

The Predicted Corruption of Christianity, and its final results.

2 Thess. 2: 1-12; and Rev. 17 and 18.

Lecture 6 of 'Eight Lectures on Prophecy' from shorthand notes.

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Those who were present here last Tuesday evening will remember the happy and exalted theme of that evening's lecture. My brother addressed you on that occasion upon "The distinct calling and glory of the church" of God. The varied glories of him who is the church's living Head came under our review, whilst we were shown the distinctive glory which he will share with, and confer upon, "the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." But how opposite a scene is that which we have to contemplate tonight! We have to consider "The predicted corruption of Christianity and its final results" — the history, character, and doom of "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." This is descending as from heaven to earth. We have to turn away from a scene of purity, and holiness, and glory, to one of impurity, and drunkenness, and shame. We have to turn away from the contemplation of the one true and heavenly church — the living body which is united to its risen and glorified Head, and which is called to a heavenly walk and conversation even now, and to the participation of his glory and his throne hereafter — we have now to turn away from all this, to the revolting spectacle of a shameless, drunken woman, sitting on a wild beast,* and ministering, even under a religious guise, to the vilest passions of the kings, and governments, and people of the earth. Yet who shall deny that this is, in proper time and place, — if we cannot say our privilege — yet still our duty. It was said by one of the wisest men of old, "There is a time for all things." And surely there is a time, not only to look on the bright side of things, but when, however painful it may be, it becomes our duty to descend from the contemplation of so happy and so cheering a theme as that of the heavenly calling and glory of the church, to the very different subject of "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." And may God preserve us from presumption, and give us teachableness of mind, while these terrible and sorrowful scenes pass under our review.

*The word *therion*, rendered "beast" in Rev. 13 and 17, literally means "wild beast." That rendered "beast" in Rev. 4 and 5 is another word, *zoon*, which literally means "living creature." It is important to bear in mind this difference in reading Revelation.

I would remark, in the second place, how important it is to avoid confusion of thought in our endeavours to interpret the wonderfully varied imagery set before us in the prophetic Scriptures. It has been very common with expositors to explain almost all the prophetic symbols of evil as meaning Popery. How often do we hear it said, "This beast means Popery. The woman

on its back means Popery. The little horn that grew on its head means Popery. And even the two-horned beast of the thirteenth chapter of this book means Popery." Now, surely, there must be some strange confusion here. The whole of these varied, differing, and in some cases even contrasted symbols, *cannot* be rightly interpreted of one and the same system. Surely the woman must denote something else than the beast which carries her! Surely the woman on the back of the beast must mean something else than that which is intended by the horn upon this beast's head! Surely the beast, the woman upon its back, the horns upon its head, and the other two-horned beast, *cannot* all mean one and the self-same thing!

But let us at once address ourselves to our task. The portion we have read, from 2 Thessalonians, predicts in most impressive terms that there should be a "falling away," an apostacy in the church. The mystery of iniquity was already "working" therein in the apostle's time; it was to result in the revelation of "the man of sin," the "wicked one;" and he is to be destroyed only by the brightness of the revelation of the Lord in flaming fire from heaven. Such, in brief, are the scriptural predictions as to the corruption of Christianity, and its final results.

In the symbol of Babylon the Great, however, we see the "mystery of iniquity" in its full maturity. "MYSTERY" is the inscription that is written on the forehead of the mystic woman, of this, the seventeenth chapter of the book of Revelation. It is, we believe, the same *mystery of iniquity* that is spoken of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians.

I beseech you, dear friends, to mark with close attention the vision here presented to us. Read specially verses 1 to 6. There was seen a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls, and having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications. This woman was seen sitting on a beast, and the beast had seven heads and ten horns. — The ten horns ultimately proved the destruction of the woman; they "hate her, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Then those horns themselves, along with the wild beast, the power of which they wielded, are overcome in a last conflict by the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Ponder well these mystic scenes. Do not say that "it is better to let such mysteries alone." They are *revealed* mysteries, and they belong to you, *because so revealed*. God would not have given us them had he judged them "better let alone" by his people. It is written of this very book, filled as it is with mystic scenes like these, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein; for the time is at hand." Let us then ponder well the revelation here presented to our view. Let us treasure up its instruction; and may God, by the Holy Ghost, seal it upon our hearts.

We have said that in the symbol of "Babylon the Great" is shown to us the full maturity of the "mystery of iniquity" — of the apostacy, or "falling away" in the church of God. Let us define and consider this explanation somewhat more closely, and in detail.

1. The woman is seen seated on a *beast*, as well as on *many waters*. Now this beast certainly denotes *the Roman empire* — the Roman empire, I believe, throughout its whole duration, whether in its pagan, its papal, or its future antichristian state. It means the same thing as the *many waters* — the "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." It means *Rome secular, Rome civil and political*. Whatever may be the religion Rome professes, it is still the

secular empire of Rome that is denoted by the "beast." Whether the empire be considered in its past whole and undivided condition, or in its present broken and divided one, still it is represented by this symbol of a seven-headed beast. Our next lecture will furnish proof of this profession, that by the "beast" here is meant *the secular empire of Rome*. But if by the beast is meant the secular and political power, what explanation shall we give as to the woman that is here seen seated on it? What great system is there to be seen seated upon, and supported by, the secular power of Europe? Is it not plainly *the ecclesiastical or church power*? Is it not the church in alliance with, and maintained by the state? We repeat it once more, that we believe this symbol denotes *corrupt and apostate national Christianity*.

2. One of the seven angels previously seen, here calls on the apostle to come and see "the judgment of the great whore." Afterwards (see chapter 21: 1-9) another of those angels calls him to come and behold "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." There is seen, then, that which is true and that which is false — that which is chaste and that which is corrupt. There is seen that which is genuine and real, and that which is but spurious and fictitious — that which is betrothed to the Lamb, and that which is united with and seated upon the beast.

In each case it is worthy of our notice, that there is a two-fold symbol — a woman and a city. Each woman is represented also as a city. Each city is symbolized also as a woman. In the one case it is said, "Come hither, I will show thee *the Bride, the Lamb's wife*. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me *that great city, the Holy Jerusalem*." (Rev. 21: 9, 10) In the other we read, "*the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*." Thus the heavenly Jerusalem is seen as the Bride, the Lamb's wife; and that great city, mystic Babylon, is seen as "the great whore, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

May we not, then, presume, that by this mystic Babylon is meant, in principle, that corruption of Christianity which is our subject this evening? May we not regard all that is true to Christ as belonging, in principle, to the one symbol; and all that which, being nominally of Christ is, in reality, false to him, as belonging in principle to the other symbol? May we not say, that while every true Christian is a member of the bride of Christ, every spurious one is a member of this corrupt system which pretends to be such? — that, while every truly quickened person is a living stone of the heavenly city, every one that has merely "a name to live" may be regarded as a stone in this mystic Babylon.

3. But is there not also to be seen *a definite organization* now so prominently existing throughout what is called "Christendom," as to justify the application to it, in a special way, of this symbol of a great mystic whore? We doubt not that there is. In this very chapter, indeed, we have *both a general and a special locality* assigned to the woman. In verse 3, she is said to sit "upon many waters;" and in verse 15, these waters are explained by the angel to mean "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues;" whilst in verse 9, we read that "the seven heads (of the beast) are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth." This seems distinctly to fix upon Rome itself — that notoriously seven-hilled city — a city which, not only as to its ecclesiastical system, but also, in by-gone ages, as to its secular power, has reigned over the kings of the earth — upon ROME itself, we say, as the centre of power, and special seat of this great scarlet whore.

Yes; though "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues," are, in the wide sense, the seat of Babylon, yet is the centre and special locality of her power to be found at Rome.

We doubt not, then, that whilst all that is Christian merely in profession and in name belongs, in a wide and general yet true and solemn sense, to Babylon the Great, yet that enormous system of foul ecclesiastical corruption, of filthy spiritual fornication, of which the metropolis is at Rome, is what is here *specially* intended to be set forth in its own true and revolting colours.

4. That the power of the woman is something distinct from the power of the beast, we may further learn from this important consideration, that the beast is seen in supreme power after the woman has been destroyed. (Read verses 12 to 14, and also chapter 19: 19, 20) There are ten horns that give their power unto the beast, and destroy the woman. The power of the beast is ultimately the destruction of the woman. How, then, can the two be but one? It is said that the beast is Popery, and that the woman also is Popery. Then Popery destroys itself, and exists in full power after its own *felo de se*! This interpretation surely cannot stand! Both symbols cannot mean Popery. Neither, for the same reason, can both the woman and the beast symbolize the secular power.

The one rides upon the other, until the beast, wearied out by the extortions, the impudent pretensions, and the arrogant assumptions of the whore, will bear her hated weight no longer. The woman is then thrown down and trampled on, and gored to death. Yet still the beast is seen in all its strength.

5. What power, then, have we witnessed thus seated upon the secular powers? — that has even "reigned over the kings" and governments of the earth? What great system is there to be seen thus ruling the nations? What but the *ecclesiastical* power? What but the corrupt *national churches* of Christendom? They are indeed supported by the secular powers, and yet they constantly aspire to their control.

And, indeed, what emblem can be imagined so aptly suited to characterize a corrupt and spurious religious system as that of an unchaste woman, here designated, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth"? The loathsome thing professes itself to be betrothed to Christ, to be espoused to him. Yet it is wedded to the sensual pleasures, and wealth, and power of the earth. What emblem so fit, then, to describe it, as the one here actually employed! The secular power avows its own stern character — acts openly on the principle of force. The "wild beast" therefore fitly characterizes *it*. But this other system, whilst it rides upon the beast, and rejoices when, enraged, it scatters and devours — still acts by subtlety and treachery, rather than by any direct, open exercise of force. It presents "a golden cup, full of abominations, and filthiness of fornications." With this wine does it make the kings and nations of the earth drunk and infuriate. What is there that has done this, except Popery, and that which partakes of its nature and its principles? And what could set forth more vividly much that we see in actual and powerful operation, even in our own day, than the emblem presented to us? What is the struggle that at this very time engages the earnest attention of all classes throughout our own nation? It is a struggle between an ecclesiastical and a secular system. It is a struggle between the woman and the beast. The woman will, if possible, not only ride, but hold the reins! It is a

struggle as to the terms on which the beast will condescend to carry — to *support* the woman. Shall *she* hold the reins? This is the gist of the serious and exciting struggle of these "latter days." Alas! that any evangelical denomination should be found in this day that would not repudiate such support!

6. Such thoughts, however, lead us to a further important contrast. The great whore rides upon and is supported by the beast. What, on the other hand, is the support, the stay, the strength, the life, the hope, the joy of "the bride, the Lamb's wife"? We see her elsewhere (or that which is of the same life and spirit with her) represented as "coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved." Yes, here we find the answer. The true church leans on Jesus. He is unseen now, it is true. But faith rests on him notwithstanding. "In whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Here is the source of energy and consolation to the bride. This explains the mystery of her unwearying foot, and her unworldly carriage. She is heaven-sustained, and heaven-bound, for she is heaven-born — "*born from above*." Christ is, or should be *all in all* to her. She is *one with Christ* indeed; by "joints and bands" has she nourishment ministered from him. But this false woman, however she may boast, knows nothing of that life which is by faith. No, "sight" — the world — its patronage and endowments — is all she knows. She knows "the beast which carrieth her," "the many waters" (and mark well here in passing, that those "many waters" are precisely what the symbol of "the beast" sets forth) — she knows the "many waters" upon which she sitteth.

What a picture, then, beloved friends, is here presented to our view, of corrupted and apostate Christianity! Here we see it in its matured and most hideous deformity. It is painful to look so closely into it. Such, however, it actually is, as drawn by the hand of inspiration. But how does it reach a pitch of wickedness so monstrous and revolting? For a solution of this question let us look to prophetic details, and then briefly at what is revealed to us, as to the doom of this Babylon the Great. Let us observe the introduction, and then trace the progress of this apostacy.

The first mention we have in the New Testament of that divine institution into which this corruption has been introduced — in which this apostacy has taken place — at least the first mention of it by its specific name, "*the church*," is in Matthew 16. Peter's confession there recorded proves that he had truly discerned the right foundation of the church. The *building* of the church, however, is not spoken of there, as if it had then been commenced. The Lord said, "On this rock I *will build* my church;" not, on this rock I *am building* it. The building of the church upon that foundation — of the church *properly so called* — did not commence till Pentecost. The foundation was indeed being laid — laid in the incarnation, and death, and resurrection of the Son of the living God. But the building thereon, in their proper church character, of the living stones, was a work not commenced at that time. Living stones indeed there were — "children of God" there were; but never to that time, nor previously to Pentecost, were they gathered into the unity, or framed together into the building, of *the church*.

In the eighteenth chapter of this gospel we have further and most important instruction as to the church. Only in that place, indeed, besides the one just noticed, have we throughout the four gospels any distinctive mention of it. We have there, (Matt. 18: 15-20,) in connection with an important rule as to discipline, the grand principle of the constitution of the church of God. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Of such

an assembly it is that the Lord says, "Tell it *to the church*," and, "if he will not *hear the church*." This passage presents the very simplest idea of the church. "Wherever two or three are gathered together *in the name of Jesus*," there is the church.

We may now turn to the Acts of the Apostles, where, in the early chapters, we have a narration of the actual commencement of the divine work of the building of the church of God. We must quote one or two passages — we must look, for a moment at least, upon the fair and lovely spectacle of a pure and uncorrupted church. For a moment — alas! for a moment only, did the church so exist. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all." "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Such was the church when first established. Beautiful spectacle! Fair and lovely scene! Would that no other features had ever been developed therein!

But a change most disastrous had been already predicted. I may here refer, though very hastily, to those parables in Matthew 13, at which we glanced for a different purpose in the second of these lectures.

And, first, as to the parable of the sower. What is the instruction given us therein, as to the special point in question? It is this: that there should be very many plants produced which should bring forth no fruit to perfection. Some of the seed should spring up only to be burnt up by the sun, picked up by the fowls, or choked by thorns. Already, then, we have intimation of much spurious, or, at least, abortive vegetation. Surely this is no favourable presage for the church!

But we have a second parable — that of the wheat and the tares; one still more marked as to its import. The explanation of it, as given by the Lord himself, is as follows: — "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are the angels." This is most clear and solemn. Amongst the wheat there should be sown "tares;" that is, a plant with a specious but spurious resemblance to wheat. The *tares* then denote, not all the children of the wicked one, but such only as are sown among the wheat, as counterfeit and spurious plants. They are hypocrites, and indeed false professors of all descriptions, whether consciously so or not. Now these were not only to be sown, but to grow together with the wheat, even until the harvest. Corruption will exist in the church, so-called, until the end of the age. The harvest is the end of this mixed state of Christendom. Plainly, then, there will be no millennium before the harvest. But this we have already seen; and I introduce it now only as a passing thought. We shall see more as to the harvest when we come to the question of the final results of the apostasy.

The third parable spoken by the Lord is as follows: — "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and

sowed in his field; which, indeed, is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Such was to be the progress of Christianity, and of the great institution that should result therefrom. The gospel seed was a very little thing at the first. But the plant that sprung therefrom grew very great. While the affair was very little, the world despised it. When it grew somewhat strong — strong in its own native, heavenly strength — the world began to hate it, and oppose it; yet, as is the case with certain plants, it grew the faster as the world trampled it down yet more and more. It even gained over to itself at length both wealth and worldly influence. Then came a crisis and a change. The world would enter into a compact with it. The world came over to it — not really — but in pretence and profession only. The world will be anything, or profess anything, or adopt anything, that may turn out to its temporal advantage. The world will go wherever there is any earthly benefit to be got. When the ecclesiastical tree had grown great, and afforded comfortable shelter, without being scrupulous as to those who came for shelter then worldlings would nestle in it. Then the unclean birds — the harpies, vultures, cormorants, owls, and bats — would flock beneath its branches. Behold the attractive branches of this mystic tree! What a lure does the worldling find in its dignities and endowments — its dues, and fees, and tithes — its rights episcopal and hierarchal, monastic and manorial! Truly this tree is great! The Babylonish monarch — the Babylonish empire itself — of old, was symbolized by this very metaphor of a great tree. Nebuchadnezzar, as you will remember, was shown to himself as a vast tree, "the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt under the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it." (See Dan. 4: 10-12, and 19-22.) Such was the literal Babylon of old. How fitting, then, the parable of this great mustard tree as a symbol of *the mystic Babylon* of modern days! Yes, let us be assured, this great attractive tree is none other than mystic "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth."

But we must notice, also, the parable of the leaven, which was hid by a certain woman in three measures of meal. On a previous occasion we likewise referred to this parable, as affording proof that the second advent will be pre-millennial. We now refer to it, because it furnishes most remarkable instruction as to our present subject — the corruption of Christianity.

We saw, on that occasion, that "leaven" always means *something evil* — that it never represents *the Gospel*. We saw that when typically used in the offerings of old, it denoted sin and imperfection; that when Christ — Christ alone — was typified, there might be no leaven introduced. Thus specially the paschal bread must be unleavened; since in "Christ our passover" there was no sin: whilst, in certain offerings of thanksgiving made by imperfect worshippers, leaven was to be introduced. We saw that the Lord spoke of leaven in an evil sense, but never in a good one. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Paul also used the term as indicative of evil only. The church (see 1 Cor. 5: 6-8) was to be a new, unleavened lump; the "old leaven" must be purged out. It was not that *a new leaven* should be introduced. No; the lump must be "unleavened;" there must be, not "the leaven of malice and wickedness," but "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." In Galatians, too, the warning was, "This persuasion cometh not from him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Here the leaven was *legality* — they were leaving the simple gospel for the abrogated bondage of the law. This leaven would leaven the whole lump, if not faithfully purged out.

Alas! the parable before us declares that the whole lump should at last be leavened. The "kingdom of heaven" — that vast system which, at the first, was the kingdom of heaven in reality, and which assumes to be so still, but which shall be the kingdom of heaven *in name only*, when the leaven has wrought in it thoroughly — the whole of that vast system shall at length be "like unto leaven." No meal shall be easily discerned therein. The leaven only shall be prominent and visible, everywhere and to all; even the Christians shall be infected by it. At first the church was a pure, unleavened lump. Into these "three measures of meal" — not into the world at large, but into the new unleavened lump — the pure and pentecostal church — was the leaven secretly and clandestinely introduced. A "woman" hid it therein. Who was she? Was it not the mystic woman of Revelation 17? Was not the working of this leaven the working of that "mystery of iniquity" which, in 2 Thess. 2: 7, we are told did, even in those apostolic days, "already *work*"? Is there not, I appeal to you, an obvious identity between the leaven of Matt. 13, the mystery of iniquity of 2 Thess. 2, and the mystic Babylon the Great of Rev. 17?

There is also in this chapter the parable of the net, which gathered fish both good and bad, the separation of which takes place only at the end of the age. The kingdom of heaven — popularly, but not accurately, called "the church" — would thus gather all kinds of people into it. Thus all that we have been setting forth receives here further confirmation.

The parable of the "ten virgins," in Matt. 25, tells us the same sad story. They all slumbered and slept. If not all asleep, still none remained quite awake. The midnight cry alone aroused them, Thus again it appears the apostacy lasts until the coming of the Lord.

These numerous predictions began almost immediately to have their sad accomplishment. Ananias and Sapphira are well-known proofs of this. The Grecian widows, too, soon felt the sorrowful results of partiality; or else were themselves guilty of evil surmising. The Acts of the Apostles gives still further instances of incipient evil. In the Epistle to the Romans we have a solemn warning as to the failure and cutting off of the Gentile branches of the "olive tree." But at Corinth things were already in a fearful state. There were parties formed within the bosom of the church. There were strifes, and envyings, and divisions. There were also great disorders at the table of the Lord. There was even the toleration of a flagrantly incestuous person in communion. There was also a system of Judaizing, of legal and unevangelical teaching, boastingly pursued there.

The churches of Galatia were in a worse position still. There the foundation error of Popery was being openly introduced. People ask when Popery began — how early its errors were introduced — whether six hundred, eight hundred, a thousand, or fourteen hundred years ago. And Romanists themselves boastingly inquire whether their doctrines were not held even by the primitive and apostolic church. This is the answer: *Many of them were held by persons even in the days of the inspired Apostles themselves.* The proof of this is most decisive: we have in the apostolic epistles most earnest *protestations against many of those doctrines* — doctrines then actually held and taught. The Epistle to the Galatians is a divinely inspired protest against some of these doctrines. Luther re-published it at the Reformation. It was found to contain the whole strength, the grand drift, the very pith and marrow of the controversy between him and Rome. Why then should we postdate any Popish error? No, let us grant this to the Romanists, that though many of their doctrines are new and modern, yet others of them are in very truth as

old — or very nearly so — as the Church of God itself. Their doctrine of justification by the united and blended merit of Jesus Christ and of human works, is especially a very old one. The whole Epistle to the Galatians was written against it. The apostacy had set in with terrible and bewitching power throughout Galatia. The Apostle Paul had to change his voice, even as to his own children in the Lord. He "stood in doubt of them." Was it possible that he had laboured in vain? They had evidently fallen from the liberty of their position, and were again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Well might he exclaim, "This persuasion cometh not from him that calleth you. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*" (See chap 5 verses 8 and 9.) Here again we have the *leaven* mentioned. In this case it was the leaven of *legality* — in other words, of self-righteousness; at the bottom of it was *pride*. It was the result of unbrokenness of spirit — of a defective apprehension, both as to the wickedness of the human heart, and as to the strictness — the exceeding broadness and spirituality of God's holy law. This, doubtless, lay at the foundation of the error; and the teaching of Judaizing partizans helped it into avowed form and shape. *This leaven*, we may say emphatically, *leavens the whole lump*. My dear friends, the root of the corrupt tree lies here. This is the core of the apostacy. All its other evils follow in due course. The *Puseyite* movement, as it is called, began with a revival of this error as to justification. The popular "Lectures on justification," by a leader of that school, are a proof of what I assert. Popery has its origin here. It is indigenous in the corrupt soil of the unregenerated heart. We all have within us by nature these Popish tendencies. We do not need baptismal regeneration, and Popish rites to impart them. But we need to be born again of the Spirit of God as the only possible means of correcting them. There is no other way of escape from the dread fowler's snares. *We must be born again*; and we must learn that our salvation is *altogether of grace*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and that we are not "under law, but under grace." *Then* only do we know the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. Then only are we placed beyond the power of priestly pretensions. But then we are free indeed! Salvation in Jesus, by grace alone, through faith — salvation in him, known and realized in blessed peace and power, lifts its possessor clean out of the world of superstition and delusion! It raises him above the region of priestly mediatorship. The One High Priest above does all the proper priestly work for such an one. A thousand bonds are snapped asunder in a moment, when the soul of a poor sinner finds its full rest in Christ. You need not prove to him, that pains and penalties — purgatorial fires, and priestly indulgences and absolutions — pilgrimages, high masses, and beads, and crosses, are all empty, needless, and vain. No! the *vital principle* of all these has been nailed already to the true cross. The *principle* of them no longer triumphs in his heart. Grace reigns there now. He stands fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free, and he rejects every priestly interference that would bring him into bondage. The true priest — the Great High Priest — has emancipated him from the thralldom of every usurper. The snare is broken, and the captive is escaped.

This, dear friends, is the only way to meet and to expel the leaven of Rome. I deeply lament that so little on this vital doctrine is urged in the disputations of our day. We hear of what are called Protestant discussions very frequently; but *justification*, which should be the grand and prominent question, is often — I believe *generally* — omitted. This is a portentous omission. Romanists will argue for ever on other questions, if you will only keep the Gospel out of view. Only let the opponent argue with them on other points — if he will just grant them this, that he will not "preach" — (that is their own mode of putting it) if only he will avoid the declaration of salvation by Christ alone and of the glorious Gospel of God, which proclaims a full salvation by him for ever, they can bear all else. But that they cannot bear! When you proclaim the Gospel

full and free, you then begin to drag them beyond their depth — you drown them in deep waters. There is a mysterious power attending it, which they feel and know full well baffles all their skill, and which translates all those who heartily receive it into another world a world of liberty. It translates them out of the kingdom of darkness and delusion into the heavenly, free, and happy kingdom of God's own dear Son. May we then have grace to remember where our true strength lies! We may know both our best weapon, and how to use it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that in thus speaking of the actions and pretensions of *priests*, I refer to those true servants of our God, who assume under him, and as called by him, the *pastoral* or the *evangelizing* office. To feed the flock, and preach the Gospel, are ministrations both important and Scriptural. But priesthood, which is the proper and untransmissible prerogative of the Lord Jesus, if assumed by man in any other sense than that of the spiritual priesthood of all true believers in common, is, in this present dispensation, a false and wicked pretension. But let us hasten on. We have seen the apostacy working thus early and powerfully in Galatia. The Ephesians themselves are warned against the cunning craftiness and lurking watchfulness of the false apostles of that day. The Philippians, too, are warned respecting some of whom Paul declares, "They are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things." The Colossians were reprov'd for a tendency, even then to be discern'd among them also, towards the legality, and consequent superstition, which have been already noticed. Even the Thessalonians were not altogether blameless. There were some among them who walked disorderly, "not working at all." The mystery of iniquity, they were told, also had begun. Great grace, indeed, still rested on many of the churches — and God forbid that we should fail to recognize this, or joyfully to give him glory — but it is obvious that everywhere the apostacy had already set in.

To Timothy the apostle has to announce — what Timothy, indeed, already knew — that striking proof of human fickleness and instability: "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me." Before Paul died, all they that were in Asia had become the partizans Of Opposing and schismatic teachers. The Catholic church of Asia had erred already! Foolish and ignorant people tell us in this day, that what is *Catholic* must be right — that the doctrine which is universal, or which is held by the vast majority, must be true. They make a gross and palpable mistake. That which generally prevails is very probably erroneous. All that were in Asia had turned away from Paul. In the very first century of Christianity, *so Catholic an apostatizing tendency* as that was manifested; *so Catholic* had error become even at that early period!

In the same epistle we have a character of the "last days," which we must not omit. We have a catalogue of their numerous and aggravated evils. Nineteen various features of the apostacy are expressly mentioned. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." To crown the whole, the evil men of those perilous times should be professors of religion. I beg you to mark this. The apostates of the last days are those who

maintain "a form of godliness." How dark and mournful is the picture here presented to our view!

To Titus the apostle says, that there were even then many unruly and vain talkers, who subverted whole houses, and that for filthy lucre's sake. (Titus 1: 10, 11.)

The Hebrews generally are warned against apostasy, and against being "carried about with divers and strange doctrines." All this bespeaks the danger which was threatening the church.

The apostle James, throughout his epistle also, gives similar warnings. And in James 5: 4-7, he speaks expressly of fraud, and robbery, and riot, which should end only at the coming of the Lord. The intervening days should be as "days of slaughter," and the patience of the just would be most severely tried till then.

Peter's epistles are still more solemn. The whole tenor of them intimates his apprehension of the approaching evil and disastrous days. There is not throughout them the slightest allusion whatever to an anticipation of times of progressive truth and righteousness. All is emphatically indicative of apostatizing tendencies. The sure word of prophecy is pointed to as the only light which could safely guide through the dark days that were coming on. Scoffers, it is said, should arise in the last days, walking after their own lusts, and mocking at the promise of the coming of the Lord. But "the day of the Lord," he adds, "will come as a thief in the night," and will terminate the dismal period. That day alone — nothing else than *the day of the Lord* — will terminate it.

John, too, speaks in all his epistles of antichrists, or antichristian men. Those to whom he wrote had heard that antichrist should come: but even then there were many antichrists. The *spirit* of antichrist was already in the world. (1 John 4: 1-3.) In the last epistle, John himself says he had been expelled [from] the church by Diotrephes. Alas! even then corruption and apostasy ruled.

Jude, as you all know, dear friends, is if possible even yet more fully occupied as to evil and apostate men, and evil and apostate days. It was needful that he should give all diligence to write thus. Ungodly men had already crept in unawares. They were "clouds without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withered, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Enoch had prophesied of them, that the Lord would come with ten thousand of his saints, and assuredly execute judgment upon them. In that way only will the evil be subdued and ended. Read the whole epistle.

We now come to the book of Revelation — to the solemn and concluding scenes of the apostate church's history. The epistles to the seven Asiatic churches speak chiefly of incipient evil. We read of first love forsaken, of first works given up, of heresy allowed, of garments mostly defiled, and of a condition neither hot nor cold. The rankest worldliness was prevalent, and even gloried in. Read chapters second and third. Then, shortly afterwards, the sad scene of full-grown evil bursts upon us: Babylon the Great is seen in all her painted, gorgeous, and illusive beauty. We must now contemplate her doom.

The doom of Babylon the Great, then, is as follows. Let us mark it well. It is the end of ecclesiastical corruption, which we are going to survey; and, my friends, I do not confine it to the church of Rome. It becomes every one of us to consider how far he may be in any wise associated with it. "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. 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, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." (Rev. 17: 12, 13, 16, p 17.) Such is the predicted doom of Babylon the Great. Such is her fate *as a system*. The *persons* who have formed her living agency, we believe, will generally survive this downfall of their system. They then fall under strong delusion, judicially allowed of God, and they perish amid the fearful judgments attending the advent of the Lord. The destruction — the sudden, total overthrow of the system, and of the organized, endowed, and world-sustained power of Babylon the Great, I conceive to be what is set before us here.

"Ten kings" arise, and power is given them for "one hour" purposely to destroy the woman. This, it would appear, signifies a revolution of the secular powers against the ecclesiastical. The beast is wearied out by the rapacity and treachery of the woman. The woman's impudence brings on at last her own destruction. The ten kings shall league together with the masses of the "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues;" "and they shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." They will strip the system of its wealth, and honours, and of all its vested rights. They will break up its establishments, and appropriate its revenues. The ten kings, in union with the nations, will at length do this. Babylon the Great will wear out their patience. Yea, "her sins" will "reach unto heaven," and God himself will "remember her iniquities." These fierce executioners will have it "put into their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast," until the words of God, as to Babylon's destruction, "shall be fulfilled." Under such a providential disposition will they, as we have seen, "hate the whore, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." The divine word is, "Reward her even as she hath rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup that she hath filled, fill to her double." Most signal retribution! Thus ends the supremacy of the false church! And what other end so very probable? Is she not in our own day taking the very course which of all others is most likely to provoke and to exasperate the nations upon which she rides? Her voice, indeed, is made to utter inviting and alluring tones; but pride and self-aggrandizement reign in her heart. "Come home, my children; come to the peaceful bosom of your holy mother," is her most subtle and deceitful cry. A *mother* truly! Yes; in the estimate of the Spirit of God, she is a "*mother* of harlots and abominations of the earth." But her days are numbered, and she shall fall. "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God will speedily avenge your blood upon her."

Such, then, is the predicted doom of Babylon the Great. But the results of the apostacy reach further than her downfall. When Babylon shall have disappeared from off the scene — when there shall be no longer seen this woman sitting on the back of the beast — the apostacy will still conduce to results most fearful and amazing.

There shall ensue that "strong delusion to believe a lie" which is set before us in 2 Thess. 2, as we have seen. The moral result of Babylon's misdoings will be the open rejection of the authority of God, and of the very name of Christ. From the "mystery of iniquity" will spring the "strong delusion" of the "man of sin" — of the "wicked one" — of the "antichrist." (Read 2 Thess. 2: 1-12, once more.) Under the power of this "strong delusion to believe a lie," the blinded nations will gather together under antichrist, to "the battle of the great day of God Almighty." I do not believe that the "man of sin" means *Popery*. We have seen that Popery is specially set forth in the symbol of the mystic Babylonish woman, and is destroyed by the confederated nations, and not, as the man of sin, by the personal coming of the Lord. The "man of sin" I believe to be an individual person, a human being, a "false christ," a secular warrior, a king. Daniel 11, from which Paul quotes, almost literally and verbally, in 2 Thessalonians 2, proves this, I think, very clearly. In our next lecture, however, we shall have to look at this result of the apostasy more closely.

I will sum up briefly this imperfect notice of these sad results. We cannot complete it now, since the *final result of all* will include the judgment of the assembled nations, at the great day of the revelation of the Lord himself from heaven, in flaming fire; and it will be one special purpose of our next address to take further notice of the numerous predictions in which this *gathering of the nations* is set forth.

Thus far, however, we have seen. The evil leaven, which was secretly introduced into the Church at first, became openly developed at last in the foul system of "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." The end of Babylon we have also seen. The secular power, that has long been her source of strength, will at last destroy her. Suddenly, and in one hour, this revolution will take place. Ten kings will arise for that "one hour" only — for that very short time — and will lead on the beast to the destruction of the woman. Then will come the crisis. "Strong delusion" will fall upon those nations that constitute the "beast;" there will ensue a great gathering together of those nations against God, and against Christ, and then the open revelation of the Lord from heaven will ensue, and close the whole scene. Such is *the final result* of "the corruption of Christianity." But more of this, as we have said, when we come to speak of "The character and doom of the great Gentile powers."

What is the moral lesson, then, that we must seek to learn from all that has passed beneath our notice? It is a lesson of warning. It should be a lesson of deep humiliation, and of earnest searching and "clearing of ourselves," and of separation from surrounding and prevailing evil, if we be in any way involved in it. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Our place, my brethren, is to stand aloof, and to wait watchfully for the coming of our Lord. With the struggles that are taking place around us, we have not to meddle. The quarrels of the woman and the beast are not our quarrels. We may look on indeed, for our God has thrown his own light upon them in his word. But while we look thereon with sorrow, it is not our place to interfere. Our work is happier work. We have to manifest, in deed and word, the truth, the love, the grace, of him for whom we long, and look, and wait. Our weapons are not carnal. The potsherds of the earth may strive with the potsherds of the earth. The beast and his rider may contend; they may plot and counter-plot; they may scheme and counter-scheme; but *we know how it will all end*. We have been "told before."

The crisis hastens. The revolutions will be sudden and momentous. We know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. Where to place the translation of the church to meet her Lord, we know not. It may be the very first stage of the crisis. Perhaps, it will be so. Are we ready for it? The Lord grant that it may be so with each one of us! T. S.