathering from “the islands of the sea” and “the four corners of the earth”.

When the Lord says “the second time” it is clear that the same nation that was regathered the first time will also be regathered again.

Also according to the prophets the Jews would be gathered and never again scattered. God spoke through Amos the prophet these words, “I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God” (Amos 9:14, 15).

Notice here that God declares the land belongs to Israel, even though they would be removed from it for a time. Of course, this is in perfect agreement with the promise of God to Abraham, “I will give unto you, and to your seed after you the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8). It does not belong to the Arabs. It does not belong to the Church. It belongs to the Jews.

Observe also that when Israel is brought back to the land they will build the waste cities and greatly develop the land. Certainly she has been doing this the past few years, whether we admit it is in fulfilment of prophecy or not.

More importantly, for the present point, observe that when this final regathering takes place Israel will never again be plucked up off the land.

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So we may certainly say that until the 20th century at least this prophecy was never fulfilled.

The present situation

Now, is the present establishment of Israel a fulfilment of these prophecies? It is my opinion that it is only the beginning of fulfilment. There are about 2 1/2 million Jews in Israel now, but there are more than 10 million who are not there. And the Scriptures indicate they will be more fully regathered (Ez. 39: 25-29).

In 1919 the third edition of David Baron's fine commentary on Zechariah appeared. In it he wrote, "There will be at first, as compared with the whole nation, only a representative minority in Palestine, and a Jewish state will be probably formed, either under the suzerainty of one of the Great Powers, or under international protection". This he could write long years before the establishment of Israel in 1948 by the decision of the United Nations, because he knew the prophetic word.

Personally I do not doubt in the least that the fact Israel is established now in the land is of immense significance. And if God, the Most High who rules in the kingdoms of men, has not caused it to be done, who has? And if He did not have a good purpose in it why was it done?

In any case, the Bible teaches that at the end of the age Israel must be there in the holy land, and the fact is, she is there. I think it would be folly to ignore this fact.

Israel in unbelief

But according to the prophets, they must be there in unbelief, for the most part, rejecting Christ until the very end. According to Zech. 12:9-14, they repent after the Lord destroys the armies that come against Jerusalem, and when Christ finally appears and they see Him whom they pierced so long ago.

David Baron put it like this in 1919, "First of all we have to suppose a restoration of the Jews in a condition of unbelief—not a complete restoration of the whole nation, which will not take place till after their conversion, but of a representative and influential remnant".

So the same Jewish nation once scattered is now partially regathered and the regathered nation is still rejecting Christ. I am convinced they will eventually be converted, for they must be to fulfil the plan of God for them and the land. But until that happy hour comes at the very end of the age they will remain in hardness and unbelief. This is the picture we have in the Word of God, and this is the exact fact before our eyes in Israel.

Surrounded by enemies

Not only must Israel be preserved, in the land, and in unbelief—she must also be surrounded by enemies as the age reaches its climax.

In later chapters we will be looking in more detail at enemies of Israel. Now it is sufficient to note Zechariah's prophecy—"It shall come to pass in that day, that I shall seek to exterminate all the nations that come up against Jerusalem", "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to wage war" (12:9; 14:2). This is in perfect agreement with other portions of the Word of God as we shall see.

Israel is yet to be the very centre of vast movements of armies. She will be a frail ship in a sea of hostility. Yet in spite of that, by the mercies of a covenant-keeping God, she shall reach the desired haven.

Last two conditions

Fifthly, Israel must be in Jerusalem as the age draws to a close. And finally, the nation must at last repent of her rejection of Christ and receive Him as Lord and Saviour.

Jerusalem is the subject of our next chapter. For a fuller discussion of the wonderful and mysterious theme of Israel's conversion I refer you again to the Appendix. But let us at least record the joyful fact here.

Israel shall be saved! Jerusalem and the land shall yet be bathed in the tears of repenting Jews. God shall at last pour out the spirit of grace and supplication upon them. Jesus Christ, pierced by them and so long rejected, will be seen and received. The fountain for cleansing from sin used throughout the age by multi-tudes of Gentiles and a remnant of believing Jews, will in the end be opened wide to the nation as a whole, and they shall wash therein.

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What a blessed miracle this will be! It seems all the greater miracle when we realize the hatred some of them have at times shown for Jesus Christ. Here is what David Baron, himself a converted Jew, and a missionary to his own people in former years, wrote.

“No person in the history of the Jews has provoked such deep-seated abhorrence as He who came only to bless them, and who on the cross prayed, Father, forgive them, For they know not what they do. ... Their hatred was intense and mysterious—’Away with this man; release unto us Barabbas. . . . Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ was their cry. And all through the centuries no name has provoked such intense abhorrence among the Jews as the name of Jesus. I have known personally most amiable and, as men, lovable characters among the Jews; but immediately the name ‘Jesus’ was mentioned, a change came over their countenances, and they would fall into a passion of anger. In the course of my missionary experience these past 35 or 40 years how often has it been my lot to witness some of my people almost mad with rage—clenching their fists, gnashing their teeth and spitting on the ground at the very mention of the Name which to the believer is ‘as ointment poured forth’!

“Israel’s attitude to our Lord Jesus may be gathered also from their literature. In the filthy legends about Him in the Talmud and more modern productions, the very names by which He is called are blasphemous. The precious name ‘Yeshua’ has been changed into ‘Yeshu’ made up of initial letters “which mean, ‘Let His name and His memory be blotted out.’ The Holy One who knew no sin nor was guile found in His mouth, is often styled ‘The Transgressor’, and another term frequently in the mouth of the Jews is ‘Tolui’ (‘the hanged one’), which is equivalent to ‘The accursed one.

“His works are still ascribed to witchcraft and Beelzebub and His gospel ... is called. . . . ‘The sinful, or mischievous writing.’ ... In the Talmud Jesus of Nazareth is placed in hell alongside of Titus and Balaam, and as undergoing not only the severest but the most degrading form of punishment”.

It is understandable that they would feel hatred for some of the so-called Christians among whom they have often suffered. But this —. Of course not all Jews believe these things or feel this way. Many are indif-

ferent to religion altogether, and many are very liberal in their views, and some have come to trust in the Lord Jesus. But the fact remains, Israel as a whole is still hardened against Jesus Christ.

Yes, it will be the crowning miracle of the age when the Jews weep on the mountains of Israel and in Jerusalem for their Messiah whom at last they shall receive. And it is just like our God to perform this wonder.

A last question

Is the condition of Israel as described by the prophets now being fulfilled before the eyes of this generation? Is the situation in Western Asia a sign of Christ's soon return?

No one on earth knows exactly when Christ shall return. It is foolish and unscriptural to set dates. But certainly conditions that the prophets foretold and the present situation in Israel, and surrounding Israel, are remarkably similar. I think this will appear even more clearly as we proceed in our study.

But before we do proceed let us pause for a moment to consider the blessed Gospel which Israel now rejects, and which they will eventually receive.

The Gospel

The Gospel has its centre in a person. It has been well said that true Christianity is Christ. Very simple, the Gospel of Christ is the Good News of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and will do for people.

Let us think first of what He has already done.

The apostle Paul put it briefly in these simple yet profound words:

“And now, my brothers. I must remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, This gospel you received, on it you have taken your stand, and by it you are saved. . . . First and foremost, I handed on to you the facts which had been imparted to me: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day. according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and afterwards to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have

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died. Then he appeared to James, and afterwards to all the apostles. In the end he appeared even to me” (I Cor, 15:1, 3-8).

Here are four extremely important facts.

Christ died for our sins

He did not die as a martyr to some high ideal. He was not a misunderstood revolutionary who had to pay the supreme price. He was not murdered against His will or outside the plan of God. He did not die for His own sin. He died for our sins.

He was a substitute for us to die the death we deserved. He took our punishment, suffered in our place. Peter wrote “For Christ also died for our sins once and for all. He, the just one, suffered for the unjust, to bring us to God” (1 Peter 3; 18).

This is also in accordance with Old Testament Scripture. For example, Isaiah looked through the centuries and wrote as though he were there actually seeing Christ on the cross: “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:5, 6).

This is the great reason for the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The ancient and ever-increasing debt of sin had to be cancelled. He cancelled it with His own life’s blood.

The buried body of the Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the third day

This mighty miracle proved that Jesus is the Son of God, and that His sacrifice for sin was absolutely complete and acceptable to God.

All this happened according to the Scriptures

It fulfilled God’s prophetic word. He, through the prophets, foretold the crucifixion of the Messiah (see Ps. 22 and Is. 53), and His resurrection (Ps. 16). In the fulness of time He brought it to pass. The death of Christ was not a ghastly mistake. It was according to the definite plan and fore-knowledge of God (Acts 2:22, 23). And it was according to the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

After His resurrection He was seen of many people

Thus His resurrection was firmly established as true. Peter saw Him. James saw Him. All the apostles together saw Him. Over 500 at one time saw Him. At last Paul also saw Him risen from the dead.

In this matter also they were not following cleverly invented myths or wild stories. They were eyewitnesses of the things they preached and died for. They declared the truth they had looked on and “touched with their own hands (1 John 1:1,2).

So the death of Christ for sinners and His resurrection from the dead are wonderful facts witnessed to by a number of holy men of God. There is no doubt whatever that this is what our Lord Jesus accomplished when He was on this earth.

This is the Gospel as it relates to the past.

But what of the present? What can Jesus Christ do for people here and now?

This is a very large subject and we cannot explore it all now. But if you want a brief answer I will give you one word—Plenty.

He can cause us to know the truth—John 7:17

He can give us rest of heart—Matt. 11:28

He can forgive us our sins—Mark 2:5

He can give us eternal life—John 6:47

He can make us true children of God—John 1:12

He can make us triumphant in this world—John 16: 33

He can take us to heaven at last—John 14.3

These are some of the things the Lord Jesus can do, and is doing for people. This is why the Gospel is good news indeed.

But we must realize one last thing to understand the Gospel. Before this good news can become effective in our lives repentance and faith are needed. A person must renounce his sin and receive Christ personally by faith. These blessings of the Gospel cannot be earned. They are a free gift of God's grace to those who trust in His Son.

“For by grace are you saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

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No ceremonies, no good works, no Church membership can ever bring us salvation. We must receive Jesus Christ by a living faith and then all these things are added to us in Him.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:12).

Repent, then, and believe the Gospel. It is your one hope, and the one hope of the world.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Call on God now. “For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call on Him” (Romans 10:12).

3. Light on Jerusalem

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son” (Zech. 12: 9,10).

“And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again” (Zech, 2:12).

We have looked at something of what the prophets say about the condition of Israel at the end of the age. We saw that they must be preserved as a people, be back in the land of Palestine in unbelief, and surrounded by enemies. Now we will look at Jerusalem, the most important piece of real estate in the world.

According to the prophets Jerusalem must be inhabited by Jews as the age draws to a conclusion. They are there when their enemies come against them. They are there when God pours His Spirit on them. They are there when Christ returns.

Jerusalem's history and importance

It would be well, I think, to remind ourselves of something of the history of this city.

It is first brought to our attention in the Bible in Genesis 14:18—“Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God”. Salem, I believe, is the same place later called Jerusalem. This mysterious person, Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God, occupied an even higher position than Abraham (Hob. 7: 4-7). This may be an indication that even then that piece of ground was a place of peculiar importance in the plan of God for the world.

A great many cities of earth have been far larger and more significant as political or commercial centres. Still in other respects Jerusalem excels

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any other spot on earth.

One indication of its importance is the number of times it appears in the Bible, the Word of God. The word “Jerusalem” is used more than 800 times and Zion (referring to the same place) more than 150 times. So the city is referred to by name nearly one thousand times in the Scriptures. Needless to say, this is far more than any other city—so much so that there is no close second.

Great names

Other names by which it is called also indicate its importance. It is the “city of David”, Israel’s greatest king in history. But it is also named the “city of God” (Ps. 37:3). And the Lord Jesus said “Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Matt 5:34,35).

It is the one city of earth specifically called “the holy city” (Neh. 11:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5). It is also the only city that is used as a symbol of the heavenly city of God (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2).

God’s choice

Other amazing things are written of Jerusalem. For example, God Himself has a special love for it. Ps. 78:68 says that He “chose the tribe of Judah, the

Mount Zion which he loved”; and Ps. 87:2, “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob”. Zech. 1:14 has “Thus says the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy”.

The Lord God chose Jerusalem above all the cities of the world as His own dwelling place. This was true in Old Testament days when the glory of God came into the temple Solomon built and resided there —”In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion” (Ps. 76:1,2).

Ps. 132:13-16 indicates more than the temporary dwelling in the temple may be in store for Jerusalem —”For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for

I have desired it". This is in agreement with the word He spoke to King Solomon, "I have chosen Jerusalem that my name might be there".

The physical location of Jerusalem also has great importance. It is at the crossroads of three continents, the very centre of those great land masses we call Europe, Africa, and Asia. This is the way the Bible describes it: "Thus says the Lord God: This is Jeru-salem, which I have set in the centre of the nations with other countries around her" (Ez. 5:5, 38:12 Berkeley). It was to the very centre of the 'world that the Son of God came to die for the sins of the world.

Christ's tears

We think, too, of this unique city as the only place (as far as we are told) that Jesus wept over during His ministry on earth. "As He approached it, just as soon as He saw the city. He burst into tears over it, and said: If today you yourself had only known the conditions of peace! But now they are hidden from you. For a time is coming upon you when your enemies will throw up earthen works around you and surround you and hem you in on all sides, and they will throw you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know when God visited you" (Luke 19:41-44, Williams).

That same day Jesus, after making this prophecy, fulfilled another prophecy made long before by Zecha-riah. "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king shall come to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9. Berkeley). And this is just how the Lord Jesus did ride into Jerusalem 500 years later, as we all know.

Jerusalem's guilt

During the days that followed Jesus' entry in this way into Jerusalem that city secured another distinction. It became the only city in history to be guilty of deocide —the murder of God. For Jesus Christ was Immanuel —God with us—who laid aside His glory for a time and became man. And as the God-man He permitted Him-self to be taken by wicked men and crucified for the salvation of men. Of course, Jerusalem also became

the scene of the great miracle of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Peaceful city

Jerusalem means the “city of peace”. But it has been anything but that in reality. From the time that David conquered it some 3000 years ago until the present time it has been fought over or changed hands more than thirty times. If my count is accurate Jerusalem has fallen into the hands of the Syrians eight times, the Egyptians six times, the Romans four times, and the Turks four times. Others as well, such as the Assyrians and Babylonians, have either fully conquered it, or at least attacked it.

In more recent times Napoleon even took it and held it for a while. In its history it has been ruled at one time or another by representatives of three present-day religious bodies and has become a holy city to each—Jews, Moslems, and Christians. It is unique in this respect also.

Cast down but not destroyed

Three times Jerusalem was completely levelled to the ground. Its first complete destruction was at the hands of the armies of Babylon in 586 B.C. The walls were demolished, the temple and all the important buildings were burnt with fire, and most of the inhabitants were either slaughtered or deported to Babylon.

This was in accordance with the word of the Lord in the prophets. “Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle” (2 Kings 21:12). Jeremiah spoke of the city’s fate in these words, “I will make Jerusalem heaps and a den of dragons” (Jer. 9:11). Daniel spoke truly when he said, “Under the whole heaven has not been done as has been done upon Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:12).

But in the providence of God the city rose from the ashes. It again became the centre of Jewish life, and remained so until the day of Christ.

The next full destruction of the city occurred at the hands of Titus the Roman general in A.D. 70. This was in fulfilment of the words of Jesus uttered forty years before. At that time there was a terrific slaughter of the Jews and the whole city was again demolished. But once more the city was rebuilt—this time under the complete direction of the Romans, and

inhabited by veterans of Roman wars.

In A.D. 132 a remarkable thing happened. A Jew by the name of Bar-Kochba led a rebellion against Rome that was successful for a time. This man proclaimed himself the promised Messiah of the Jews and was received as such by many thousands, His most important defender was Rabbi Akiba, the most famous and learned Jewish teacher of his day. Bar-Kochba actually took Jerusalem from the Romans and held it for about two years. He also thought to rebuild the temple.

But the Roman legions marched on the city again and, after a bitter struggle, Jerusalem fell again. Then Hadrian, the Roman emperor, hit on a plan to crush the rebellious Jews. He destroyed the city once more and refused to permit any Jew to enter the area on pain of death. Everything was razed to the ground and the temple area was ploughed up. Micah the prophet had written long before, "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem, shall become heaps" (Mic 3:12).

Hadrian built a new city on the ruins of the old. called it Aelia Capitolina, and sent a colony of Roman citizens to live there. The Jews were not permitted to visit the city until the fourth century. By then the emperors of the Roman Empire had become "Christian".

There was one exception. Julian, when he came to power in A.D. 361, renounced Christianity and turned back to paganism. He restored all the privileges of the Jews and promised he would help them build a temple. But two years later he was dead. He was, and is, known as Julian "the Apostate".

It is an interesting thing that the two persons who thought most to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem were a false Jewish messiah and an apostate Roman emperor. This is a shadow of things to come. For I believe that in the last days of this age a false Jewish messiah and an apostate Roman emperor will join together and succeed in rebuilding the temple. The future career of both of these men is partly described in Revelation, chapter 13.

From Julian's time onwards possession of Jerusalem alternated between Christians, Turks, and Arabs— until June 1967.

Jerusalem's future

So much for Jerusalem's unique and troubled 'past. What of her future? Well, the Bible has a great deal to say about the future of Jerusalem. And I cannot but think that even as the prophecies of her past have been so literally fulfilled, so will those of her future.

One of the most striking prophecies about Jerusalem was made by the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 21:24 records it. "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled".

The first part of the verse has evidently been fulfilled. For from Titus in A.D. 70 until June 1967 the city has been trodden underfoot by the Gentiles (that is, non-Jews). The one exception was the rebellion under Bar-Kochba, soon crushed. But is the second part of the verse being fulfilled now?

The end of the times of the Gentiles will also be the end of the age. This is clear from the verses that follow in Luke 21. It is also clear from a similar expression ("the fulness of the Gentiles") used in Romans 11:25. During this present age God's great program is to send His Gospel throughout all the world. He is calling to Himself a special people out of all nations. But these times will come to a close. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in power and glory. And, if I am not mistaken, one of the principal signs of the end of "the times of the Gentiles" is just this—the Jews will take possession of Jerusalem.

The Jews take the city

Now all the world knows that Israel did just that in the war against the Arabs in June 1967. We do not know how long they will be able to hold the city. The situation in that area is still unsettled. But they insist that come what may they will retain their hold on Jerusalem.

They could well do so for some time. This is no mere rebellion like the one under Bar-Kochba. It is the determined position of a sovereign state which happens to be the strongest military power in the area.

Let us watch then. It is not beyond belief that the times of the Gentiles

are now coming to a close. Ours may be the last generation of this age. Perhaps the statement made by one of Israel's commando leaders who helped take the city is truer than he knew, "None of us alive", he said, "has ever seen or done anything so great as he has done today".

The temple

There is talk of the Jews building a new temple to replace the one destroyed so long ago by Titus. Does the Bible have anything to say about this?

It seems to me that three references in the New Testament indicate they will have a temple before the age ends.

Matthew 24:15 speaks of the "abomination of desolation" which shall stand in "the holy place". This verse comes in the midst of a discussion about the end of the age. "The holy place" could mean (and I believe it does mean) the holy place in the Jewish temple. The "abomination of desolation" means that some abomination enters the holy place and denies it. And this will be the signal for widespread desolation and destruction.

The second reference reveals what this "abomination" may be. Paul in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, writes of the coming of Christ. In verses 3 and 4 he says: "Let no one in any way deceive you; for the apostasy is to come first, and the man of sin is to be revealed, the son of doom, the adversary, so proudly insolent toward everything called God or worshipped, as to seat himself in the temple of God with the acclaim that he himself is God" (Berkeley).

So then, before the return of Christ, a powerful and wicked man will sit blasphemously in the temple. I believe that he himself, or an image of him, will probably be the "abomination of desolation".

The third reference is in Rev. 11:1,2. "There was then given me a reed like a measuring rod, with the words: Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those worshipping in it, but omit the outer court of the temple; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will for forty-two months trample the holy city under foot" (Berkeley). When John was commanded to measure the temple there was no temple in Jerusalem, to measure. In a vision he was commanded to

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measure a temple yet to be.

Others may interpret these verses in different ways, but let no one be surprised if the Jews begin to build a temple. It is just what many teachers expect from a study of the Bible.

More to come

But beyond this what do the Scriptures tell us of Jerusalem's future? We can divide the prophecies that come under this heading into two parts. Some prophecies speak of a time of future trouble and danger. Others foretell future blessing and glory.

Let us go back to the prophet Zechariah. He is pre-eminently, perhaps, the prophet of Jerusalem. In his small book he uses the word "Jerusalem" 41 times and "Zion" 6 more. The last three chapters of his prophecy, as we have noted, refers to the time of the end. Here is the picture as he presents it:

"Behold, I shall make Jerusalem as a cup that causes reeling for all the nations around it, and also against Judah will it go in the siege against Jerusalem. In that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome boulder for all people; all those who lift it shall be severely injured. All the nations of earth shall be gathered against her" (12:2, 3, Berkeley).

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem, to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives"; etc. (14:2-4).

Are not these verses plain enough? Certainly the language of 14:1-4 indicates the very end of the age. Verse one speaks of the "day of the Lord"—still future. Verse 2 declares that vast armies will come against Jerusalem from many different quarters—"all nations". Verse 3 reveals that the Lord Himself shall fight against these armies. And verse 4 puts the time un-mistakably at the return of Christ.

Nor do these verses stand alone. Additional examples are Joel 3:1, 2 and 3:9-17 which reveal the same truth. Rev. 11: 2 (quoted above) I be-

lieve is one with

Zech. 14: 2. And Rev. 16:12-16 and 19; 11-19 give more details concerning the last great battle of the age.

So Jerusalem will again be attacked and captured. But some of the Jews will remain and their temple, it seems, will not be destroyed at that time. But many in the nation will fall and tribulation will rage once more in Israel.

Glory at last

However, the story of Jerusalem will not end so. The prophets speak of a time of glory after suffering. Now it is known as the city which rejected her King. Then it will be in full measure the “city of the great King”.

Isaiah 24:23 puts it like this: “Then shall the moon-blush, and the sun shall be ashamed; for the Lord of hosts shall be king on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem His glory shall be before His elders” (Berkeley). This-verse comes at the end of a long passage describing the terrible destruction that is yet to fall on the earth in the last days.

Is. 51:3 has, “For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places: and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody”.

And Is. 65:18, 19, “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold I create Jeru-salem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying”.

Micah 4:1-7 describes the future days of glory for Jerusalem. I say future days for it is evident that v. 3 at least has not been fulfilled—“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”. This is, of course, in great contrast to this whole age when, in the words of the Lord Jesus, “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours 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” (Matt. 24:6, 7).

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Zechariah also, who wrote so clearly of the trouble that still awaits that city, closes his prophecy with a promise of glory. The King will be at Jerusalem and the nations will come there to worship Him. And every-thing there from the bells on the horses to the pots and pans in the houses shall be Holiness unto the Lord.

Get from these Scriptures all the spiritual truth you can now for the people of this day. But do not easily persuade yourself that there can be no kind of literal fulfilment. Already a great number of things in these same prophets have had a literal fulfilment. I have no strong reason to think these that relate to her future will not also be literally fulfilled.

But there will be no glory without the conversion of Israel and the return of Christ. But how fitting that Jerusalem which slew the Son of God should at last be the scene of weeping, repenting Jews and a fully triumphant Jesus!

The peace of Israel and the peace of the whole world is tied up with the peace of Jerusalem, the "city of peace". There will be no peace in Israel and none in the world until the meaning of that name is fulfilled.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee" (Psalm 122:6).

4. Light on Israel's enemies

ISRAEL at the present time is surrounded by enemies. Her Arab* neighbours are determined in their hostility, though there may be talks of peace.

They may be fully convinced that they are in the right. It is not my purpose here to try to judge the rightness or wrongness of all that has been going on in Western Asia, but to point out what prophecy has to say about general conditions there at the end of the age. Christians, of course, can feel compassion for the victims of tragedy on both sides. Who of us approves of that which causes violence, bloodshed and homeless refugees? We wish it didn't have to be so there, or anywhere. But we are dealing now with things as they are, not with things as we wish they were. And the Arabs are still hostile to Israel.

In particular the Arabs claim that if Israel insists on keeping old Jerusalem there will be continuing trouble. Some of them have said: "The Arab war against Israel will become a holy war of all Islam and its 465 million people".

No doubt some of the talk coming out of the Arab capitals is for propaganda purposes. But those who have listened to Arab threats and witnessed Arab actions in these past few years can hardly write it all off as mere propaganda. The Arabs do not intend to give up the fight. Many of them still seek Israel's destruction. And now there is more to provoke the Arabs to hatred and violence than ever before. There are more refugees driven from their homes; more land occupied by Israeli soldiers; more Arab dead to mourn: and there is the loss of Jerusalem, one of the holiest places on earth to the Muslim.

More enemies

We have seen from the prophet Zechariah that at the time of the end Israel will be surrounded by enemies. The Lord "will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle (14:2). The expression "all nations" "is a very

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broad one. It does not necessarily mean every single kingdom of man on the face of the earth from the greatest to the smallest. But it obviously does mean something more than those comparatively small and insignificant nations which lie in the near neighborhood of Israel.

And this brings us to the passage of Scripture which we will consider in this chapter—Ezekiel 38:1-16.

The prophecy

This quotation is from the New American Standard Bible.

1 "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him. 3 and say, Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I am against thee; O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal: 4 and I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords; 5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them: all of them with shield and helmet; 6 Gomer, with all its troops; Beth-Togarmah from the remote parts of the north, and all its troops—many peoples with you. 7 Be prepared, and, prepare yourself, you, and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. 8 After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. 9 And you will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you, and all your troops, and many peoples with you.' 10 Thus says the Lord God: 'It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil plan': 11 and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwallled villages; I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls, and having no bars nor gates; 12 to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from, the nations,

who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.' 13 Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you 'Have you come to capture spoil? have you assembled your company to seize plunder? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?'

14 "Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, Thus saith the Lord God: 'On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it? 15 And you will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you, and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army: 16 and you will come up against My people Israel, like a cloud to cover the land. It will come about in the last days, that I shall bring you against My land, in order that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes,' O Gog."

The remainder of chapter 38 and a large part of chapter 39 continues the prophecy against the people of Gog.

The questions

Now I want to ask and try to answer four important questions. Who are the peoples spoken of in this portion of Scripture? What is the prophecy concerning them? When will it take place? Is there anything here that could be a sign of Christ's soon coming?

No doubt these questions are much easier to ask than to answer. But let us examine the evidence and cautiously try to come to a conclusion.

First, who are the peoples spoken of in this portion of Scripture? They are a vast army that comes out from a number of countries down into the mountains of Israel. They are called "a mighty army" in verse 35, The NASB lists 10 names for these peoples, some other versions have only 9. Let us look at the order of the NASB list.

GOG. This name seems to refer to an individual. He is the "prince" of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, the man recognized as the leader of all these peoples.

MAGOG. This is a land where Gog is the leader. The name first appears in Genesis, chapter 10. The sons of Noah were Shem, Hem, and Japheth.

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The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The descendants of Japheth all took a generally northern or western direction, just as the Hamites and Shemites tended to go toward the south.⁷

Javan is Greece, as all are agreed. It is the Hebrew word for that country. Madai is almost certainly Media, and Tiras is probably Thrace, north of Greece. But what of Magog, Gomer, Meshech, and Tubal?

The Bible dictionaries and commentaries all seem more or less agreed that Magog belonged to the regions of the ancient people known as the Scythians. Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote in the first century, identified Magog with the Scythians.

Now the Scythians lived originally in the region immediately north of the Black Sea. Later “all north-eastern Europe and central Asia were supposed to be transversed by the nomad Scythian race”. Smith’s Bible Dictionary in identifying Magog with the Scythians, says that Magog was “a general expression for the tribes living north of the Caucasus”—that is, present-day Russia.

So it is practically certain that Magog inhabited large areas now parts of the Soviet Union.

ROSH. This word is interesting. It actually means “chief” and is so translated in some versions, “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal”. But some scholars are convinced it should stand along with the other names here as a proper name. And many interpreters are persuaded that “Rosh!!” could only refer to Russia. It is true that the region now known as Russia was not known by that name when Ezekiel wrote, nor for many centuries afterward. But we should not rule out this possibility—that God, who knows the future, was naming Russia long in advance (as He once named Cyrus many years before he was born).

MESHECH. Some have tried to identify Meshech with Moscow. This people in Assyrian was known as Mushki, and in Greek, Moschi—very similar to the sound of Moscow. However, there is nothing to indicate that Meshech is a city. Actually it was a tribe living northward around the Black Sea in “Ezekiel’s day. They are placed by the authorities around Soviet Georgia or Armenia.

TUBAL. He was another son of Japheth and not a city such as Tobolsk. It is not impossible, of course, that Tobolsk (another Russian city) was originally derived from the name Tubal and Moscow from Meshech. But I don't know that there is any proof for it. The descendents of Tubal lived in close proximity to Meshech in the north around the Black Sea.

These are all mentioned in verse 2 and make up the principal lands of Gog. But in verses 5 and 6 other peoples are mentioned as being allies of Gog and so we should look briefly at them also.

PERSIA. There is no question here. Persia is the ancient kingdom now called Iran.

CUSH (KJV, RV, etc. The NASB has Ethiopia). It seems that in ancient times there were two areas known by this name. One in Africa, known today as Ethiopia, and the other near Persia perhaps in present-day Iraq (Gen. 2:13, R.V.).

PUT. Likewise there seems to have been two Puts. One in the region of present-day Libya; the other near the Asian Cush.

Since both Cush and Put are linked with Persia in the prophecy, and are allies of the armies coming out of the north, they probably refer to territory near Iraq or Iran.

GOMER. Some say dogmatically that Gomer is Ger-many. I have seen no solid evidence for this at all— though there may be some I have not seen. The Armenians to this day call a part of Turkey "Gamir", which may indicate the original homeland of Gomer. Whoever they may have been, Ezekiel certainly thinks of them as north of Palestine and linked with these great northern armies.

TOGARMAH, or BETH-TOGARM AH. This is usually identified with Soviet Armenia or else a part of eastern Turkey.

So by an examination of these names it appears that every one of them in Ezekiel's day, with the exception of Persia, Cush, and Put, were to the direct north of Palestine—beyond Syria and Lebanon.

But quite apart from the names there are clear statements in the text that reveal the direction from which these armies come.

Verse 6—"Beth-Togarmah in the remote parts of the north".

Verse 15—"And you will come from your place out of the remote parts

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of the north”.

This is repeated in 39:2.

So in the day of the fulfilment of this prophecy Togarmah, Magog, Meshech, and Tubal. at least these, come from the extreme north of Palestine.

Russia identified?

Now for an important question: If God wanted to identify present-day Russia and her allies, using the language and peoples of Ezekiel’s day, how better could He have done so?

Personally I am persuaded (and I am far from being alone in this) that chapters 38 and 39 do indeed describe a vast alliance headed up by that huge country we now know as the U.S.S.R. I do not believe that the names given here exhaust the list of Israel’s enemies. We have the expression in 38:7, 9, “many peoples with you”. The language of this whole passage signifies a coming together of many nations. But Gog of Magog is at their head.

Question two

What is the prophecy concerning them? This is certainly easier to answer than the preceding question. This mighty army comes “like a storm”, “like a cloud to cover the land”—down into the land of Palestine. This is definitely stated in 38:8, “you will come . . . upon the mountains of Israel”, and in 38:16, “you will come up against my people Israel”.

According to 38:12 they come to take a “spoil” or “plunder”. That is, the aim is material advantage of some kind. At present it cannot be said that Israel is rich in material resources—not rich enough to stir the greed of Russia. Unless we count the value of the Dead Sea. I understand that body of water is worth many billions of dollars in minerals and salts. However, it might be that the advantage seen in an invasion of Israel is control of the whole of Western Asia. For there are the huge oil deposits of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Arabia, etc. And there is the Suez Canal, which could be very useful to Russia if she controlled it.

There is no doubt that Russia would like to control this area. And perhaps she may think to gain a great deal by an alliance with Israel’s Arab

neighbours. And this, in turn, may be the motive for an invasion of Israel itself. Whatever this motive might prove to be, if the Word of God predicts an invasion from the U.S.S.R. then it will surely be. The Scripture cannot be broken.

The language of 38:4 suggests a degree of reluctance on Gog's part. God says to him that He will "turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you forth". God has determined the whole thing, and if necessary He will drag these northern armies into Palestine.

Enemies destroyed

Ezekiel's prophecy goes on to describe what happens to this northern military power and its allies. They are utterly defeated, routed, crushed, and destroyed. Consider the following statements.

"It shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord God, that my fury shall come up in my face . . . and I will call for a sword against him throughout my mountains, says the Lord. God" (33:18-21).

"You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you, and all the people that is with you; I will give you unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured" (39:4).

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel . . . and there shall they bury Gog and his multitude . . . and seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may, cleanse the land" (39:11, 12).

How?

How does this great northern army come to its end? 38: 21—"I will call for a sword against him"; 38: 22—"I will rain upon him and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone"; "I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles" (39:6),

This does not necessarily mean a miraculous inter-vention by God Himself to defeat this military power. God uses means to accomplish His purposes. In Ez. 22:15 God says of Israel, "I will scatter you among the

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heathen, and disperse you in the countries”. But of course God used other people to do the scattering.

So God will no doubt use human agents to defeat this northern invasion of Palestine. Some think they see in the context of Ez. 38 an indication of this. Verse 13 reads, “Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, ‘Are you come to capture spoil?’ have you gathered your assembly to seize plunder?” etc.

Sheba and Dedan were located in Arabia. But who is Tarshish and all its villages (or “all the young lions thereof KJV, RV, etc.). “Tarshish was the farthest limit of the western world’ as known to the Hebrew people” (ISBE). Some think that Tarshish today would be the nations of the west, particularly Great Britain, the old lion, and her young lions, Canada, Australia, United States, etc. It is certainly not impossible. But it can hardly be proved from the context.

At least the questions put by these peoples suggest that they oppose the action of Gog and his allies. In the next chapter we will be looking at another great power that will be on the scene in the last days—the kingdom of Antichrist. It is my opinion that this power will be the instrument that God will use to destroy Gog’s armies. For it appears from Scripture that for a time at the end of the age Antichrist will reign supreme. “Power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and nations” (Rev. 13:7).

The time of fulfilment

We have come to the third question that needs to be answered. When will Ezekiel’s prophecy be fulfilled?

First of all, let us remind ourselves again that we must not try to set dates. This is impossible for us. We can never say that such and such a prophecy must be fulfilled on such and such a day. But we can inquire into the general time of fulfilment.

Now it is perfectly clear that this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. There has never been an invasion of Israel from the far north land of Magog from Ezekiel’s day to this. There have been invasions by the Syrians, and the Greeks, and the Egyptians, and the Parthians, and the Romans. But never by the Scythians. Never from the “uttermost parts of the north”

from beyond the Black Sea. So the prophecy awaits fulfilment.

It must be fulfilled when Israel is in the land (38: 8, 12, 16). So until very recent times it was not possible of fulfilment. But now it is. For Israel has taken those mountains that have lain waste and dwelt in them again, and planted them, and prospers in them today.

It must be at a time when Israel has a measure of security (38:11). It is true that until the latest war Israel has perhaps not felt very secure. Now they have proved themselves far and away the strongest military power in the immediate area. Their sense of security must have increased. But strong as they are, they know that they are yet a tiny nation. Their real and ultimate security must come from some other source. If they are able in the future (and I think this will happen) to sign a military pact with friendly western powers they would think themselves even more secure than at present.

It must be fulfilled according to 38:8 “after many days”: “in the latter years”. These words may easily be interpreted to mean the end of the age. The words of the prophet Daniel are in agreement with this: “At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships” (Dan. 11:40).

Some seem to think that the invasion described here and the one in Rev. 20:7-9 are identical. I do not see how this can be. Although two of the names are the same everything else about these two pictures is different. The one in Revelation occurs after “the thousand years are expired”. But the one in Ezekiel occurs before the thousand year (millennium) reign of Christ begins. This seems evident for the following reasons.

1. The events that take place after this invasion in Ezekiel 38-39 indicate that a time before the millennium is meant, and not a time after the millennium. In 39: 9-16 we read that it will take the Israelites 7 years to dispose of the implements of war, and 7 months to bury all the dead who fall in the land of Israel. But after the battle of Gog and Magog in Rev. 20 there is the final Judgment and a new heaven and a new earth. That new earth will surely not need to be cleansed by burying the dead (as it is in Ez. 39:14, 16).

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2. The invasion in Ez. 38 & 39 appears to be before the millenium when we examine the language at the close of ch. 39. See verses 21-29. Also we should remember that these chapters immediately precede chapters 40-48, which certainly seem to speak of the glory of the millenium.

3. The invasion in Ez. 38 is from the north only and certain definite nations which are named take part in it. But the time referred to in Rev. 20 has to do with “nations in the far corners of the earth”. This seems to speak of an involvement of more peoples and nations than Ezekiel speaks of.

4. After the invasion in Ezekiel we read of a place “east of the sea” (Ez. 39:11). but after the battle in Rev. 20, in the new earth, there will be “no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).

So I believe Ezekiel 38 & 39 and Rev. 20:7-9 speak of different battles separated by 1000 years. The one in Ezekiel may be very near at hand.

Does the mention of horses, and spears, and shields, etc. in Ezekiel’s prophecy argue against a fulfilment in our day? I think not. After all, Ezekiel could hardly speak of tanks, and planes, and bombs. They were not in existence in his day and there were no names for them. But it is common in Scripture to use the language of the day to describe events that are future.

A final question

Is there anything here that could point to Christ’s soon return? It seems to me that the developing situation in Israel, in Western Asia, and to the far north of Israel, is very significant.

Israel, as we have seen, is in the land of Palestine in a state of prosperity. They may not yet feel fully secure, but they are still very strong militarily and have a powerful friend in the U.S.

Russia, in our generation, has become one of the two greatest world powers. She is now certainly capable of just such an invasion described by Ezekiel.

Russia is opposed to the Jews, and on the side of the Arabs in the struggle against Israel.

Russia and Israel's other enemies are in agreement. That country is the major source of arms for the Arabs, and it is to Russia that many of them look for aid.

You may interpret these facts as you will, but they are certainly very interesting in the light of Ezekiel's prophecy. Remember, too; that Zechariah predicted that all nations will come against Jerusalem in the last days. And this would surely include Russia.

I believe the final collision between Communism and Christ is still to come. At that time the followers of the Jew, Marx, will be utterly crushed by another out of Israel, our Lord Jesus,

We saw above that God Himself will bring these northern armies against the mountains of Israel. He says "I will turn thee about, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth".

But God is love

Yes. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. But this will by no means clear the wicked. This will not help those who reject, Him and His Son and His love.

For God is a God of judgment. As the just judge of the world He cannot spare the guilty. There is coming a day, and soon, when God will arise in wrath to punish the world. Unbelief and pride and blasphemy and boasting and wickedness will not go on for ever unpunished.

"I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible", says the Lord God (Is. 13:11). And this judgment of wickedness is for the good of the universe. It will happen, not because God is not love, but because He is.

Sin is the great destroyer of nations. So if Russia falls, and Europe falls, and America falls, and the nations of the East fall, let no one wonder why. There is one reason—SIN.

But now God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Some of you may need this word. God waits now to be gracious to you.

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But He will not wait for ever. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”.

5. Light on the Kingdom of the antichrist

PROPHECY reveals another mighty earthly power at the centre of the events of the end time. Unlike the peoples we looked at in the last chapter this power is not indicated by names and locations. Rather, it is presented to us more by images, visions, and pictures. This is the kingdom of Antichrist.

Most of what we know about this kingdom is given us in the prophecy of Daniel and in the book of the Revelation, To understand what is said requires close and careful study and a comparison of Scripture with Scripture; particularly of Daniel, chapters 2 and 7. and Revelation, chapters 13 and 17. We cannot, of course, make a detailed study of so much material in so brief a space. But we will try to consider the most important features of what we find in these chapters.

The prophecy

To begin with let us look at a quotation from Daniel chapter 7.

1 "In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed; then he wrote the dream, and told the sum. of the matters. 2 Daniel spak and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven brake forth upon the great seas. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea diverse one from another. 4 The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon two feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. 5 And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it was raised up on the side, and three ribs were in his mouth between his teeth: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. 6 After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads: and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night vision, and behold a fourth beast, terrible and powerful,

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and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. 8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things”.

16 “I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. 17 These great beasts, which are four, are four kings; which shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. 19 Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was diverse from all of them, exceeding terrible. . . .”

23 “Thus he said, the fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. 24 And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the former, and he shall put down three kings. 25 And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time” (Dan. 7:1-8, 16-19, 23-25, R.V.).

Three things to learn.

As we consider this passage of Scripture let us try to do three things. First, identify the four beasts: second, examine more particularly the fourth beast; and third, discover the time of the final fulfilment of the vision.

First, let us try to establish the identity of the four beasts. It is the fourth beast that Daniel was most interested in. It is the fourth beast that we will study in particular. But in order to identify the fourth we must first learn who the other three are. This is really not so difficult as it might seem at first sight. And there is considerable agreement among conservative

scholars as to the identity of these beasts.

We are told in verse 17 that they are four kings that appear on earth. In verse 23, “the fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom”. So the four beasts are four kingdoms represented by four kings that arise one after the other.

Beginning with Daniel’s day four and only four empires arose and succeeded one another—Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian, and Roman.

The first beast

The first was like a lion and had eagle’s wings. It represents the kingdom of Babylon. Jeremiah compares Babylon to both a lion and an eagle (Jer. 4:7; 49:22; 50:17). The symbol of the winged lion is very appropriate. A statue of a winged lion with a man’s head has actually been excavated at Nimrud south of Nineveh. The phrase “a man’s heart was given to it” is probably to be explained by the experience of king Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s greatest king (4:28-37).

The second beast

The second was like a bear that raised up itself on one side and had three ribs in its mouth. It doubtless represents the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which Daniel refers to in 5:28 and 8:20. Raising itself on one side indicates that in the joint kingdom one people were stronger—as the Persians became under Cyrus. The ribs in its mouth speak of conquered kingdoms—probably Egypt, Lydia, and Babylon.

The third beast

The third was like a leopard with four wings and four heads. This is the empire of Greece and Macedonia which defeated the Persians and Medes. The leopard is an exceedingly quick and cunning beast. This, and the wings, speak of the unparalleled speed and brilliance with which Alexander the Great conquered everything in his path and set up his world empire. After his death his empire split into four parts. The four heads of the leopard speak of this.

The fourth beast

The fourth could only be the fourth great empire which replaced the third—Rome. Rome was different, stronger, more determined, more lasting, more extensive than any empire before her.

So the four beasts are four empires. If we were to name the four “kings” that represented these empires in the past, we would say Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, and Caesar.

A look at Daniel chapter two confirms this interpretation of the four beasts. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream.

A strange dream,

In it he saw a great image “whose brightness was excellent” and whose “form . . . was terrible”. It was the image of a man with a head of gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, and his feet part of iron and part of clay. By the wisdom God gave him Daniel explained the dream. This is what he said to Nebuchadnezzar:

“You are the head of gold! After you another kingdom shall arise, less forceful than you; then a third kingdom of bronze, which shall also have sway over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron: for as iron breaks everything to pieces and beats all things down, so shall it break in pieces and crush all peoples” (Dan. 2:38b-40, Berkeley).

So beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, there were four kingdoms that arose on earth one after the other which were the most powerful of all kingdoms. Since the first kingdom is identified by Daniel as Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar), the other three are easy to name. They are, as we have seen in chapter 7, the empire of the Medes and Persians, the empire of the Greeks and Macedonians, and the Roman Empire, the strongest of them all.

Chapter 2 and chapter 7 both describe the same kingdoms. But why go over the same ground twice? Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image in chapter 2 is man’s view of worldly kingdoms—a dazzling image of power. But Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 gives another view of things altogether. This is God’s view of man’s kingdoms — wild, destructive beasts. Moreover, in chapter 7 many details of the fourth kingdom are added.

Rome

Let us now examine more particularly the fourth beast. It is described in 7:7, 8 and these symbols are explained in 7:23-25. From these verses certain facts appear. This beast is dreadful and strong exceedingly with iron teeth and a cruel disposition that devours and breaks in pieces. That is, the angel explains, this fourth kingdom shall be different from the other kingdoms and shall devour the whole earth and break it in pieces,

This beast has ten horns which are ten kings who arise out of this kingdom.

A “little horn” comes up from among these ten horns and three of them are torn up by the roots. That is, a strong king (from perhaps lowly beginnings or a small country) shall arise after the ten kings and subdue three of them. This suggests that the ten kings are living at the same time. The fact that they are on the one beast suggests that they will be in some sort of federation or union.

This little horn begins to be the spokesman for the whole beast. He has a “mouth speaking great things”, and he shall “speak great words against the Most High”.

He shall have power over them for a “time and times and half a time”. This is frequently interpreted to mean one year and two years and half a year—3 1/2 years.

Now at the end of chapter 7 Daniel says his thoughts troubled him very much, and the beast passes out of view. It is not seen or heard of under this exact symbol, anywhere else in Daniel, nor in the whole of the Old Testament. Nor in all the New Testament until we come to the last book of the Bible. The apostle John on the rocky isle of Patmos about 650 years after Daniel’s strange visions also had visions given to him.

Revelation

Let us read a few verses concerning what he has recorded for us in Revelation, chapter 13.

“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns,

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and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority” (13:1, 2).

“And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months” (v. 5).

“And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (verses 7, 8).

This beast which John saw combines some of the features of all four beasts of Daniel’s vision. But there are certain exceptional marks that seem to identify this beast with Daniel’s fourth.

It has ten horns, as Daniel’s beast had. These horns are explained in Rev. 17:12, 13, 17. They are ten kings who must arise. They are contemporaries of one another and their reign is very short.

It has a “mouth speaking great things”. Rev, 13:5 list’s the exact language of Dan 7:8.

It is given power to continue for 42 months, which is 31/2 yours (Dan. 7:25).

It makes war with the saints, as the fourth beast of Daniel does.

It is given power over “all kindreds, tongues, and nations”. This corresponds to Dan. 7:23.

So it is very hard to escape the conclusion that the beast John saw and the fourth beast of Daniel are the same beast. There are certain differences in the two descriptions, but there are no contradictions. Each gave a detail or two omitted by the other. But there is such agreement in general between the two descriptions that I think we may be sure they speak of the same kingdom and kings, This appears more certain when we consider that both Daniel’s and John’s beasts are in the same time period.

And that beast, as we have seen is Rome.

A difficulty?

But here a difficulty may seem to arise. When did the Roman Empire, which has seemingly passed away, ever have ten kings who agreed to give their king-doms to another? And when did this other king, stouter than his fellows, fulfil all that is said of him in Rev. chapters 13, 17, and 19? It is my opinion, and the teaching of a great many other commentators, that it has never been fulfilled.

Rome's post

Perhaps the briefest kind of an outline of the history of Rome might be helpful as we consider this. And we should pay some attention to the area occupied by this Empire.

According to tradition the city of Rome was founded by Romulus in 753 B.C., who became its first king (about the time of Isaiah the prophet).

At first Rome was not strong and it took her many years to gain control of the Italian peninsula. In the 3rd century B.C. the Roman beast began to stalk other prey, and in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. gradually took over much of the territory that had been Alexander's Empire. The famous Roman generals Pompey and Julius Caesar added greatly to the power and possessions of the Empire. So that when Christ was born in Palestine the Romans controlled the land. Indeed we read in Luke that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus "that all the world should be taxed". But at that time, of course, Augustus had absolute power and there were no ten kings who united to give him the kingdom.

Nor were there at the time of Tiberius when Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem. The picture was by no means fulfilled at the time of Christ's first coming.

The Empire reached its fullest extent in the 2nd century A.D. under the emperor Trajan. At that time it included most or all of the territories of the following present-day countries: England, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg. West Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Yugoslavia, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Turkey. Syria. Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, a strip running the length of north Africa, the so-called iron curtain countries of Hungary. Bulgaria, Rumania, and Albania; and, of course, Italy, the

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centre of it all. Rumania was held only briefly as were Armenia, Assyria, and Babylonia.

The Empire did not include what is now East Ger-many, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, or Russia. At its greatest size it extended 3,000 miles from east to west and 2,000 miles from north to south.

The empire divided

Rome began to split into two parts during the reign of Constantine, the first "Christian" emperor. (Was not this the meaning of the two legs of Nebuchadnezzar's image?) In A.D. 330 he moved the capital from Rome to the new city of Constantinople (later called Byzantium, and at present Istanbul). The final division came in 397. Thereafter there was an eastern empire with its capital at Byzantium.

The western part was, of course, the more direct continuation of the Roman Empire of the Caesars. It continued, growing gradually weaker, until A.D. 476 when the last emperor was deposed, and the city of Rome destroyed by barbarians from the north of Europe. The eastern empire continued for another 1,000 years until 1453 when the Turks captured Byzantium. But before that event much of its territories had fallen into other hands.

The western Roman empire after 476 broke into a number of smaller kingdoms and city states which frequently were at war one with another. The city of Rome itself eventually came under the authority of the bishop of Rome who became the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, and the head of a large part of Christendom.

Attempts at union

There were later attempts to unite the western empire again and parts of it did come together for a brief time under Charlemagne who united the heart of Europe. But it began to fall apart again after his death.

The "Holy Roman Empire" was a name that arose in the 12th century. It was a loose federation of states, some quite small, and numbering as many as 200 in the 16th century; or, if one counts the tiniest units, 2,000.

In later years others dreamed of uniting the old empire under a strong central authority. Most notable of these was Napoleon who considered himself a successor of Charlemagne, though he came a thousand years after.

But through all these centuries there has not come about the exact situation described by Daniel and the Revelation.

The time of fulfilment

And this brings us to our third point. If these visions have not yet had a final fulfilment when will they have? Let us inquire into the Scriptures and see if we can learn.

In the midst of Daniel's description of the fourth beast, Rome, we read the following words:

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire . . . the judgment was set, and the books were opened ... I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame ... I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:9-11, 13, 14).

And in verse 26 "But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it until the end".

The vision relates to the end of this age when the judgment shall be set and the Son of man shall come with the clouds of heaven. And the beast with the ten horns and the one little horn will be in existence then. It is then he is destroyed and the kingdom and dominion given "to the people of the saints of the most high" (7:27).

This view is confirmed by the language of Rev. chapter 19. There in verses 11-16 we have the glorious return of Jesus Christ and in verses 19, 20 "I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered

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together to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army. And the beast was taken . . .”.

The conclusion we must reach, as I see it, is this. The fourth beast of Daniel and the beast of the Revelation symbolize the same mighty kingdom. That kingdom is the Roman Empire, and it will be in existence at the end of this age.

Rome revived?

For this reason various Bible scholars for many years have been predicting the revival of the Roman Empire. We may, perhaps with greater accuracy, call it the final form that the old Roman Empire takes. It has been forming through the centuries and will eventually reach the precise condition pictured in Daniel and the Revelation.

At the end of the age, for a brief period, this empire will be the strongest on earth. And it will be ruled by the remarkable and vastly wicked person called the Anti-christ. He is also given other names: “man of sin”, “the son of prediction”, the “wicked” or “the law-less one” (2 Thess. 2:3-10). He is called the “little horn” in Daniel; he is called the beast himself in the Revelation because he embodies all the power and violence and wickedness of that final antichristian kingdom. He will demand and receive worship as God from a great many people. He will be a great boaster, blasphemer, and persecutor of the saints. He will, it seems, make an agreement with Israel (Dan. 9: 27), but will later prove false and treacherous. He will, of course, be the most powerful political figure in the world. And he will be assisted by one called “the false prophet” (Rev. 13:11) who may well be (I believe will be) a Jew in Israel.

We cannot say which ten kingdoms will be ruled by the ten rulers of the last day. We do not know which three the little horn will pluck up by the roots. They may all be in the western part of the Roman Empire — that is, a large part of Europe. But some may be from what became the eastern empire. It is thought by some, that the United States might be included because that country in a large degree has been settled by peoples from Europe — a kind of extension of the Roman Empire. I cannot say. Russia

can hardly be a part of the future form of that empire. She certainly was never included in it before. And, besides, they have a different, role to perform as we saw in the last Chapter. But we would expect countries like Italy and France to be more or less at the centre of Anti-Christ's kingdom.

The situation now

In conclusion, a question of some interest and importance. Is the present situation in Europe at all like we would imagine it should be from a study of the prophets?

It is true we do not see a ten nation federation of nations. But, as everyone knows, European statesmen for years have been talking about (and some working for) a United States of Europe. A few are at present creating difficulties, but the situation could, and may, change quickly and dramatically.

It would be no mistake, I think, to look for more and more co-operation between the nations of Europe. Certainly the plan is there, and the hope, and the determination on the part of some. God, in His own time and way, will bring about the fulfilment of His Word. Until then we watch with great interest developments in the old Roman Empire.

6. Light on world evangelization

Here we will look at world conditions in general as they will be at the end of the age. But we will examine more particularly the subject given in the title of this chapter.

The following quotation is from the Berkeley Version.

The prophecy

24:1 "Leaving the temple, Jesus went on His way, and His disciples came forward to point out to Him the temple buildings; 2 but He replied to them, Do you not see all this? I assure you, not one stone shall be left here on another, that shall not be thrown down. 3 "When He was seated on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately and said, "Tell us when this will happen and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age'. 4 Jesus replied to them, Look out that none may mislead you; 5 for many shall come in My name, saying; 'I am the Christ', and shall mislead many. 6 You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you be not troubled; for they have to come, but that is not yet the end, 7 For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and there shall be famines and earthquakes in various places; 8 all these are but the early pains of birth pangs.

9 "Then they shall hand you over for persecution and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations on account of My name. 10 Many then shall fall away and shall betray one another and hate one another, 11 and many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many 12 and, due to exorbitant lawlessness, the love of many shall be chilled. 13 But he, who perseveres to the end, he shall be saved. 14 And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached all over the world to testify to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:1-14)

The apostles' questions

Chapter 24 of Matthews should be studied with two other passages of Scripture—Mark chapter 13 and Luke chapter 21. In Luke 21:7 the recorded question is, “Master, but when shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” The Lord Jesus had told them of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and in their question they were referring to that. In Matt. 24:3 there is a significant addition to the questions—”And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

In these three passages of Scripture Jesus answers these questions. He answers not merely the question about the temple destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70; and not merely the question about the end of the age. He answers both questions. And it would be a mistake to apply all that He says either to the first century of this age or to the last.

The answers to these questions are interwoven, and it may not be an easy matter to state definitely when Jesus is speaking of the one event or the other. But it is clear enough. I think, that the emphasis in Luke 21 (up to verse- 24) is on the destruction of Jerusalem, and the emphasis in Matt. 24 is on the end of the age. Some think the two events cannot be so easily distinguished. In any case, we have here a principle for interpreting these passages.

These two time periods will be so alike that in large measure they can be described in similar language. The one is a picture of the other.

In other words, the conditions that appeared before and at the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70 will appear again at the end of the age before Christ returns. Jerusalem will once more be the centre of Israel's life (as we have seen); once more she will be besieged and taken; once more conditions described in Luke 21: 8-20 will prevail.

Bishop J. C. Ryle put it like this: “The first fourteen verses [of Matt. 24] are taken up with general lessons of wide range and application. They seem to apply with equal force to the close of both Jewish and Christian dispensations, the one event being strikingly typical of the other”.

The past

Just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus long ago, false prophets did appear, famines and earth-quakes occurred, signs were seen in the heavens, wars and persecutions were terrible, and the Gospel had been preached throughout the known world.

Josuphus, the Jewish historian born in A.D. 37 or 33, wrote about false prophets before the fall of Jeru-salem- “The land was overrun with magicians, seduc-ers, and irnposters, who drew the people after them in multitudes into solitudes and deserts, to see the signs and miracles which they promised to show by the power of God”. Among these were Dositheus, a Sama-ritan who said he was Christ; Simon Magus, who stated that he appeared among the Jews as the Son of God; and Theudas, who persuaded many to go to the Jordan river to watch him divide the waters.

During those years there were wars in various places of the Roman Empire, and much violence in Rome it-self. In a period of 18 months four emperors met a violent death. The rebellion of the Jews against Rome began in A.D. 66 and became a full-fledged war for independence which was not crushed until A.D. 70 under

Historians also tell us of famines and earthquakes. There was a terrible famine in Jerusalem and other places which was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28). Four times between A.D. 41-54 famine prevailed in Rome, Palestine, and Greece. There was an earth-quake at Rome during the time of famine. In the reign of Nero not long before Jerusalem was destroyed, the cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse experienced violent earthquakes. The cities of Pom-ᵑeli, Smyrna and Miletus, and the islands of Chios and Samos were also shaken.

Even signs in the sky

There were also strange things seen in the heavens. Josephus says that several preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, A star resembling a sword stood over the city. A comet, he says, continued for a whole year in the area. Once during the night a bright light shone about the temple so that for one half hour it seemed as bright as day. One evening before the sun had gone down “chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen

running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities”.

We cannot say how accurate these descriptions of Josephus might be. But, being a Jew, he certainly had no reason to invent stories that would support the predictions of Christ. In any case, we have the word of the Lord Jesus that there would be “fearful sights and great signs” from heaven (Luke 21:11).

Tribulation

There was also much tribulation both among Christians and Jews at the time. The Roman emperor Nero (died A.D. 68) terribly persecuted the Christians of Rome, using them as a scapegoat to allay suspicion that he himself had started the great fire of A.D. 64. He charged the crime to them and began to torture and slay them. The whole evil story is reported by Tacitus and Severus, Roman historians. Severus wrote:

“In the meantime, the number of Christians being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. But the opinion of all cast the odium of causing the fire upon the emperor, and he was believed in this way to have sought for the glory of building a new city. And, in fact, Nero could not, by any means he tried, escape from the charge that the fire had been caused by his orders. He, therefore, turned the accusation against the Christians, and the most cruel tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent. Nay, even new kinds of death were invented, so that, being covered in the skins of wild beasts, they perished by being devoured by dogs, while many were crucified or slain by fire, and not a few were set apart for this purpose, that, when the day came to a close, they should be consumed to serve for light during the night. In this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians. Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws which were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian”.

As for the Jews. Josephus tells us what happened to them when Titus took Jerusalem. “Many hundreds were first whipped, then tormented with various kinds of tortures, and finally crucified; the Roman soldiers nailed them one after one way and another after another, to crosses, by

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way of jest [!], until at length the multitudes became so great that room was wanting for crosses”.

Prior to this the Gospel had been preached in a very great many places. In Col. 1:6 Paul says that the Gospel had come to the Colossians “as it is in all the world”.

So then even back in the first century there were false Christs and false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, persecutions and tribulations, the Gospel preached throughout the known world, and Jerusalem destroyed.

All fulfilled in the past?

Because of this, some have taught that the whole prophecy Jesus uttered was fulfilled in that first century. But this simply is not possible. Remember our Lord also answered the question, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” And Matt. 24:29, 30 speaks of the coming in glory of the Son of God. He will come after the tribulation described in the preceding verses. This makes the whole picture in this chapter relate to the end of the age. For the coming of Christ (and not the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus) is the mighty event that brings the picture In a close.

And just as the events predicted in the early verses of this chapter in some measure appeared in the first century, so they will appear in full measure at the end of the age.

The last days

I think we should expect, an increase in wars and famines and earthquakes as we approach nearer and nearer the end. I do not think we can judge how near we are to the end by such signs. There have always been wars and famines and earthquakes. We hear more about them now but this is because of modern means of communicating the news. In any case, Jesus said these are just “the early pains of birth pangs”.

It would seem that the problem of crime and rebellion against authority is going to increase more and more. Because of spreading “lawlessness” (that is the exact meaning of the Greek word) the love of many will

become cold. People are going to be a law to themselves and will not submit to proper authority. And because of this the last days will be a time of coldness and indifference in the vital matters of Christianity—even more than usual.

The last days will also see a time of tribulation greater than any previous one. We are warned about this in verses 15-28 of Matt. 24. It will exceed any-thing experienced in Old Testament times—and some of those days were terrible indeed. It will be worse than the persecutions of Saul of Tarsus or king Herod against the early believers. Jesus plainly tells us that in verse 21. He shows us equally clearly in verse 29 that this tribulation will be at the end of the age. To endure such times will require a living faith that can stand the test to the end.

The Gospel and the end

Now let us turn our attention to verse 14—”This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached all over the world to testify to all nations, and then shall the end come”.

Strangely enough, though it does not seem difficult at first sight, the meaning of this verse has been greatly disputed. Some teachers have said it was entirely fulfilled in the first century by the preaching of the Church. We have seen already that the meaning goes far beyond that.

Others teach that it will be fulfilled at the very end of the age, but not by the Church at all. They believe that the true Church, the Body of Christ, will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord Jesus before the

Great Tribulation begins. Then converted Jews will go into all the world and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom before the end comes.

Jewish evangelists?

Dr. William Pettingill stated the matter like this: “During the seven years absence of the Church from the earth this unbelieving remnant [of Jews in Palestine] will turn to the Lord together with a remnant of Jews throughout the world; and these will be the evangelists of the End-time”. Also: “It is not ‘the Gospel of the Kingdom’ that is committed to the Church to preach but the Gospel of the grace of God” (God’s Prophecies

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for Plain People).

This is the position of a fairly large number of Bible teachers today, and some of them state the thing very dogmatically. They even seem to think it is not necessary to bring forth any Scriptural proof. Unfortunately for this theory, solid foundation in the Bible is lacking. I cannot find a word anywhere in the Scriptures that states the Jews will be an agency for evangelism during the Great Tribulation.

Most of those who hold this view direct us to Revelation, chapter 7, for evidence. Now the fact is, the people described in verses 1 to 8 are Jews. But do they go all over the world preaching? Do they go anywhere? Are they preachers? Nothing, not a word is said about it here or anywhere. In verse 3 they are called “servants of God”, but this is the common word, used throughout the New Testament and refers to all believers whether they are preachers or not. Moreover, we must closely observe the sequence of events in Rev. chapters 6 and 7. It then appears that these Jews are not sealed until the Tribulation is altogether over. The Tribulation ends with signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the Day of the Lord begins (Matt. 24: 29; Acts 2:20 —these two references should be compared) after that. This is what we have in the Revelation. In chapter 6 we see the Tribulation under seal 5, and the signs that come after it under seal 6. Then follows the sealing of the Jews in chapter 7. It is my opinion that the Jews will not turn to Christ until the Tribulation is over and they see Christ whom they have pierced when He comes,

But quite apart from all this, is there any reason at all to think the Gospel of the kingdom is any gospel other than the Gospel we preach in this age?

The Gospel of the ‘kingdom

I am convinced that the Gospel of the kingdom is just simply the Gospel—the only Gospel there is, or ever will be. Then why is it called in Matthew 24 the Gospel “of the kingdom”? What would it mean but that through the Gospel of Christ we are brought into the kingdom of God and God becomes our King? What “could it mean but the old Gospel that proclaims, “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of

God” (John 3:3)?

The word “kingdom” is used 56 times in the Gospel of Matthew and 51 times it refers to God’s kingdom. It has been said that Matthew’s Gospel is the Gospel of the kingdom. It certainly is not surprising that he used the expression here in Chapter 24. It is not used in the parallel verse in Mark 13.

This kingdom is the one Jesus preached and the Jews refused. It is the kingdom that He describes in the parables of chapter 13. It is the kingdom to which He gave Peter the keys, and which he used at Pentecost and after (16:19). It is the kingdom which one must enter as a little child (18:3), and which the rich can hardly enter at all (19: 23, 24). It is the kingdom taken from the Jews and given to another people for this age (21: 43). It is the kingdom to which all are invited in the parable of the marriage feast (22:1-10).

It is the kingdom that the Pharisees would not enter and tried to shut up against them who were trying to enter (23:13). It is the kingdom that is related to the parable of the virgins concerning the end of this age (25:1-13), and the parable of the talents concerning the whole of this age (25:14-30).

It is a kingdom which is past, present, and future. It was in the world, it now exists, it will come. It is a kingdom which Jews of Jesus’ day were entering, which we may now enter, and the final manifestation of which we await the future.

One Gospel

It is the Gospel of the kingdom that Jesus our Lord preached, that Paul preached, that we preach. The kingdom relates to this age and is preached in this age. He that preaches the new birth is preaching the kingdom. He that preaches repentance and faith in Christ is preaching the kingdom.

A few verses of Scripture should make this clear.

Compare Matt. 24:14 with Matt. 28:19,20. We have the same expression “the end” in each place. Surely the words of Christ “I am alongside you all the days until the end of the age” (Berkeley) are a gracious promise to the Church of this age. And so what is preached in 24:14 and 28:19, 20

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must be the same, for they end at the same time.

The early Church certainly preached the Gospel of the kingdom. Acts 8:12 “Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ”. George Ladd in his book “The Gospel of the Kingdom”, points out that the phrase in Acts 8:12 is the same as in Matt. 24:14 in Greek except that in Acts a verb is used instead of a noun, and “concerning” is added. The literal reading would be “gospelling about the kingdom”.

Acts 19:8 says that Paul “went into the synagogue, and speak boldly for the space of three months, dis-puting and persuading the things concerning the king-dom of God’!

Acts 20:25 records Paul’s words, “I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more”.

Acts 28:30, “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”.

Paul mentions the kingdom in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and 2 Timothy. He taught that believ-ers now have been translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son and that God has called us unto His kingdom and glory. Good News indeed, the Gospel of the kingdom! It is also found in Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and in the Revelation.

When shall the end come?

Let us return to Matt. 24:14. Here Jesus links two things together—the preaching of the Gospel and the end of the age. The one must be finished before the other comes. The plain implication is, if the Gospel is not preached in all the world as witness to all nations the end will not come. And if Christians do not do it, it will not be done. This is not the work of future Jews. It is the work of the Church now.

It follows that the most important things the Church can do to hasten that day (2 Peter 3:12) is to preach the Gospel throughout the world, especially in un-reached areas. God’s people must become more mis-sion-

ary minded. It is time that every true local Church, and every individual believer awoke to this fact.

Perhaps the Church will finish the task in this generation. Never since the first century has she been nearer the completion of it. Ladd suggests that more has been done in missionary activity and worldwide evangelization in the past century and a half than in all previous centuries put together (except the first).

The printing press, radio, and modern means of travel have all contributed to the success of this vast effort. Previously unreached (and unheard of) tribes have now received the Good News in their own language. The Bible or portions thereof have been translated into 1,200 languages, or dialects. The work continues on many fronts and in many ways.

Yes, God's people in our (Jay could finish the work. If we do not. our failure will be because of indifference and disobedience to the plain commands of our Lord Jesus Christ. His one supreme commission to His church is just this—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". In spite of this, many Christians and many whole churches do practically nothing to promote missions. They do not give, nor go, nor, I fear, hardly pray for the most important thing in the world.

Let us be up and doing. Let us put first things first. Let us pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest fields, and be forward to go ourselves if at all possible. Let us think especially of people in unreached areas that have not heard the sound of Jesus' Name. Let us give our money, our time, our thought, our prayer, our persevering effort to this greatest of all tasks, until "all nations and kindreds and people and tongues" have heard the Gospel of the kingdom, the good tidings of great joy.

Then shall the end come.

7. Light on Christianity

WHAT do the prophets have to say about the state of Christianity at the end of this age? What will be the state of the professing church just before the return of Christ? This is the exceedingly important matter before us in this chapter.

We have seen that the Gospel will be preached throughout the world before the end comes. But we should not thus think that the state of the professing Church in general will be healthy.

What is the church?

First of all, I must define what I mean by “the professing Church”. The word “church”, of course, may be understood in several different ways.

In the New Testament we have references to the Church which is Christ’s Body, and of which He is the Head. Col. 1:18 reads “He is the head of the body, the church”. This Body, the true Church, is made up only and altogether of those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and who are baptized into the one body by the Holy Spirit.

This is how the apostle Paul puts the matter: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Of course his reference there is only to those who have believed the Gospel and not to all men in general.

In Romans he says, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:4, 5).

And in Ephesians 5:30 he wrote, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”.

No unbeliever, no one who is not a partaker of the Holy Spirit, is a member of this one and only true Church. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9).

It is not an organization; it is a spiritual organism. It is not something

men strive to achieve; it is the work of God. If we are not members of this Church which is Christ's Body, it does not matter how many churches we may join. Without this membership all else comes to nothing and we remain lost in our sins. No man, regardless of his position by any ceremony whatever, can bring a person into this Church, The Holy Spirit alone can quicken us and make us members of Christ.

Local churches

In the New Testament the word "church" is also used to designate individual local churches, made up of those who profess to be Christians. In such local churches there is very often (or should we say, always?) a mixture of saved and unsaved. To have an absolutely pure church that excludes from membership all mere professors of Christianity who do not possess Christ is no doubt the ideal. But in practice it is extremely difficult to achieve.

Even the best of the churches established by the apostles had their struggles with those who were guilty of unbelief, heresy, and evil living. This is plain enough from their letters to the churches, and their strong warnings against such matters.

It was with good reason that Paul tried to put the Ephesian elders on their guard. His admonition to them is recorded in Acts 20:29-31, and reads. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears".

If this could happen in one of the best taught churches of the apostles' day, we need not wonder whether it can happen in our day. But the Ephesian elders were not to give up because of evils to come. On the contrary, Paul says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood". As long as he was there he would fight against every evil influence that would corrupt the church. It was their responsibility to do the same.

For local churches are of central importance in God's program of world evangelization.

Other meanings

The word "church" has also come to be used in other ways. Christians now usually refer to the buildings where they meet as churches.

A denomination made up of a lesser or greater number of local churches joined together in a larger organization is also called a church—as we say "The Methodist Church" or "The Church of South India".

Again, the word may refer to all the professing Christians in an area—"The Church in Hyderabad", or "The Church in India".

Lastly, along this same line, the word "Church" is sometimes used in the loosest and broadest possible meaning to indicate all Christians everywhere. This would mean all those in all the local churches in (or out) of all the denominations of the world who profess to believe in Christ or are called by the name Christian. In other words, the worldwide Church, Christendom, Christianity in its widest, meaning, which would include the various branches of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, etc.

Now it is in this last sense that we should ask and answer the question, What will be the final condition of the professing Church in the last days just before the return of Christ?

Think first of those glorious early days of the Church of this age. Pentecost "was the day when the waiting disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit and as a living, holy fellowship began to preach the Gospel to others. How beautiful were these beginnings! How fruitful were their lives! How mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed! How pure was that earliest Church that would not tolerate evil!

We might expect such a Church to go on from strength to strength, to retain its purity and power, to convert the world. But it was not so. As local churches multiplied so did tendencies that spoiled the original high ideal. And even into the older churches crept agents of the evil one to plant the leaven of false doctrine and corrupt practice.

After the departure of the apostles the progress of evil in many church-

es was accelerated. Toward the end of John's life (the last of the apostles to die) already "many anti-christ's" had appeared from among the professing Christians (1 John 2: 18, 19). And Christ had to rebuke sharply five of the seven churches of Asia (Rev., chapters 2 and 3).

It is a sad story indeed how the outward professing Church slowly fell away from the first vision and zeal, became disgustingly lukewarm in many places, and plagued with various heresies.

Still, many held firmly to the faith that had been delivered to them. Thousands suffered even unto death during the series of persecutions that raged under the Roman emperors during the first centuries of the Church.

Important changes

In the fourth century things changed. The Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian and proclaimed Christianity as the state religion. In the eyes of the people it was no longer a mean or dangerous thing to become a Christian. It was profitable. Thousands of baptized heathen were swept into the Church and persecutions ceased—for the state Church at any rate.

The outward Church, which had long been losing its original purity, was now united to the state and married to the world. More and more, as the centuries passed, the clear light of the Gospel was extinguished in the Church. Many of the doctrines of the Bible were replaced by the teachings of men, and the way of salvation by grace through faith alone was obscured. So much so that the Middle Ages in Europe are called "The Dark Ages".

The Reformation of the 16th century was a large step back toward the Bible, back to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. But the Reformation did not stop the progress of apostasy. Rome did not repent of her heresies, and Protestantism itself, before too long, began to be racked with heresies of its own—as is the case in much of Protestantism today. (By heresy I mean teaching contrary to the revealed truth of the Bible.)

What of the end?

But does the Bible have anything to say about the final state of the pro-

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fessing Church? Much. And we shall be looking at certain Scriptures that bear on this question.

First, however, let me remind you of what happened to Israel, God's chosen nation.

The Old Testament, from one point of view, is the tragic story of: the terrible apostasy of that nation. (By apostasy I mean falling away from the revealed body of truth as it is In the Bible, falling away from God Himself.) In spite of the mighty efforts of the pro-phets and teachers of Israel, in spite of the warnings and appeals from God Himself, the nation became fear-fully corrupted. Only a small remnant remained true to God. The people as a whole (professing all the time to be God's people) rejected the Saviour whom God sent to them and nailed Him to the cross. And then went on professing to be God's own. But as a nation they were cast off by God for this whole age.

Now if it happened once, can it not happen again? It is my solemn conviction that it has been happening again, will fully happen again—this time in the church. Consider the following New Testament references.

New Testament prophecies

Jesus said in Matt. 24:12 "Because iniquity [or 'law-lessness'] shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold". Remember the disciples' questions at the begin-ning of the chapter—"What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

In the same chapter He warned, "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" (24: 24). Apparently, then, they shall deceive vast numbers in the Church and out of it who are not of the elect.

The language of Matt. 24:37, 38 and Matt. 17:26-30 indicates that only a small number comparatively will be ready for Christ's return—as it was in the case of the people of Noah's day and Lot's.

In Luke 18:8 Jesus said, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" This is asked in a way that requires a negative answer. That is. He will not, generally speaking, find faith on the

earth. There will no doubt be a remnant, as in all ages, who hold fast to God's truth. But evidently the vast majority of those who profess to do so will not have true faith.

The teaching of the apostles of Christ on this subject was very clear.

Paul's warning

The Thessalonian Christians were troubled about certain matters that related to the second coming of Christ. They feared the Day of the Lord had already come. Paul writes "Let no one in any way deceive you; for the apostasy is to come first, and the man of sin is to be revealed, the son of doom, the adversary, so proudly insolent toward everything called God or worshipped as to seat himself in the temple of God with the acclaim that he himself is God" (2 Thess. 2:3, 4. Berkeley).

According to Paul, before Christ returns there will be the apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist. And the second of these, in some measure, seems dependent on the first.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul is more explicit. "Remember this! There will be difficult times in the last days. For men will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited: they will be insulting, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and irreligious; they will be unkind, merciless, slanderers, violent, and fierce; they will hate the good; they will be treacherous, reckless, and swollen with pride: they will love pleasure rather than God: they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its power. Keep away from these men" (2 Tim 3:1-5, T.E.V.).

It is no surprise that men will be like that. To some extent men have always been like that and it hardly requires a warning if only men of the world are meant.

Paul included the Church—"they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its power", or, as the K.J.V. has it, "Having a form of godliness but rejecting the power thereof". This, of course, was the exact condition of Israel when Christ came the first time. It will also be the state of things in "the last days".

Paul goes on to urge Timothy to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine".

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Why? “For the time will come when men will not listen to true leaching; but will follow their own desires, and will gather for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Such people do not wish to give up religion, They only want to get rid of the humbling and converting Word of God. So they keep their religion, heap to themselves teachers and preachers who preach to please them, and try to silence those who preach the true Gospel. They are tolerant of everything but the plain teaching of the Bible. This, too, was the state of things in Israel before they were finally rejected.

Peter prophesies

The apostle Peter speaks in the same way. He has re-minded believers that in olden days “holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”. He then adds, “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you; the kind that will shrewdly introduce ruinous heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and so bringing on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow along in their shameless ways, on whose account the way of truth will be maligned” (2 Pet. 1:21-2:2, Berkeley).

Here the state of things as it will be in Christendom is compared with the state of things as it was in Israel. Just as they had false prophets who misled the people, so shall Christendom. And just as many of them believed the lies of their prophets so shall many in the professing Church “follow along in their shameless ways”.

These are some of the principal references in the letters of the apostles concerning the progress of evil in the professing Church. Some may be tempted to say that it has all happened long ago. Thus, it has, to some extent. But it is still happening. And will go on ,so until the final development of the professing Church is reached.

Revelation 17

There remains a very important passage in the book of the Revelation which we must now consider. It is the first six verses of chapter 17.

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, and I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon the waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.’ 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; 5 and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations,’ 6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”.

Let us try to understand just who or what this “great harlot” is. She is not Babylon for her name is a “mystery”. It has a secret or symbolic meaning. It would be very difficult to understand these 6 verses if they stood alone. Speculations as to their meaning would be endless. But very fortunately for us, the angel who showed John the vision also explained certain features of it in plain language.

In verse 7 the angel says, “I will tell you the mystery of the woman”.

Let us humble ourselves like little children, cast aside our own speculations, and receive the angel’s explanation. Then we shall understand who the woman is. We are not to guess about her identity. We are to receive the divine unfolding of the mystery. There are many symbols in the Revelation, but there are also explanations of symbols. And these we dare not ignore.

The mystery partly explained

“I WILL TELL YOU THE MYSTERY OF THE WOMAN”. The angel makes several statements that are intended to identify the great harlot beyond doubt. If we accept the statements the matter is settled.

First, the angel says, “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits”—verse 9- In John’s day, when this explanation was given, the city of Rome was known the world over as the city on seven hills or

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mountains.

The Romans oven celebrated a national festival which they called “Septimonium”—the Festival of the Seven Mounts.

The poets and writers of ancient Rome (such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, etc.) frequently referred to Rome as the city seated, on seven mountains.

Moreover, the coins of that period bear witness to the same thing. “On the Imperial Medals of that age, which are still preserved, we see Rome figured as a woman on seven hills, precisely as she is represented in the Apocalypse” (Bishop Wordsworth).

So the first explanatory statement points to Rome.

So does the second statement. “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues”—verse 15. The woman then exerted a very widespread influence on the peoples and nations of earth. She actually sat “upon many waters”. This indicated her supreme position. When the angel spoke these words it could only mean the city of Rome.

This is made even more evident by verse 18—”The woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth”. The angel used the present tense in declaring to John the supremacy of the city. If the explanation was to have any value at all to him (or to us) the city referred to had to be Rome. Not literal Babylon but Rome. She alone could be “that great city” that ruled “the kings of the earth”. Many were the nations and kingdoms in subjection to her at that time, including John’s own nation Palestine.

The language here is so plain that it was the unani-mous opinion of the early church fathers, who mention the matter at all, that Rome was intended. If it did not mean Rome to John it could not mean anything. If it was not Rome it could be any city on earth, or no city at all. Yet the word of the angel was, I will tell you the mystery.

Moreover, the angel in his explanation connects this woman with the beast which had seven heads and ten horns (verses 7 and 16). The beast carries the woman at first but later destroys her. So they are closely-linked but. not identical.

We have already seen that the beast is the final form of the Roman Em-

pire. It is at the end of the age when the ten horns shall hate the harlot and burn her with fire. The point is this: the woman is Rome, but not merely the Rome of John's day. She is Rome as she will appear in the last days of this age.

So much may we learn about this great harlot from the words of the angel.

Roman mystery

Now let us return to the vision John saw and recorded in the first G verses. There we have further state-ments that help us understand what is meant by Mys-tery Babylon, And I must speak plainly about them. I do not wish to offend anyone unnecessarily. But if the truth offends I cannot help it. I dare not hide what I am convinced is the truth, but I trust I speak it out of love for the souls of men. Search the Scrip-tures to see if the things I say are so. And let us pray a] ways that God would enlighten us with His Word.

We have seen that the harlot is Rome as that city finally appears. But the question arises. What is meant by the city of Rome? Are we to understand only the literal city of houses and streets and office buildings built on the seven hills? Obviously much more than that is here described.

A city may represent the whole nation of which it is a part. We may say "New Delhi" when we mean India. For as the capital of this land it is the represen-tative city. We hear "Washington says" when the whole government of the United States is meant.

A city may also be the symbol of a system of thought or religion. Thus ancient Athens is always associated with the great age of Greek philosophy, and present-day Mecca with Islam.

In these dark times as we near the end of the age when Mystery Babylon will be destroyed what does the name "Rome" suggest to our minds? What is the one thing, far above all else, that Rome represents, and has represented for centuries?

The answer is evident. Rome stands, above all, for the Roman Catholic Church. She is the centre of that vast religious system that claims so many adherents around the world.

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Earlier in this chapter we have briefly noted the apostasy of the nation Israel. We have also seen certain Scriptures that predict a similar result in Christendom. Here in Revelation 17:1-6 I am convinced we have the final picture of that terrible apostasy, headed up by the Roman Church.

Let us examine in more detail the description given us and see if this interpretation rests on a solid foundation.

The great harlot

The woman is called the great harlot. It could be translated “the harlot, the great one”. She is the greatest of all the whores and prostitutes who ever sold themselves for gain. She is the most seductive, the most successful. She is the supreme example of harlotry.

What is the significance of calling Rome the great harlot? In what sense has Rome, more than any city on earth, played the harlot?

The nation Israel, we repeat, was an example of apostasy. The whole nation, except for a small remnant, departed from the true God. In Jeremiah Israel is described” as the “wife” of the Lord. “Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord”; “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you” (Jer. 3:20:14), The prophet Hosea wrote in a similar fashion.

Yet the nation Israel became both an adulteress and a harlot. In the 3rd chapter of Jeremiah she is called a whore and a harlot four times. In Ezekiel 16 the words harlot, whore, whoredoms, etc. are used in relation to Israel 17 times and the words fornication and adultery 4 more! In Ezekiel 23 the words are used 25 times! Let all of us read and reread these chapters until something of God’s viewpoint takes possession of us. Let us try to understand the message of the prophets, these holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

To turn from God to other objects of worship, or to the pleasures or wealth of the world is whoredom. Backsliding and perverting the good way is spiritual adultery (Jer. 3:9, 21). “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4).

Apostasy

In one word, harlotry or whoredom is apostasy. It is forsaking God's truth, or perverting God's way, or leaving God Himself. It does not matter who is guilty, whether Israel, or Roman Catholicism, or Protestant-ism. There is no nicer name for it. The fact is too fearful for gentle words.

Hear God Himself cry out to this fallen nation— "Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord: thus saith the Lord God; because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whore-doms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; behold, ... I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy" (see Ez. 16:35ff).

If it is fitting to call an apostate nation a harlot, it is fitting, yea. more fitting, to call an apostate Church a harlot. It is not that we wish to do so. We are compelled to do so. For the sake of the truth and the salvation of men we must speak out. We do not speak out of hatred for Rome or because we delight in attacking that Church or any Church. God forbid. It is possible to speak the harshest truth with great love and longing for those about whom we speak. Certainly the prophets and apostles did so. I number some Roman Catholics among my friends. I have no desire to grieve them. It grieves me to think that some of them might be grieved by what I say here. But to hide the truth is no kindness to them or anyone.

So here in Revelation we have:

The Fact—APOSTASY

The Place—ROME

The Time—THE END OF THE AGE.

Roman apostasy

This means that the greatest of all apostasies was to be connected with that city and that it would go on. until the harlot is destroyed at the age's end.

Even if we knew very little of the history and doctrines of the Roman Church, simply by reading the Scriptures, we might well come to this conclusion. But those who have studied Rome's career in the light of the Bible

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have no reason to doubt.

This becomes even clearer when we compare that apostate Church with the statements made about Mystery Babylon,

“With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication” (17:2) is an exact description of that which has taken place between Rome and the rulers of many nations through the centuries. The Roman Church has always been involved in politics up to her neck, and not infrequently, as history shows, she has sold her favors to the highest bidder.

“And with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk”. Her actions have thrown large numbers of people into a religious daze. They have imbibed her spirit and now can discern neither her character, nor themselves, nor the truth.

Further descriptions

“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet” (17: 4). It is well known that these are the colours worn by the cardinals of the Roman Church. We are told that the woman is dressed in purple and scarlet for purposes of identification. It is one of the marks that enables us to recognize her. And the Roman Church wears the mark.

“And bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup” (17:4). This speaks of wealth and the promise of pleasure. It also suggests seduction and enticement. God said to the harlot nation of Israel “You bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments. And together you sat on a stately divan, with a table spread before you on which you had placed My incense and My oil” (Ez. 23:40, 41—Berkeley). Pomp and pageantry, wealth and beauty, these attract many of the unwary.

The wealth of the Roman Church is almost beyond estimate. It has been well said that this Church is a huge money-gathering institution, and that everything has a price tag on it. Rome owns banks and businesses, stocks and securities, museums and giant cathedrals, and great treasures of art. She is immensely wealthy, decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. Quite in contrast to Peter whom they mistakenly claim as the first pope. “Silver and gold have I none”, said that humble, Spirit filled man of

God.

“On her forehead was written a name of mystery”. A mystery, still it is written on her forehead, and thus visible to all whose eyes are opened. But why is she called Babylon if Rome is meant? For the same reason that Jerusalem is called Sodom and Gomorrah in Isaiah 1:10. Jerusalem had taken on the character of those vile cities. Rome has taken on the character of Baby-*lon*, with its blasphemous religious pretensions and pride (Gen. 11:1-9; Jer. 50:38; 51:7).

Rome’s children

“Mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations” (17: 5). If there is a mother there are offspring. Rome does not stand alone. Harlot children are near. Rome’s perversion of the truth has had a profound effect, I doubt not, on all the nations of earth. But the idea of daughters suggests other Churches that forsake the right way and go into apostasy—and perhaps into union with the mother.

Roman drink.

“And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6). History reveals the Roman Catholic Church as the greatest of all persecutors of the true children of God. Some of the deeds committed by her are almost un-believable, but they are also undeniable.

Sir Robert Anderson, former head of London’s famed detective bureau, Scotland Yard, estimated that she has slaughtered 50,000,000 (5 crores) people through the centuries, And many of her victims, tortured and burned, or murdered, have been the finest, holiest Christians their age produced. This, too, was the work of adulterous Israel (Ez. 16:36; 23:37). If these things have mostly ceased now I must admit I believe it is more because of the changing character of the times than the changing character of Rome.

Perversion of truth

Some may hesitate to call Rome an apostate Church. But if she is not

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apostate then surely there was never any such thing as apostasy on the face of the earth. Many of her doctrines are not merely absent from the Bible—they are utterly contrary to the Bible. The money-making invention of Purgatory, the idea of a select priesthood in the New Testament Church, the teaching of baptismal regeneration, the so-called sacraments of Penance, Confirmation, and Extreme Unc-tion, the blasphemous sacrifice of the Mass, the enormous exaltation of Mary, the infallibility of the Pope, the veneration of saints, and many other doctrines and practices are all opposed to the clear teachings of the Bible.

Above all, Rome has perverted the Gospel of the grace of God. She has devised a plan of salvation that depends ultimately on ceremonies, self-effort, and the favour of the Church. It is not enough that she still holds to certain basic doctrines of the Bible. Israel also did so in the blackest days of her history when she put to death God's Son. And what good is it to hold some truth if it is so mixed with error that the result is a false way of salvation, and brings us into opposition to God Himself?

For the salvation of men nothing is so important as truth. The Gospel of the grace of God is too eternally important to allow it to be perverted without raising our voice. It was because the Gospel was in danger in Galatia that Paul spoke so passionately in his letter to them. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9, R.S.V.).

Terrible, terrible words

It is hard for some to believe that Paul could have spoken these words in love. But there is no doubt at all that he uttered them in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with a heart aflame with love for the Gospel of Christ, and for people led astray by false teaching. In these days many are

tolerant of everything—but the truth. They are not uncomfortable in the presence of false teachers, are not alarmed when heresy is preached.

The apostles and prophets were the opposite. They could be tolerant of everything—but falsity and evil.

Do not misunderstand what I have been saying as I have tried to teach the truth of Revelation 17. I am not speaking against individual Roman Catholics or Protestants. No. We are to love all men and earnestly desire their salvation. I have been speaking about a religious organization that through the centuries has terribly perverted the truth. And such systems (and yes, alas, men who propagate such systems) bring themselves under the curse and judgment of God. This is the word of the inspired apostle, twice repeated for emphasis.

I am also not saying that there are none at all true to God in this apostate Church. Even in one of Israel's darkest hours there were 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. I have only been trying to show the true character of this religious system.

Coming destruction

This system is going to be destroyed because it has perverted the Gospel of God.

“And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will . . .” (17:16, 17).

Babylon, this confusion of a religious system, will fall. Its judgment will be the same as the harlot Israel's: “They shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more” (Ez. 16:40, 41).

Some Protestants hope and believe that Rome will change. They point to the new atmosphere in that ancient system as being evidence of a fundamental change going on right now. Changes there are. No one can deny that. And all of us should be filled with joy if Rome radically repented and

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turned whole-heartedly back to the Word of God. But if Rome changed fundamentally she would cease to be Rome. She would have to deny herself and fall before God in sackcloth and ashes. This is perhaps not impossible, but it is very improbable. Especially since we see her judgment already written in the Word of God. Just as surely as Israel's pre-written judgments came on that people, so I believe Rome's judgment will come upon her.

The woman in Rev. 17 is a harlot riding high for a time and at last destroyed.

But is judgment to come only on the Roman Church? Will others in Christendom who fall into apostasy altogether escape? It is not reasonable to think so. For some of the daughters of Rome have been as bad as their mother in some ways, even worse in others ways. At least Rome has not denied the inspiration of the Bible and the deity of Christ as many Protestant preachers have done.

No Church and no people who pervert the Gospel shall escape.

Today

We live in a day when a momentous thing is taking place. That is the movement to unite all the various branches of Christianity into one huge, world-wide Church, one giant organization. I believe in and practice co-operation and fellowship across denominational lines with those who try to walk according to the Scriptures and love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. I believe God's own dear children in Christ should be tolerant and loving toward one another. But this is a different matter altogether.

Perhaps the ecumenical movement will fully succeed. Perhaps the so-called Mother Church of Rome and those daughters who wish to return to her will eventually dwell harmoniously together under one roof. Perhaps they will merely co-operate closely while maintaining separate residences. Time will tell, but we are going to hear more and more of the ecumenical movement.

Surely, in the light of prophecy, the condition of Christianity in our day is very significant. Many people are being led astray by the prophets

of the ecumenical Church. But this is just what we might expect from a study of the New Testament.

As in Israel long ago so now “many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness”; “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so” (Jer. 12: 10; 5:31).

And does not God cry against such now as then— “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed’ the flocks?” (Ez. 34:2).

“Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord” (Jer. 23:1).

People of God, awake! In our day we dare not be guilty of sleepy compromise. We dare not keep silent while all Christendom rushes to its ruin. We dare not be indifferent to the plain truth of the Word of God.

Jesus is coming. We must stand before Him and give an account. Now, then, in the time that remains, let us love the truth of God, and preach it, and live it, and stand for it regardless of the cost, and die for it if need be.

We have, I believe, accomplished what we set out to do at the beginning of this chapter. We have answered the question, what will be the state of the professing Church just before the return of Christ?

May every one of us fearlessly apply this truth of the Scriptures to his own situation, for the glory of God and the salvation of men.

8. Living in the light of prophecy

WE have finished our study. We have looked at those conditions of our day which I consider most clear and important as possible signs of Christ's soon coming. Each has its individual significance. Each is developing more or less as the Bible would lead us to expect.

The situation in Israel, in Jerusalem, and in Western Asia in general seems almost taken right from the pages of Scripture—except, perhaps, for the building of the temple which is not yet begun.

The enemies of Israel, both near at hand and to the far north, Russia and her allies, seem ready for the final conflict. At any time the storm over Israel, already thick with threatening clouds, could break in all its fury. It is true that Persia is not at present in the communist camp; nor is Cush, Put, and Gomer (depending on where we place Gomer). But to fulfil prophecy it may not be necessary for the Muslim nations who will be linked to the U.S.S.R. to go communist. Their close alliance may develop out of hatred for Israel and not out of love for communism.

The present condition of Europe is perhaps more doubtful. Certainly the statesmen of various European countries have been talking unity for a long time. There have been various obstacles to unity through the years. But it is certainly possible that before too long these obstacles will be overcome, and the old dream of a United States of Europe become a reality. Certainly there is already much closer co-operation than in centuries gone by. The Common Market and NATO are realities—however strained the realities may appear now and again. And when God's time is fully come these European nations can quickly go all the way and fulfil the picture as it appears in the Bible.

Complete world evangelization is closer than in any previous century of the Church. We cannot define exactly perhaps what our Lord may mean by "nations" in Matt. 24:14. Nor do we know just how intensively the Gospel must be preached to every nation. God alone can be the judge

of when the task is finished. But the work goes on in every corner of the globe and it is not improbable that the Gospel will be preached to all nations in our generation.

The apostasy is not something we must await. It is a terrible reality here and now. Quite apart from Rome, Satanic attacks on the Bible, denial of every basic doctrine of the faith, and even atheism, or the in-sane teaching that God is dead, are permitted in Pro-testant denominations without official rebuke. Official rebuke? Often enough it is the officials themselves who are guilty, fs the picture complete? Some fee) that a world church must be formed which will in-clude Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, before the final judgment falls on apostate Christianity. Certainly there is going to be more and closer co-operation but I am not quite sure there has to be actual union of all these churches. But even complete union is not an impossibility in our lifetime.

Rise of the east

Besides these we have previously discussed at length we should perhaps mention one more developing situation in the world that seems significant. I refer to the rise of the Orient. We cannot forget that Zechariah and others prophesied that all nations would come into Palestine at the end of the age. One would think that in that broad term "all nations" huge coun-tries like India and China at least would be included. And Japan with her vast potential, and other Eastern countries. Scripture is silent on this except for one verse in the 16th chapter of the Revelation. Verse 12 says, "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared". Whatever literal or symbolic meaning the reference to the waters of the Euphrates may have, one thing at least seems clear enough. The armies of the countries of the East (we know not which) will be coming to the battle of the great day of God Almighty, to Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-16). Is it not significant that in our generation these great nations of Asia have broken free from foreign domina-tion and risen to be powers to be reckoned with in the world?

All at the same time

Considering all these matters of prophecy we see it is not just one out of several developing all alone. All these are developing together. Conditions in Israel, in Jerusalem, in Russia and her allies, in world evangelization, in Christianity are remarkably like the prophets foretold, and to some extent in Europe and the East as well. And, as far as I can see, there is no major prophesied condition that is not developing in our day.

The fact that all these things are appearing at the same time may be the most extraordinary thing about it all. Other centuries have witnessed one or more significant situations in the world. Each generation has had its own reasons for believing that the end was at hand. But no generation in the Church's history has had so many reasons as ours to think so.

Ready for anything

I make no predictions. Jesus may come today. It is conceivable that He may not appear for a number of years. I believe personally it is quite possible that the true people of God will face a time of great persecution and trouble before Christ comes to take them to Himself. I think we should be prepared for that and should prepare others for it. If we are removed from the earth before the Great Tribulation Jesus referred to in Matt. 24 it will no doubt be a cause of rejoicing. If we are not we should not be dismayed. Many reasons and arguments have been offered on each side of this question which we cannot consider now. I think the important thing is to have a proper attitude of heart toward Jesus Christ and to be actively engaged in His service. Then we may face the future—any future—with confidence. Let us, then, walk in the light as children of the light; let us watch carefully events taking place in the world; let us patiently wait for our Lord from heaven; let us be ready for anything.

Yes, Jesus Christ is coming again in power and great glory. He is coming to punish the wicked for their iniquity and to reward His true servants. He is coming to reign. And His coming may be at the very doors.

The important question now

All this we have seen. But an important matter remains for our consid-

eration before we take leave of this subject. It is a question that must be answered by each of us, for it has eternal consequences. The question is, What are we going to do in the light of all this? What effect is the truth of Christ's coming going to have in our life here and now?

First of all, such truth should stir us up to examine the very foundations of our life. As for me, I would not wish to be without Christ in times like these. I found long ago that a satisfying aim in this world, and a true and living hope that reaches beyond this world to the next are found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. I urge any of you who may not have Him as Saviour and Lord to turn to Him with your whole heart. There is satisfaction and purpose and peace in Christ that cannot be found in all the vain pleasures or pursuits of this world. More than this, He is the only giver of eternal life.

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). Jesus Himself promised, “He that believeth on me hath ever-lasting life” (John 6:47). And again He said, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John. 17:3).

Remember, there is no hope in mere religion. Ceremonies, and self-effort, and churches, and human merit are all worthless to save the soul. Christ must save and Christ alone. And He will save now anyone who puts his trust in Him.

But the day of opportunity will not go on forever. In the words of the apostle Paul (terrible words! but none the less true for that), when Christ comes He shall “be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God. and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

And we who do know God and who have obeyed the Gospel, how should we live in the light of prophecy?

We saw in the opening chapter how prophecy is joined in the Word of God with holiness of life and watchfulness and faithfulness and patience and devoted service.

Work to be done

We are not to stand idly gazing into heaven as the apostles once did (Acts 1:11). We are not to be so occupied with trying to understand times and seasons that we forget the principal business in hand. In any case, we cannot know these times and seasons with absolute certainty. But we can receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. We can be witnesses to Christ to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). This was the last thing Jesus spoke to His disciples and this is the thing that should occupy us most of all. If the study of prophecy does not help us to this end, does not make us better Christians and better witnesses then it is worse than useless. There is work to be done, urgent work, and we dare not fritter away our time with idle speculations.

Our present obligation is perhaps best set forth in a parable our Lord Jesus once taught His disciples. It is found in Luke 19:12-27, and was given because the disciples mistakenly thought that He would immediately set up His kingdom when He reached Jerusalem. In the parable Jesus does not deny that He will set up His kingdom on earth. Quite the contrary. But instead of indicating the exact time when the kingdom should appear He emphasizes the task of the disciples while they are waiting.

This quotation is from the translation by Charles B. Williams.

12 So He said:

“Once upon a time a man of noble birth went off to a distant country to get for himself a kingdom and then return. 13 He called in ten of his slaves and gave them twenty dollars apiece and told them to do business with his money while he was gone. 14 But his citizens continued to hate him. and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We do not want this man to become king over us,’ 15 Then after he had gotten the appointment as king, he returned and ordered those slaves to whom he had given his money to be called in, that he might find out what business they had done. 16 Now the first one came in and said, ‘Your twenty dollars, sir, has made two hundred more.’ 17 So he said to him, ‘Well done, my good slave! because you have proved dependable in a very small business, be governor of ten cities!’ 18 The second one came in and said, ‘Your twenty dollars, sir, has

made a hundred!’ 19 So he said to him too, ‘Be governor of five cities!’ 20 But another one came in and said, ‘Here is your twenty dollars, sir, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief. 21 For I lived in constant dread of you, because you are a stern man, you pick up what you did not put down, you reap what you did not sow.’ 22 He said to him, ‘On the ground of what you say I will sentence you, you wicked slave! You knew that I was a stern man, that I picked up what I did not put down, and reaped what I did not sow. 23 So why did you not put my money into the bank? In that case, when I came back I could have gotten interest on my principal.’ 24 So he said to the bystanders, ‘Take the twenty dollars away from him and give it to the man who has the two hundred.’ 25 And they said, ‘Sir, he has two hundred already.’ 26 ‘I tell you, the man who gets will have more given to him, but the man who does not get will have even what he has taken away from, him!’ 27 But bring those enemies of mine here who did not want me to become king over them and slay them in my presence!’”

This parable should be compared with the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). There the teaching is that equal faithfulness will receive equal commendation and reward even when there is considerable difference in abilities and opportunities. Here the teaching is that in those things which are the same greater labour and faithfulness will receive greater reward.

In this parable the nobleman is, of course, none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Abraham and Son of David, the royal Man who has every right to the kingdom.

Servants, faithful and otherwise

The ten slaves represent those who profess at least to be in Christ’s service. Broadly speaking there are only two classes of people in the parable—those who reject the rights of the nobleman and those who claim to belong to him.

The amount given to them represents those things in which all the professed servants of Christ are equal. Actually it was a very small amount as the nobleman himself stated in verse 17. A hundred or a hundred and fifty rupees. They could not do business on a vast scale with that. And in the small business they might establish, if they fail he will not be bankrupt; if

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they succeed he will not become rich. But oh the difference to them!

Compared to all that is, no servant of Christ has very much of anything. Even the greatest are poor and weak. But all of us are being tested, not with what we do not have, but with what we do have.

The nobleman at last received the kingdom and returned to settle his accounts. He dealt first with his servants and then with those citizens who hated him.

There was a great difference in the way his slaves did business with his money.

The first did remarkably well. It was no small achievement to gain ten times the amount he had been given. He labored hard and faithfully and his master recognized it, "Well done, my good slave! Because you have proved dependable in a very small business, be governor of ten cities!" Observe how the reward was out of all proportion to the service rendered. So will it be, I doubt not, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second slave did not do so well, and he did not receive the full commendation of his lord. He did not say to him "Well done, my good slave!" And I do not think this is implied in the text. After all, he only did half as well as the first one with exactly the same resources. His service was half good—and that means it was also half poor. His reward, too, was only half as much. But still a tremendous thing!

This is certainly the way with the servants of Christ in this age. Often those with meagre abilities accomplish a great deal simply because they work so hard. Others do not but half as much, though everything else may be equal. Well, their rewards will be but half. We will certainly not be commended and rewarded for something we have not done.

The third servant came trembling before his master stammering out his excuses for not doing as he was told. "Here is your twenty dollars, sir, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief".

Who told him to lay the money away in a handkerchief?

His master gave him one order—"Do business with this till I come". If he did not do the one thing he was commanded what on earth was he doing all that time? One of two things, or, from time to time, both. He

either sat in the house doing nothing, or he went about his own business without a thought for his master's.

He said that he feared this nobleman. He did not. If anything he probably feared work. He feared work. If he had really had a healthy fear of his master he would have done as he was told. He might indeed have had a dread of somehow losing the money and being punished. For he completely misunderstood the character of his lord. He did not comprehend that it was better to risk everything and even to lose it all than to do nothing. And that if he had lost everything in his attempts at obedience his master would have been merciful and forgiving. But being ignorant he sank into slothfulness and idleness and indifference, mixed with a certain fearful looking for of judgment.

Disobedience is wickedness

Is his case not the same as the servant in the parable of the talents who hid his talent in the earth? His lord said to him, "Thou wicked and slothful servant" (Matt. 25:26).

Jesus would teach us that to be lazy, careless, and disobedient in the things of God is sheer wickedness. To do one's own will even when there seems to be good reason for it, instead of following the instructions of our Lord, is the very essence of sin. To fail to do the one thing commanded is to fail in everything. It does not matter what else we may do if we do not do what we are plainly told.

Both the servant in that parable and the one in this lost everything. They lost everything because they tried to save it. And this is in perfect agreement with another statement of Christ—"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35).

The fate of rebels

After reckoning with his servants the nobleman turned his attention to those who hated him and would not have him to reign over them. "Slay them in my presence!" was his command.

It will not go well in the time of Christ's coming for those who have re-

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fused to let Jesus Christ rule their lives. It is neither wise nor safe to reject Him as Lord and Saviour. For this is to rise in rebellion against God Himself and His appointed Ruler. It is treason and lawlessness. Those guilty should not, and will not go unpunished. God's justice and yes. His love, will be expressed at last in putting down revolt and cleansing the world of sin and sinners. The person who says either by lip or by life "We will not have this Man to reign over us" is showing enmity against the king of glory and is on exceedingly dangerous ground.

Solemn truths

There are solemn spiritual principles in this parable that all the servants of God would do well to learn.

All the professed servants of Christ in this world are now being tested. Character is being revealed and formed. The test is this: what will we do with the comparatively small resources given us? Obey our Lord and work hard in business for Him? Or will we do nothing for His sake and the Gospel's in spite of professing to be His servants? Will we be honest and faithful? Or lazy and disobedient? In very small matters will we prove ourselves good, dependable ser-vants, or wicked, slothful servants?

He who is not faithful in small things is not faithful at all. Consider the words of our Lord Jesus in Luke 16:10, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much". Character is revealed in trifles. The man who would tell a small lie would tell a huge one if he thought he could bring it off. The man who would steal a dollar would steal a million if he thought he would not be caught. The man unjust in the smallest matters would be unjust in everything if he dared. The man who would deceive his wife would deceive the whole world if he had opportunity and motive. On the other hand, the person who is honest and dependable in the small things is proving himself ready for greater ones. We show in tiny things whether we are fit for anything larger.

There is no acceptable excuse for not doing the one thing commanded by our Lord. We may possibly come up with excuses if we try and fail. We

certainly can have none at all for not trying. And what is that one thing commanded? With the servants in the parable it was a matter of money and trading. With us it is something more. No doubt this too, in a way, is included. Certainly faithfulness and honesty in business dealings are very important. A great many Christians have endangered their whole usefulness because of failure here. Many have sinned against God and their fellow men in matters of money. But we have a larger, more urgent command that relates to our occupation in life as Christians. Our business is to be in the eternal things of the Gospel.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luke 24:47).

“As my Father hath sent me even so send I you” (John 20:21).

“Ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

These are the last orders of Jesus the Lord to His servants. This is His principal business in this age.

And if we are not obedient in this we simply are not obedient. If we do not try to fulfil our responsibilities in the work of the Gospel I fear it shall be revealed at last that we are wicked, slothful servants. It is not enough to be kind and just in our relations to others, moral in our personal lives, punctual at Church services. We may be all that, and much more, and still miss the chief thing. And if we fail in the chief thing our loss will be great indeed.

The ‘faithful servants of God are now being prepared for future service. The rewards given to the servants in the parable speak of a future service of glory, of spiritual responsibilities and privileges and opportunities in the age to come. They surely represent something real and extremely wonderful and valuable whatever the fulfilment may prove to be. Something worth our best thought and greatest effort. We are just serving our apprenticeship now. In many ways we are ignorant and fumbling. Only

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let us be faithful and we shall be elevated to far higher duties. It is written, “His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads . . . and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev, 22:3-5).

Let it be repeated again, Jesus is coming. “Behold”, He says, “I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:121).

John the beloved disciple in the 28th verse of the 2nd chapter of his first epistle has given us the words with which we will close these thoughts:

“And now, little children, abide in him: that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming”.

Appendix Israel's conversion

The nation Israel shall turn to the Lord at the end of the age. The following quotation is one among many that teaches this:

25 "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; 26 and so all Israel shall be saved; even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 And this is my covenant unto them, When I shall take away their sins. 28 As touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. 30 For as ye in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, 31 even so have these also now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they also may now obtain mercy. 32 For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all" (Romans 11:25-32, R.V.).

The theme of Romans is the Gospel of Christ. In this letter, more than in any other. Paul shows the necessity of the Gospel, the meaning of the Gospel, and the effects of the Gospel when believed. He insists that all, Jew and Gentile alike, are under sin (3:9, 23). He shows that God will judge all men, both Jew and Gentile (ch. 2). He proclaims the fact that no one, Jew or non-Jew, can be saved in any way other than faith (3:30).

The Gospel is the great leveler. All men are lost and must be saved in the same way, and there is no difference (10:12). In Christ's Church "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 2ft).

All this is true.

But apart from salvation in Christ, it would be a big mistake to think there are no differences between male and female.

Just so, it would be a big mistake to think there are no differences between the nation Israel and the Gentiles. Paul never confuses the Jews

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with other people. In a number of references he recognizes the distinct existence of Israel as a nation. He never forgets that the Old Testament Scriptures are theirs.

He asks the questions, “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there in circumcision?”, and answers, “Much every way” (3:1, 2). If Romans had been only eight chapters in length we could not perhaps have understood what he meant by the Jew having much advantage. For there is no advantage in being grouped together with the non-Jew. And certainly no advantage in being rejected by God as a people.

But God inspired Paul to take up this matter more thoroughly in chapters 9, 10, 11.

The meaning of Israel

He begins with an expression of great longing for the salvation of Israel. And he defines very carefully what he means by Israel.

“My brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israelites” (9:3, 4). He has great sorrow and unceasing grief for them because of their lost condition without Christ. He does not speak of Israelites in the Church (and there were some, of course), but the lost race outside the Church.

He goes on to show what belongs to the Jews as a people, these relatives according to the flesh.

To them belongs “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises”. And “the fathers” are theirs, and even Christ, according to His human nature, came from the Jews (9:4, 5).

Observe closely what he says. The covenants and the promises (of the Old Testament) still belong to the Jews, his kinsmen by race. The Church of this age must not try to take away from the Jews the promises given them by God.

Just here is the problem. Israel rejected Christ, and the kingdom was taken from them and given to a people who would produce the fruit of it (Matt. 21:43)— the people of God in this age.

What, then, becomes of the promises and covenants made to the Jews?

Will they remain unfulfilled? Will they be spiritually but not literally fulfilled in the Church? Will Israel be cast away forever?

Paul's answer in these three chapters is this: The promises made to Israel will be fulfilled to Israel. For they still belong to Israel by race. But they cannot be finally fulfilled until the race turns to God and believes in Christ.

In 9:6 he draws a distinction between fleshly Israel and spiritual Israel, "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel". The real Israel was within the outward nation of Israel. Both were the natural descendants of Abraham, but some were believers and some unbelievers.

New Israel?

The Church of this age, composed mostly of Gentiles, is nowhere called the "New Israel" or "spiritual Israel". There are similarities in some respects between Israel of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament. For there will be certain features of the kingdom of God that will remain constant in every age. But to say they have some similarities is not to say that they are the same. To recognize that certain Scriptures could apply equally well to both is not to admit that all Scriptures apply equally well to both.

The Church is not Israel and Israel is not the Church. Even to say the Church was in Israel in the Old Testament, as Israelites are in the Church of the New Testament, is not to say the two are identical. For, in such case, Israel was more than the Church then, just as the Church is more than its believing Israelites now.

To say Israel and the Church are the same is to confuse what the Bible keeps distinct. And if we confuse these two we will not only have difficulty with Romans 9-11 but with many other Scriptures as well.

When Paul uses the words "Israel" or "Jacob" he always means those of the race descended from Abraham. This is strong evidence that in the Old Testament he took the words in the same way.

Paul's point in 9:6 is this: Among the natural descendants of Abraham some were individually chosen by God. They responded to His call and believed His word. They were the true Israel, the kind of people to whom

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God could fulfil the promises. This is the same truth taught in 2:25-29.

The Jews made the tragic mistake of thinking that because they were the natural children of Abraham they were also the children of God. Not so, says Paul. There was always a remnant of true Israelites in the nation of Israel, the elect of God, and only these could enjoy the blessings of salvation. The bulk of the nation rebelled against God and scorned His Word.

It is for this disobedient nation that Paul prays with such fervour (10:1). Their zeal was evident, but it was false and blinded zeal. It led them to reject God's righteousness in Christ and to try to establish their own. So there is no hope for the nation as it is. It must be changed.

Romans 11

Paul reaches the height of his argument in chapter 11. The promises and covenants belong to Israel alter the flesh, but they can never be fulfilled until the nation is converted. Disobedient, unbelieving Israel cannot enter into God's promised blessings. Natural Israel must become spiritual Israel. The nation that rejected Christ must receive Him. Then all the promises, and other advantages Paul lists in 9:4, 5 can be fulfilled.

One great question answered

The whole chapter is an answer to the question asked. in verse one, "Hath God cast away his people?". The answer is briefly stated in verse 2 "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew". God chose them and knew them of all the nations of earth (Deut. 7:6; Amos 3:2).

The question is provoked by the contents of the preceding verse, a quotation from Isaiah 65: 2, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people".

So the question is, Has God cast away this disobedient and contrary nation of Israel? Notice Paul says they are still "His" people.

The answer comes quickly, "God forbid", Paul says, and adds, "I also am an Israelite". He means by this, he. is "of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin". Here and everywhere he holds to his original meaning of Israel, "according to the flesh"; that is, members of the race.

His meaning here is this: Israel's rejection is only partial even now, Just

as in former centuries so “at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (11:5). Paul was one of this remnant. He himself had been a striking example of a “disobedient and contrary” person.

But apart from the remnant, Israel was blinded and stumbled in the way. This was in perfect agreement with their own Scriptures (11:7-10). The Word of God which they despised was fulfilled in them.

Then Paul asks, “Have they stumbled that they should fall? In other words, did they fall completely never to rise again? “God forbid”. God actually had a gracious purpose in this stumbling. Because they sinned and rejected Christ, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Their fall resulted in the riches of the world (verses 11, 12).

Paul does not stop to explain just how this was, but hurries on to the pointed question—if so much blessing to the world resulted from their fall, what wonders might not be expected by their fulness? Or, as the NASB has it, if “their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!” “For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (verses 12, 15).

If there is so much of God’s blessing among the Gentiles in spite of the fact that the promises to the nation Israel remain unfulfilled, what will it be when those promises are fulfilled (promises like Is. 2:1-5; 11:1-9; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:5-8; Zech. 14:9, 16-21)?

It will be like life from the dead. This may mean that the actual resurrection of the dead awaits the conversion of Israel, as some think. Or it may mean a time of wonderful restoration to the earth, as others believe. Paul had said in 8: 22 “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”. (So the picture given in Is. 11:1-9, etc. is not fulfilled now). But he looked for the day when “creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (8:21, NASB).

The “first fruit” of 11:16 is a reference to Numbers 15:21. The fathers of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are the first fruits of the nation. But, says Paul, “If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump”

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(R.S.V.). In other words, the whole nation is still “holy”, set apart for God’s special pur-poses. Israel has not ceased to be a consecrated nation in God’s eyes, though now terribly fallen.

The olive tree

Paul now gives us the figure of the olive tree. In it he still keeps the ideas of Israel and the Gentiles separate. The “root” of the tree is the same as the first fruit— the fathers of the nation. Especially, perhaps, Abra-ham is in his mind (as in chapter 4). He is the father of Israel according to the flesh, and also the father of all of them that believe whether Jew or Gen-tile. Some have a natural connection with Abraham and some a spiritual connection. It is of no personal benefit to have the one without the other, as we have seen. But if the “root” be holy, so are the “branches” (Israel as a nation).

But now “some” (the vast majority of Jews as a matter of fact) of these branches have been broken off (v. 17). That is, because of unbelief the bulk of the race has only a natural but no spiritual connection with Abraham.

So God has taken the kingdom from them during this age. As a nation, they are fallen, rejected, and excluded. In their place the Gentiles have been graft-ed in. They were from a “wild olive tree” with no connection with Abraham at all. natural or spiritual. But now. through Jesus Christ they are also brought into relationship with Abraham. They are among those who at least profess to be the spiritual descend-ants of that, man of God. Thus the word spoken to Abraham is being fulfilled to some extent now—”In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:11).

Paul then warns these Gentiles (the whole passage-is for them partic-ularly v. 13), Do not boast against, these fallen branches (v. 18). Do not be conceited but have a wholesome fear (v. 20). If God broke Israelite branches from the tree, He may also break off Gentile branches (v. 21).

We should try to be clear in our thinking about Paul’s figure of the olive tree. Calvin in his commen-tary on Romans has a note on this we would do well to consider.

“Paul speaks not here of the special election of in-dividuals, but sets the Gentiles and Jews in opposition the one to the other; and that therefore

the elect are not so much addressed in these words, as those who falsely gloried that they had obtained the place of the Jews: nay, he speaks to the Gentiles generally, and addresses the whole body in common, among whom there were many who were faithful, and those who were members of Christ in name only”.

The olive tree is not the tree of individual salvation. It is not the spiritual Body of Christ. From this, many of us are soundly convinced, there is no breaking off.

In the Old Testament the tree was obviously the whole nation of Israel including both saved and lost. But because of the unbelief of the nation there came a time in the plan of God when He rejected them on the whole and turned to other nations.

Through this age the Gentiles have been the ones who have been receiving God’s special blessing. The Gospel has gone throughout all the Gentile world and vast numbers have been brought into the professing Church, and, of course, large numbers truly saved in Christ.

So the olive tree speaks of God’s outward dealings with nations and peoples. Stifler, in his fine commentary on Romans, has, “The only question considered is from what national sources and in what chronological order and relation God called men to be His own spiritual people”.

The olive tree is the outward sphere of blessing, the line of God’s purposes in the earth. Israel had previously been the centre of that sphere of blessing, and in the direct line of God’s purposes.

George Ladd puts it in these words: “Until the time of the coming of Christ in the flesh, God’s redemptive activity in history had been channelled through the nation Israel and the blessings of the divine rule had been bestowed upon his people” (The Gospel of the Kingdom). Now the Gentiles are at the centre of the sphere of blessing, and in the direct line of His purposes in the world. Now God’s “redemptive activity” is being channelled through the Church made up mostly of Gentiles.

Paul’s reasoning in 11:20-24 is this: If God turned from the Jews to the Gentiles, He may again turn to the Jews. If the kingdom was taken from them it can also be given back to them. (Does not the apostles’ question in Acts 1:6 suggest this exact thing?—“Lord, wilt thou at this time restore

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again the kingdom to Israel?” They were sure, after 40 days instruction in the Old Testament by Jesus Himself, that, the kingdom would be restored to the nation Israel, but they were uncertain about the time of the restoration.)

For if God could graft into the tree branches from a wild olive, can He not graft in again the original branches? If Gentile nations through Christ are brought into the sphere of God’s blessings, cannot Abraham’s own nation be?

“How much more” is Paul’s word in v. 24.

He now lays aside symbols and states the matter plainly in the words we have quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

Gentile conceit

He does not want these Gentile Christians to become wise in their own conceits, or “in their own estimation”. But he fears they will unless they understand that God is not finished with Israel. If they persuade themselves that all the promises made to Israel now belong to the Church, and that the nation Israel is permanently rejected they may think themselves very wise indeed. Paul tries to remove the possibility of this conceit by some clear statements.

“A hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”. That nation, largely hardened now, will not be hardened permanently. There is a time limit to this hardening—“until” the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. That is, until God has brought the full number of Gentiles into the Church; until the last of the “great multitude” of Rev. 7:9 has come in. Or, possibly, until God’s full purpose toward the Gentiles in this age is accomplished. In any case, the fulness of Israel awaits the fulness of the Gentiles.

Paul calls this a mystery—a truth known only by Divine revelation. Now some from Israel are being saved, for the hardening is only partial. Then the nation shall be saved for the hardening is only “until”.

“And so all Israel shall be saved”

He is not saying merely all “spiritual Israel” will be saved during this age. This would require no lengthy argument to establish. Who would dream of denying it? And how would this remove conceit from the Gentiles? It would be like saying, “all who will be saved will be saved”. Moreover, it is Paul’s obvious meaning that this Israel of whom he now speaks will be saved only after the fulness of the Gentils be come in—a time even yet in the future.

The comment of Bishop Handley Moule is to the point here—“It has been held by some interpreters that this points to the Israel of God, the spiritual sons of Abraham . . . but surely it puts violence on words, and on thought, to explain ‘Israel’ in this whole passage mystically. Interpretation becomes an arbitrary work if we may suddenly do so here, where the antithesis of Israel and ‘the Gentiles’ is the very theme of the message. No; we have here the nation, chosen once to a mysterious speciality in the spiritual history of man, chosen with a choice never cancelled, however abeyant. A blessing is in view for the nation: a blessing spiritual, divine, all of grace, quite individual in its action on each member of the nation, but national in the scale of its results” (The Epistle to the Romans).

The suggestion that Israel means the Church cannot bear much examination. All we need to do to show the absurdity of it is to substitute the word “Church” wherever Israel is referred to. It would then read like this: “A hardening in part hath befallen the Church until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all the Church shall be saved”. And verse 28 would read, “As touching the gospel, they of the Church are enemies for your sake; but as touching the election, they of the Church are beloved for the fathers’ sake”, etc.

No. This is the climax of his argument through three chapters for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. His point is plain. The nation as a whole now rejected, fallen, broken off, hardened, unbelieving, disobedient, yet still “holy”, will be accepted, raised, grafted in, softened,

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and made believing and obedient. Natural Israel will become “true” Israel. Abraham’s descendants according to the flesh will become his spiritual descendants as well.

What says the Scripture?

For proof of this statement Paul goes to the Word of God. What do the Scriptures say? was his constant thought. He refers to two Old Testament Scriptures. The first, in v. 26, is from Isaiah 59:20. The other, in v. 27, gives, it seems, the substance of Jer. 31:31-34.

Observe that the reference from Isaiah has Jacob instead of Israel. Perhaps Paul was careful to choose a reference that contained the word “Jacob” to make it clear that he referred to Israel after the flesh. At least no one calls the Church “the new Jacob”!

In chapters 9 to 11 Paul uses the words Israel and Jacob 13 times. He refers to them in a number of references to the Old Testament. But in his reading and quoting of the Scriptures he never takes these names except in a natural, literal way. As we have seen, he gives no indication that they mean anything but the people descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Everywhere they are put in contrast to the Gentiles. He does not spiritualize the names to make them mean the Church of this age. It is the literal Israel to whom God stretched all day His hands (10:21). It is the literal Israel to whom God gave the spirit of slumber and eyes that should not see (11:8). It is the literal Israel for whom Paul prayed and whose zeal was misguided (10:1, 2). And it is the literal Israel who shall be saved at last (11: 26). The apostle does not play with words and twist them to suit his pleasure.

Other prophecies

Paul could have chosen other references from the prophets to prove the future conversion of literal Israel, if he had been so led. There is an abundance of such references—Jer. 23:5-8; 32:37-40; Ez. 20:40-44; 37:21-28; Dan. 12:1; Hos. 3:4, 5; Zech. 10:10-12 are some of them. But having quoted one he shows the proper interpretation for the others.

Zechariah 12

He could have chosen the passage in Zechariah that we looked at in chapter 2 (12:9-12). That portion is not puzzling if we allow the words to have their natural meaning. At least as plain, we should think, as the reference Paul chose from Isaiah. If a verse in Isaiah which some might consider more or less obscure can have such meaning, how can the passage in Zechariah and the other references above be given some entirely different meaning?

Of course, the attempt has been made to take all these references from the nation Israel and apply them only to the Church. The New Bible Commentary (which is quite good in many places) has this kind of comment on some of Zechariah's prophecy.

On Zech. 12:9—"In this picture of the impregnable city Jerusalem represents the Church. The literal Jerusalem was to be laid waste by the Romans, as it had been on former occasions by other enemies".

Zech. 12:10-14—"This mourning for Christ began almost immediately after the crucifixion (see Luke 23:48). The number of mourners greatly increased on the day of Pentecost, and subsequently; and shall continue to grow until 'all Israel shall be saved'. These prophecies have a special reference to the spiritual Israel of God; for repentance is a necessary part of Christian experience".

In other words, in this view the house of David, and the house of Nathan, and Levi, and Shimei, refer to the Church of this age. To such interpreters Jerusalem is the Church, the various tribes of the nation are the Church, I suppose even the land of Israel is the Church! And such views are often stated with surprising dogmatism. f

I do not see that Paul read the Old Testament like this. In Zechariah if Jerusalem does not mean Jerusalem and Israel does not mean Israel, and the houses of David, Nathan, Levi, etc. do not mean the houses of David, Nathan, Levi, etc., then no one on earth knows just what they do mean. For we are told nowhere in the Bible that they are not to be taken literally, and no other meaning is suggested for them.

But if a person has no room in his theological system for the restoration

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of Israel to Palestine, their eventual conversion, and their place in God's kingdom during the coming millennium, then what is he to do? He will have to find some way of interpretation which denies these things even when they are literally fore-told in the prophets. So he insists that such plain prophecies are to be understood only in some spiritual way.

I must confess I admire the ingenuity of some of these commentators. (It takes considerable skill to weave through so many Scriptures and somehow not touch their plain meaning.) But I do not admire their results. I cannot think that method is the true one which denies even the possibility of literal fulfilment.

In Zech. 9:9 we have a prophecy that was literally fulfilled.

“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king shall come to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Berkeley).

Before Christ actually fulfilled it, I suppose some could have interpreted this prophecy something like this: “This passage is not to be literally interpreted. ‘Jerusalem’ here means the people of God in general. ‘Come to you’ speaks of spiritual influences God will bestow on them. ‘Riding on a donkey’ signifies that the King will treat His people with humility. We need not suppose that the King of Israel will literally ride on a literal donkey into a literal city of Jerusalem. We may safely leave such interpretation to the ignorant literalists.”

However, as everyone knows, Jesus did literally ride into Jerusalem in just this way (Matt. 21:1-10).

In Zech. 11:12, 13, we have another prophecy.

“And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price: and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me. Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord”.

Again, before the fulfilment, our spiritual commentator might have said. “We must not press the details

here. The selling and the buying are only symbols of spiritual realities. The expression ‘thirty pieces of silver’ does not mean literally thirty or Lit-

eral silver, It means simply that the blessings of God were not prized very highly by some in Israel. Casting the money to the potter in the house of the Lord signifies only that those who have made this bad spiritual bar-gain change their minds”.

But this, too, was literally fulfilled (Matt. 26:14-16; 27:3-8).

In these strange and detailed prophecies in Zech. chapters 9 and 11 we do not have merely spiritual truth. We have literal prediction. No doubt we have spiritual realities there, but they are clothed in state-ments that have a literal fulfilment.

Why should we think it will be otherwise with the prophecies of chapters 12, 13, 14?

Let others take these prophecies as they think they must. But let them not wonder if some insist on be-lieving in a literal fulfilment.

As for myself. I cannot see that Zech. 12: 8 or 9 con-cerning Jerusalem, and following from that 12:10-14 have ever had a literal fulfilment from Zechariah's day to ours. When did God defend the Jews of Jeru-salem? When did He destroy the nations that came against that city? As we have seen in chapter 3 of this book it was the Jews and Jerusalem that were destroyed, not the nations. And when, following this predicted defence of Jerusalem, did the whole house of David and the others mentioned see Christ pierced for them and repent with bitter tears? When did the prophecy of 13; 2 come to pass? And 13:8, 9? Cer-tainly the day of the Lord (as in 14:1) has not yet come. Nor have the events foretold in 14:2-4. If these prophecies are to have anything like a literal fulfil-ment at all then it is still in the future.

We must always be careful in the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy. The Scriptures of the Old Testa-ment are exceedingly full and deep and we do not know all there is to know about them.

A helpful suggestion

Erich Sauer in his book *From Eternity to Eternity* offers what seems to me a fruitful idea. He says that the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom of God have a fourfold reference. They refer first of all to the historical circumstances of the prophet himself. Then to a spiritual or typ-

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ical fulfilment in the Church of this age. Then beyond that they refer to a literal fulfilment in the coming reign of Christ on earth during the Millennium. And, lastly, to an eternal fulfilment in the new heavens and new earth at the end of the Millennium.

This is an attractive suggestion. According to this, no single system of interpretation exhausts the meaning of these prophecies.

Certainly the prophets wrote for their own day, and their words were a source of encouragement for the saints then. God was King in Israel and His people could rejoice in that fact, and in His promises of a more glorious time to come.

But they also wrote for us (Romans 15:4; 1 Peter 1: 10-12). For now the Church is the centre of God's program on earth, and the kingdom of God has been taken from Israel for the present. And we should not dream of denying that there are rich treasures of spiritual truth in the Old Testament for the Church now.

However this does not by any means exhaust the meaning of the prophets. Let us find all the spiritual truth, and help, and encouragement we can from their writings. Let us rejoice now, as they did in their age, in God our King. But let us not commit the blunder of thinking that because their writings have spiritual application for us they therefore have no literal fulfilment. If one cannot accept the view that says there will be a literal fulfilment let him at least have wisdom enough not to deny the possibility of it. The kingdom shall be restored to Israel and the promises made to them will be literally kept. The prophecies concerning Israel may indeed mean more than this. But they mean at least this much. And when shall they be fulfilled except in the coming Millennium, when the Lord shall be king over all the earth? (Zech. 14:9, etc.). And when we speak of a literal fulfilment we do not at all mean that it shall be less spiritual. It will no doubt be far more blessed and joyous and spiritual than anything we know now.

Even beyond this, Sauer suggests, there is a fulfilment in the eternal kingdom of God, in the new heaven and new earth. Then all lesser fulfilments will be at an end and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the midst of His people and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev.

ever. Is not this, rather, the meaning?—God has shut up all nations in disobedience that He might have mercy on all. The salvation of Gentiles and Jews are intimately connect-ed in the plan of God. One is not to be saved with-out the other. God’s purpose is grace towards all the peoples of the earth. And this purpose, mysterious as it is in its outworking, will in the end be fully realized.

Praise

It is the assurance of this truth that calls forth from the apostle’s heart the exclamation of wonder and praise that close this chapter.

“Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judg-ments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsel let’? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

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22:3-5).

Now we must return to Romans 11.

Israel still beloved

Paul has said that ungodliness shall be turned away from Jacob. God shall take away their sins. The covenant with them shall be confirmed. They shall be saved.

For, he continues in v. 28, from the standpoint of the Gospel they are enemies of the Gentile Christians, but “as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sake”. This could only mean literal Israel. Was any other Israel an enemy of Gentile believers? “They” in this verse is the Jacob of v. 26, the ones with whom God makes His covenant in v. 27. This is further evidence that Jer. 31:31-40 refers to literal Israel.

Do not fail to notice what the apostle says. Though now enemies of the Gospel the Jews are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. God has not forgotten the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

“For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance”

“The gifts” are listed in 9:4, 5—those special promises and privileges given to Israel. “The calling” was to be His own special nation above all other nations of the earth. The failure of Israel has not changed God’s mind: He will be true to His word in spite of the present disobedience and unbelief of that nation. He never takes back what He gives, never revokes His call, never breaks His promises. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mai. 3:6).

“For as ye in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience, even so have these also now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you they also may now obtain mercy. For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all” (verses 30-32).

These Gentiles were once in the same state of disobedience and loss that the Jews are now in. But just as God had mercy on them, so will He have mercy on His own fallen nation.

Verse 32 does not teach universal salvation of all individuals. Those who reject Christ and die in their sins in any age of the world are lost for