

The Church Removed before the Apocalyptic Judgments.

Appendix to 'Eight Lectures on Prophecy' from shorthand notes.

W. Trotter and T.S. (Smith?)

(New Edition, Broom & Rouse, 1890.)

There is one difficulty which meets the student of prophecy soon after he has crossed the threshold of his earliest inquiries. These inquiries may be supposed to have resulted in an entire conviction that the second advent precedes or introduces the millennium; that the Jews are to be restored to their own land — some of them in the first instance undergoing the utmost extremity of trouble there; that this trouble arrives at its height through a gathering together of all nations against Jerusalem; and that the nations thus gathered meet their doom at the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, and whose coming brings deliverance to the poor oppressed Jews, while it discomfits and destroys their adversaries. It may be supposed, moreover, that it is pretty plainly seen, from the whole tenor of New Testament teaching, that what is placed before us Christians, as our hope, is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: that for this we are exhorted to look, and watch, and long, and yet patiently wait; in a word, that our proper posture of mind is that of continual expectation of this blessed event. But here it is that the difficulty I speak of arises. "If," says the inquirer, "a whole train of events are to occur on earth preparatory to the Lord's coming — if the Jews are to return to their own land — the Gentiles to be gathered together against them there — the time of unequalled tribulation to occur — the seals, and trumpets, and vials of the Apocalypse to run their course of judgment — and the coming of the Lord to ensue all this how can we, seeing that none of these things have begun to come to pass, be intelligently looking and waiting for the coming of the Lord? For these intermediate events we may wait; and until they commence, and as they transpire, we may look beyond them to that in which we know they will surely terminate; but how can we be in a posture of continual expectation of Christ, if his coming has thus to be certainly preceded by a number of yet unfulfilled events?" I think I have stated the difficulty in its full force; and it is to meet this difficulty, as far as any present light on Scripture may enable me, that these pages are written.

But first, I would remind you, my brethren, that difficulties are no reason for unbelief. If it be plainly revealed in the New Testament, that our place as Christians is to be always waiting and looking for our Lord, faith would receive and welcome this revelation, however many difficulties might encompass the subject. And that it is so revealed, who that is acquainted with the word of God can question? Our Lord himself had described the position in which he would delight to have his people found at his return — "and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord." (Luke 12: 36.) The definite assurance with which he comforted them in the immediate prospect of his departure was, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14: 3.) The very first thing presented to them after he had gone, while they were yet straining their vision, as it were,

to catch another glimpse of him in the clouds whither he had ascended, was the assurance of his return. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1: 11) The Corinthian believers came behind in no gift: "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1: 7.) The apostle says of himself and his fellow Christians, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." And again, "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52.) He declares, that what he and his brethren longed and sighed for was, "not that we would be unclothed, (i.e., disembodied,) but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." (2 Cor. 5: 4.) "For our conversation is in heaven," is his language elsewhere; "from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body," etc. (Phil. 3: 20, 21.) The Thessalonians had been "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. 1: 10) In one form or another the coming is referred to in every chapter of this epistle. In the fourth chapter, the twice repeated expression, "we which are alive and remain," marks definitely enough what the posture is that becomes the church. How easy would it have been for the apostle to say, had such been the mind of the Lord, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so *us also, who are to sleep* in Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that they *which are alive and remain* unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent *us, who will ere then have fallen asleep.*" Why does he not speak thus? Surely, because it was the Lord's will that his saints should ever be expecting him. Not that the apostle could say, or that we can now say, that we shall certainly be alive and remain.. the apostle afterwards knew by special revelation that he himself would not; and we may not. It may please the Lord to tarry till we have all fallen asleep in him. But in the absence of certain information to the contrary, faith would say, as is said in these passages, "we who are alive and remain." Faith puts us where our Lord would have us, in the attitude of readiness and expectation. The virgins "went out to meet the bridegroom." And if faith should be tried, and hope seem to be deferred, it is still not for any of us to say, "My Lord delayeth his coming." The apostle prays, "I pray the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the *patient waiting* for Christ." (2 Thess. 3: 5.) He speaks again of a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give him at that day; "and not to me only," he adds, "but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4: 8.) "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2: 13.) "Unto them that look for him," we are told, "shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." (Heb. 9: 28.) And lest we should get weary, and hope deferred make the heart faint as well as sick, we are encouraged by the assurance, "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. 10: 37.) And though Peter knew from our Lord's own lips, that he was not to tarry till his Lord should come, — though he had been told by what death he should glorify God, he does not say a word in his epistles to lead those to whom he wrote to suppose that they too should certainly depart ere the Lord returned. No, he exhorts them rather, and us too, in such words as, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1: 13.) "Looking for and hasting unto the coming (or as in the margin, hasting the coming) of the day of God," is the way in which he describes our proper position in his second epistle. The coming is referred to in 1 John, both by way of exhortation and encouragement. (See 1 John 2: 28, and 1 John 3: 2.) In Revelation, the closing book of Scripture, "Behold, I come quickly," is a word so often repeated; the volume finally closing with "Surely I come quickly," from the lips of Jesus, while the church responds, "Amen: even so, come, Lord Jesus;" that there can be no doubt as to the impression

left on the heart of the simple-minded believer, that it is our place of faithfulness and blessing to be always expecting our Lord, and awaiting his return. And with such varied and copious testimonies on the subject as these, if we had no solution of the difficulties that present themselves, it would clearly still be our place to maintain this attitude of expectancy, leaving, as we surely might, our gracious Master to clear away all the difficulties as and *when* it may please him. But there is a clue to the unravelling of this mystery. He has not left us without a solution of the difficulty in question. If he had, it would not have excused our taking any position but that which he has so plainly assigned us; while his tender, considerate love is the more displayed in relieving our hearts by the positive light he has shed in his Word on this question, so interesting to the heart that finds its joy in the daily expectation of his return.

Suppose then, my brethren, that there should be an interval between the coming of Christ into the air, where he receives the saints to himself, and his coming onwards to the earth, attended by his saints, to execute judgment; suppose there should be an interval long enough for the accomplishment of all these prophetic events which must be fulfilled ere he does thus come in judgment; suppose that the Jews should return to their own land, the Gentiles be gathered together against them, the antichrist arise, the great tribulation take place, the apocalyptic seals be opened, trumpets sounded, and vials poured out; suppose all this should occur *between the taking away of the Church, and the coming of Christ to execute judgment on his congregated foes*; suppose this, I say: would not this meet the difficulty in question? Could we not, in the light of such a fact (supposing it to be a fact), see clearly how we may be intelligently waiting for our Lord, without the idea of a single interposing event? Many events may, of course, interpose. But in this case we could not say of any of them that they certainly will. At any moment our blessed Lord might come to receive us to himself; and yet, in the interval supposed, all the events come to pass which we know from God's word must be accomplished, ere Christ comes to consume the wicked one with the breath of his mouth, and to destroy him with the brightness of his appearing.

Be it remembered, moreover, that the mere possibility of the occurrence of such an interval meets the difficulty which has been stated. If it be only possible that there may be such an interval between the descent of Jesus into the air, and his coming onward to the earth in judgment, what should prevent our being in the posture of daily and hourly expectancy of his return? What is the difficulty we are considering? Why, that the Jews have not yet returned to their own land, nor the other events occurred, which must occur ere Christ come in judgment. But then, if it be possible that after Jesus has descended into the air, and we have been caught up to meet him, an interval should ensue, in which the Jews may return, and all the predicted events come to pass, and then the Lord come onwards to the earth, his risen and glorified saints following in his train, — if this be but possible, I say, — does it not show that it is equally and blessedly possible that Jesus may come at any moment, and that there is nothing to hinder our receiving those scriptures in their simple, obvious sense, which exhort us to be always waiting and looking for his coming? And who will undertake to say that there may not be such an interval? Who would have thought that between two clauses of a verse, in Isa. 61 — two clauses only separated from each other by a comma — an interval of eighteen hundred years would have come in? Any one reading or hearing the prophecy in Isaiah's day, would have concluded that "the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God," were one and the same period. But when our blessed Lord quoted these words in the synagogue at Nazareth, he knew that there was to be an interval between them, and that he had only then come to preach "the

acceptable year of the Lord," and not to introduce "the day of vengeance of our God." And accordingly he only read as far as the comma, and then "he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down." (Luke 4: 20) And if, in this instance, there was room left in God's precious word for the whole of the present dispensation to come in between the two clauses of a sentence, who will be so bold as to affirm, that in our Lord's second coming there will certainly not be an interval of a few years between the first stage of it and the next? between his coming into the air to receive the saints, and his coming with all the saints to execute judgment, and reign on the earth? And again would I press it, my brethren, that if *there may but be* such an interval, *if it be possible for any one to prove from Scripture that there will not be*, then is it our privilege, even without a shade of difficulty on our minds, to be always looking and waiting for our Lord.

But I believe we are not left to the thought of what may be. There are several considerations which satisfy my own soul, not only that there *may be*, but also that there *will be*, such an interval. These considerations I desire in all simplicity to present, leaving them to be weighed by my brethren in the balances of the sanctuary. The Lord grant to each of us deep and real subjection to his blessed word.

The first consideration I would present in proof that there will be such an interval is not in the form of an exact quotation from Scripture, but drawn from an extensive comparison of one part of Scripture with another. I trust, however, to be enabled to make it plain to the most simple. We are all aware of the continual exhortations we have in the New Testament to a spirit of forgiveness, and to manifest towards others the grace in which our heavenly Father has dealt with us. And perhaps there is hardly a Christian anywhere who has not been perplexed with passages in the Psalms and elsewhere in the Old Testament where the heaviest curses and judgments are invoked by the worshippers on the heads of their enemies. And many of these psalms are evidently prophetic of the time immediately preceding the coming of the Lord to execute judgment. Can it be for us, my brethren, for the Church, that these prophetic utterances, full of imprecations, are prepared? And yet it is clear that they can have no place after the Lord has come in judgment, destroyed his adversaries, and delivered the remnant of his Jewish, earthly people. Whose language then can that of these Psalms be? and when can it be uttered? I believe it to be the language of the Jewish remnant, amid the deep darkness of their final tribulation, after the Church is removed. And you can neither suppose the Church to utter such language, nor to be still on earth while the Spirit of God leads the Jewish remnant to utter it, without confounding those things which the Holy Spirit in Scripture has been most careful to distinguish from each other.

The present dispensation is one of unmingled grace. God is not now imputing to men their trespasses, but freely forgiving all, the vilest and the worst, who believe in Jesus. And to us the exhortation is, "Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not." "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing: knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." Our Lord himself said, while his enemies were nailing him to the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The first martyr for the name of Jesus cried, in like manner, while they were stoning him to death, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But there is a time coming when prayers like the following (inspired prayers, be it remembered) will ascend up to heaven. "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke

against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this Mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt." Pause here a moment to remark that this must apply to the condition of Israel at some period subsequent to their going into captivity; yea, to a period *long after* they have gone into captivity. "Lift up thy feet unto the *perpetual desolations*; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. . . . We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom. Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually." (Psalm 74) This shows plainly enough to what period this class of psalms applies. It is to the period of the last Jewish tribulation. Look at another. "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem: and there was none to bury them. . . . How long, Lord? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed. . . . And render unto our neighbours seven-fold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord." (Psalm 79) Once more. "Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us put them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. . . . O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire, so persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. . . . Let them be confounded and troubled for ever: yea, let them be put to shame and perish: that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth." (Ps. 83) I need not further multiply quotations. There are such prayers and anticipations as these: "Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth." (Ps. 59: 13.) "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." (Ps. 58: 10) Need I ask again, Can it be the Church that uses such language, presents such prayers, and rejoices in such anticipations? Impossible. But may not the Church be still on earth, while the Jewish remnant thus pour out their souls? What! the one Spirit of God put a prayer for forgiveness of enemies into the heart of one, and inspire another to ask for their destruction! Besides, in the Church there is neither Jew nor Gentile; and the dispensation must be entirely changed before a body of people can be in existence, led of the Spirit to use as their own the language of such psalms as have now been quoted. If there be an interval after the Church is removed, during which the Jewish remnant is formed, and passes through its deep and unparalleled tribulations, looking forward to the coming of Messiah to deliver them, by the destruction of their adversaries and oppressors, all is plain, and easy enough to be understood. Without this, all is one inextricable mass of confusion.

Some one may be ready to say, "But these passages are all in the Old Testament; have we no intimations of like character in the New Testament?" Yes, indeed we have. Turn to Rev. 11: 3-6, where we read of God's two witnesses who are to prophesy in sackcloth twelve hundred and sixty days, that "if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will." Is this the ministry of the gospel of God's grace with which the Church is entrusted? Is there any resemblance between the two? Once, when our Lord was here below, a village of the Samaritans refused to receive him. "And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?" What was his answer? Did he give them the permission they asked? Nay, "But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9: 54-56.) How entirely must the dispensation have changed, and how evident that the Church must have been removed from the scene, ere a testimony such as that of the sackcloth witnesses in Rev. 11 can be raised up.

But let us look a little at the entire structure of the Book of Revelation. It is here we shall find the most definite, positive evidence of the fact, that the Church is taken up prior to the judgments under the seals, trumpets, and vials. We have strong presumptive evidence in what has already been considered. Here we have, as it seems to me, direct and conclusive proof

In Rev. 1: 19, the favoured disciple is thus instructed: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter," or "after these." The Greek words are *meta tauta*, which every Greek scholar knows simply and definitely mean, *after these*. They have not the force of our indefinite expression, *hereafter*. *Meta* is the Greek word for "after;" *tauta* is the Greek word for "*these*;" and, seeing that it is the neuter plural, it must be "these" things. Here then we have, on the authority of the blessed Lord himself, the division and arrangement of the book of the Apocalypse. "Write the things which thou hast seen" — these we have in Rev. 1, the vision he had beheld at Patmos: "and the things which are" — these we have in Rev. 2 and Rev. 3, the seven churches, with the judgment of their state pronounced by the Son of man: "and the things which shall be after these" — the visions which commence with Rev. 4 and extend to the close of the book. Let us consider these a little more in detail.

As to the first division, "the things which thou hast seen," it needs no remark; it is obviously contained in Rev. 1. "The things which are" — the second division of the book — requires a little more attention. There can be no doubt that the seven letters of Rev. 2 and Rev. 3 were addressed to the seven churches whose names they bear. But why were these seven selected to be thus addressed? Was it not, as very many who have studied prophecy judge, that they were chosen to be thus addressed, as representing in their spiritual condition, and in the warnings, threatenings, exhortations, and promises, needed by them, the whole course of the dispensation? That is, these epistles to the churches were prophetic of the several and (as I for one cannot but conclude) *successive* states of the church from the time that they were written down to the taking up of the true Church at Christ's coming, and the rejection of the false professing body as a loathsome thing, fit only to be spued out of Christ's mouth. Thus "the things which are" are presented to us in Rev. 2, Rev. 3. Now turn to Rev. 4: 1: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door

was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter," or "after these." It is exactly the same expression as before, *meta tauta*. So that, this voice that John heard being witness, the third division of the book begins here. "The things which shall be after these" begin to be unfolded in ch. 4. What are these things? Rev. 4, and Rev. 5 present to us a scene in heaven, — a scene which neither answers to the existing state of things in the present dispensation, nor to the state of things in the millennium. The throne of him who is worshipped as "the Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come," is here seen by our apostle, and out of it proceed "lightnings, and thunderings, and voices." Surely this is different from the throne of, grace to which we are now invited to come boldly, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. "Lightnings, and thunderings, and voices," tell of judgment, not of grace. And yet it is evidently not the millennial state; for the seven-sealed book, which has not begun to be opened in Rev. 5, unfolds the judgments which precede the millennium. The Lamb, too, is here in the midst of the throne, and receives from him who sits thereon this seven-sealed book, as the only one in heaven or in earth who prevails to open it. Evidently, then, these two chapters describe a transitional state, an interval between the present dispensation of full grace and the millennial dispensation. The question is, Where is the Church during this interval? The only answer afforded by the Book of Revelation is, IN HEAVEN. Who are they that are symbolised by the twenty-four crowned elders in white raiment, and the four living creatures in these two chapters? Let their song give the answer. "And the sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth." They are clearly not four-and-twenty individuals literally. How could they in that case have been redeemed out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation? They are symbolic personages, representing the whole company of those who are thus redeemed, and who are to reign on the earth. Thus we see that those who are to share Christ's royal glory during the millennium are, during the transitional period between the present dispensation and the millennium, assembled around him in heaven, owning his worthiness, and anticipating their reign with him over the earth. And every glimpse that we have of them in chs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 11: 14, 15, 19 presents them in the same place. As another has beautifully observed: "In ch. 4 we see the living creatures and crowned elders around the central throne of God Almighty in the heavens. The action in the course of the book changes, but the place of these mystic personages never does. They are interested in the action, they sing and rejoice at certain stages of it, but they are never engaged in it, nor leave their high habitation."

My space allows me to notice but one or two points more. Rev. 19: 4, where we have the last mention of the crowned elders and the four living creatures, goes on to inform us of the marriage of the Lamb, his wife having made herself ready. Surely the Church must be complete and in glory, when, as the Lamb's wife, she is ready for the marriage. The marriage is in heaven. After the marriage heaven opens, and the rider upon the white horse comes forth to the final conflict; to tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Now mark the 14th verse: "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen white and clean." The fine linen has been explained in verse 8 to be "the righteousness of saints." *The armies which were in heaven*. In Rev. 2, 3 we have a sevenfold presentation of the Church in its responsibility here below. In Rev. 4 to Rev. 19: 4, we find the Church in heaven under the symbols of the elders and living creatures. The seals are opened, the trumpets blown,

the vials poured out; all these bring dreadful sorrows on the earth and its inhabitants; but it is from heaven that the Church views the whole, and celebrates the praises of God and the Lamb. While waiting thus in heaven for the time when, with the Lamb, they shall reign over the earth, they are symbolised by the crowned elders and living creatures. But in Rev. 19 the false pretender, Babylon, having been judged, the marriage of the Lamb with the true bride takes place, and we hear no more of the crowned elders and living creatures. The Church, now married to the Lamb, comes in his train when he comes forth, conquering and to conquer. In Rev. 20 the reign takes place, and in Rev. 21: 9 to Rev. 22: 5 we have the Church's glory as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. *The Church is never seen on earth, or anywhere but in heaven, from the end of Rev. 3 till in Rev. 19 Christ comes forth from heaven, and the armies which were in heaven follow in his train.*

One word more. It is the positive promise of Christ in Rev. 3: 10 to those who have kept his word, and not denied his name; "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from (not keep thee *in* or keep thee *through*, but keep *thee from*) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Amen.
W. T.