

Earth's notable Events

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Introduction.

The Bible is the sole depository of the history and chronology of the world for by far the greater part of its existence. The title; "father of history," so commonly given to Herodotus the Greek, properly belongs to Moses the Hebrew, as the first of the inspired writers. From Adam to the flood covered a period of sixteen and a half centuries; what do we know of that long era apart from the Scripture records? And for long after the flood there is nothing upon which we may plant our foot securely, and say, "This is fact, and not legend." This being indisputably true, their folly is apparent who labour to discredit the historical portions of Holy Scripture. The persistency of such men borders on wickedness when we consider how many of their bold denials have been thrown back upon themselves by the simple application of pick and shovel. To reject the historical records of Scripture is to turn away from the only light available concerning the early history of the human race, a history which cannot but be of the deepest interest to us all. Seeing too that the Bible narrative is largely occupied with God's ways with man, there is considerable moral profit therein for those who ponder those ways in faith. It is sometimes urged that it is possible to believe in the general Inspiration of Scripture without necessarily accepting its historical accuracy in all things. But this is to introduce a crack into the structure that must inevitably lead to its total ruin. Scripture claims, not "general," but full and complete inspiration for itself. Its "words," not its inner spirit merely, are inspired of God (Ex. 24: 4; 2 Sam. 23: 2; 1 Cor. 2: 13, etc). This being so, we have either to accept or reject the Scriptures as a whole. If we do the latter, we stand convicted of rebellion against our Maker; which awful sin, if unrepented of, He will know how to deal with when His present long-suffering is ended. The Bible has in these days been relegated to an altogether secondary place with the many. It may only be believed if it happens to accord with the latest teachings of Science. But why must the Bible always be wrong when it fails to endorse what Scientists assert? Why should it not be these teachers who are at fault? Is Science such a fixed thing that its utterances must be accepted as infallible? Or is it not a fact that Science is the most changeable thing in the world, the "facts" of today being the scorn of tomorrow? Reader, the question at issue is of the greatest importance. It is Bible or no Bible, light or no light, Revelation or no Revelation. The records of the Old Testament are so frequently referred to in the New that both Testaments stand or fall together. To reject the older revelation while generally accepting the later is illogical in the extreme. The following among the many ancient records that are challenged to-day are referred to and so endorsed in the New Testament. It will be noticed that the instances here given are mostly taken from the book of Genesis: —

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
THE CREATION.....	3
THE ADVENT OF MAN.....	3
THE FALL.....	4
THE FIRST CITY.....	5

THE RAPTURE OF ENOCH.....	6
THE FLOOD.....	7
THE COVENANT WITH NOAH.....	8
THE TOWER OF BABEL.....	8
THE CALL OF ABRAM.....	9
THE FIRST BATTLE.....	10
THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM.....	11
THE EXODUS.....	12
THE GIVING OF THE LAW.....	13
THE ELECTION OF DAVID.....	14
THE DISRUPTION OF ISRAEL.....	14
THE SUPREMACY OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.....	15
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY THE CHALDEANS.....	16
THE RETURN FROM BABYLON.....	17
THE BAPTIST'S MISSION.....	18
"THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.....	19
THE CROSS OF CHRIST.....	20
THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.....	20
THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.....	21
THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.....	22
PETER'S OVERTURE.....	23
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY TITUS.....	24

The descent from a single pair 1 Tim. 2: 13.

The institution of marriage Matt. 19: 4-5.

The fall 2 Cor 11: 3; 1 Tim 2: 14

The deluge Matt 24: 38; 1 Peter 3: 20 etc

The personality of Abraham John 8: 37-58; Heb 11: 8-11

The overthrow of Sodom Luke 17: 29; 2 Peter 2: 6

The judgement of Lot's wife Luke 17: 32.

The burning bush Acts 7: 30.

The exodus Acts 7: 35, 36; Heb 11: 29

The giving of the manna John 6: 31.

The speaking ass 2 Peter 2: 15, 16.

The swallowing of Jonah Matt. 12: 40; 16: 4.

An honest mind can only rise from the consideration of the passages here cited with the conviction that if the Son of God speaking on earth be true, and the Holy Spirit speaking through apostles after His departure, then the Old Testament writers, beginning with Moses, are true historians. However marvellous their records, however contrary to our experience today, we thankfully accept them as God's gracious gift to our souls, and humbly seek His lessons for us therein.

THE CREATION.

Events are either great or small in our eyes according to the point of view from which we regard them. The ordinary historian writes with the present course of things in mind, and he emphasises particular incidents accordingly. Only in the volume of Inspiration is the history of the world looked at from a truly broad point of view. There everything is considered in the light of God and eternity, and events are dealt with as they bear upon the accomplishment of the divine counsels concerning the Lord Jesus. Hence Scripture devotes no space whatever to the siege of Troy, while filling whole chapters with the story of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem; it ignores altogether Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, while referring repeatedly to Abraham's crossing of the Euphrates. In this, as in many other matters, the saying is true: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith Jehovah" (Isa. 55: 8).

The earth's first notable event was surely its birth. We do not refer to the wonderful six days' work, which was more than anything a recovery from a state of ruin, but of God's creative act at the beginning, whenever that may have been. In imagining matter to be eternal, the ancients only proclaimed themselves fools, while professing to be wise. God alone is eternal. It is true that man, now that he has been created, has no end, but GOD has neither beginning nor end. The book of God opens with the divine account of the origin of all things. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." How, when, and why is not stated; the one object of the verse is to tell us WHO created. It is of the first importance for man to understand that not only himself, but his little world and all that is therein, and also that vast system of which his world forms a part, was brought into being by the act of God. This puts both God and man in their true place. Job doubtless felt very small when his Maker challenged him thus: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38: 4). Unbelief brushes all this aside with scorn, preferring the theories of its own darkness, but "by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11: 3).

Nothing was created apart from the Son. The Son then is eternal — "before all things," as Col. 1: 17 puts it. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1: 3). But not this only: "all things were created for Him" (Col. 1: 16). Here we have a thought full of moral grandeur. Our poor earth was not made simply for man's pleasure, but to be the ultimate possession of the Son of God. This puts marvellous dignity upon our little planet: yea, it invests it with a veritable halo of glory. Hither came the Son of God in His lowly grace; here He both lived and died. Here He groaned and wept; here, too, He shed His precious atoning blood. Let the arch-rebel, Satan, and man, his petty dupe, do and say what they please; everything below, as well as everything above, will yet fall into the hands of its rightful Heir, to be His possession for evermore.

THE ADVENT OF MAN.

Man was not the earth's first inhabitant. Leaving aside the geologic ages, and the animal fossils that have been brought to light, and confining ourselves to the six days' work, man came upon the scene last of all God's creatures. Birds, fishes, and beasts were all brought into being before him who was to be their lord and head. There seems to be moral suitability in this order: first, the whole subordinate system, then him around whom it was ever after to revolve.

In the light of Gen. 1: 27, it is sheer infidelity to speak of man as an evolution from some other being. Three times in this one verse the Spirit is pleased to use the word "created" in relation to man.

Man is thus a work of God distinct from every other. The whole human family has sprung from a single pair, Adam being the federal head of the race. He is thus the type of Christ as head of a new race, i.e., of the whole company of those who believe the Gospel. The dream of pre-Adamic man is absolutely forbidden by 2 Cor. 15: 45, not to mention other Scriptures. "The first man Adam" leaves no room for man in any form before him.

Man was distinguished from all other creatures in that he was made the subject of divine counsel before his creation. "And God said, Let us make man, in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion," etc. (Gen. 1: 26). There is a solemnity about this which commands attention. It was not a new kind of animal that was about to be brought into existence, but a moral being with marvellous endowments and possibilities. "Image" has reference to man's position as set here to represent God and rule for Him; "likeness" has reference to his moral being, as one capable of entering into relationships, and bearing responsibilities. Neither the image nor the likeness of God have been lost by the fall (Gem 9: 6; James 3: 9).

There was a twofold act of God in the creation of man. First, his body was formed of the dust of the ground; then life was imparted to the clay by the inbreathing of Jehovah Elohim (Gen. 2: 7). The life of man is thus a thing altogether distinct from the body. Let us note this carefully, for the lessons suggested by it are of the most momentous character.

The modern notion of "the ascent of man" is downright folly. It was no savage that God created, with power and responsibility to raise himself from degradation to dignity. God created man perfect. The moral and physical degeneration, which perplexes the philanthropists and statesmen of today, is the result of sin and rebellion against God. Men appear to have lapsed into barbarism very early; witness Job's description, in Job 30, of the objects of his time. But it was an absolutely perfect being that came forth at the beginning from the workshop of the Almighty.

There was language from the first. God spoke to the man and his wife (Gen. 1: 28-30) and the man spoke to the beasts, etc., in giving them all their names (Gen. 2: 20). What a different story the earth would be able to tell had its most gifted inhabitant remained loyal to his Creator, and refused all the overtures of the foe! But though Eden is lost beyond recovery, heaven stands open to all who, as confessedly ruined sinners, put their trust in the Saviour who died and rose again.

THE FALL.

The story contained in Gen. 3 is no mere allegory. It is instead God's account of the greatest disaster that has ever befallen this world. The words are few; without comment or garnishing, the solemn event is recorded, for the moral profit of mankind.

The first home of Adam and his wife was in Eden — in a garden planted by the hand of God. Everything was contained therein that was calculated to make life a delight. Infinite wisdom and love could permit of no lack. The choicest blessing of all was unrestricted intercourse with the Creator, who deigned to walk there with the objects of His favour. With one single prohibition, everything around was free to them. The prohibition was necessary as a test of their obedience and fidelity.

Alas for the day! The tempter entered, speaking with serpent's voice to the weaker vessel. She in her unfaithfulness suffered him to impugn both the truth and the love of God. The man, not deceived, nevertheless followed his wife in her revolt against God. So sin entered, with all its entail of suffering and death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Unbelief calls death "the debt of nature"; GOD calls it "the wages of sin" (Rom. 6: 23).

The wreck was now complete. The first man, set up in responsibility, and surrounded by every blessing, had failed miserably. Harkening to the enemy when he said, "Thou shalt not surely die," he had braved the consequences of disobedience to his utter ruin. Satan's favourite text was never more popular than to-day. The sages of our time have wiped hell out of existence, so that the multitudes persuade themselves that it is perfectly safe to indulge their passions as they please, in despal of God and His Son. The sequel will show how fatally they have suffered themselves to be deceived.

As far as man was concerned, all was now chaos. His robe of innocence was gone for ever. Satan had become master of the situation. Never could the man have extricated himself from the thralldom into which he had fallen. His only hope now lay in the One against whom he had sinned. Soon the voice of God was heard in the garden calling the unhappy pair out of their hiding place, and bringing home to their stricken consciences the reality of their sin. But not this only. He spoke of a Deliverer. Not as promise to Adam, but as judgement upon the serpent, God said: "It (the woman's seed) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3: 15).

Here we have "the Gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1: 1-3). The mystery of the incarnation is here, and also of the cross. One who should be really man, but also infinitely more than man, should meet Satan in his own stronghold and vanquish him for ever. The cross involved pangs for the Saviour ("thou shalt bruise His heel") such as none can ever comprehend; but His stooping to death for a moment, and then emerging triumphantly from it, has inflicted a fatal wound upon the foe. The completeness of His victory will be demonstrated in a later day. With words of hope ringing in their ears, and with coats of skins upon them as the gift of God, the man and his wife went forth from Eden to tread their allotted path of toil and grief, terminating in death. Their coats of skins are typical of righteousness divinely imputed on the ground of redemption, in contrast with the fig-leaf coverings of their own devising, which savour of the self-righteousness which has ever been the futile resource of fallen man.

THE FIRST CITY.

From a garden to a city was a great stride; indeed, it marked a revolution in human affairs. What were the steps which led up to this? The answer will be found in the careful perusal of Gen. 4. Two men are there seen drawing near to God; the one accepted and the other rejected. The accepted one placed a lamb upon the altar; the rejected one put fruit there — the product of his own toil. It is a typical picture both characters representing classes of men which have been found in the world throughout its history. Abel was the father of all who humbly draw near on the ground of the atoning sacrifice; Cain was the progenitor of all who presume to approach God on the ground of their own works. Rejected by God, Cain slew his brother, and thus inaugurated the era of religious persecution, which has never since died away. False religionists have in all ages vented their hatred on the true worshippers of God.

The murder being consummated, it is added significantly: "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod." Proud and unrepentant, Cain would now make a way for himself in the world, apart from God altogether. "He builded a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch." He who has no regard for God and heaven naturally seeks to gratify himself with the present scene. The city Enoch soon resounded with the strains of music and with the industrious clang of the smith. Comforts and accomplishments gave character to it. As men would say, it became the centre of light and learning, and the great commercial depot of the human family. But God was unknown there; nay, He was sedulously excluded from the place. The city and all that was

therein, however excellent in its way was man's great scheme for making the world agreeable without God.

Vast concentrations of men, such as a city suggests, are necessarily sinks of evil, man being a revolted creature. The excellent and the noble that men's cities contain are hopelessly overshadowed by the appalling evil which gives character to the whole. All the streams of human iniquity meet in one foul pool in the city of man's designing, and the larger the city the fouler the pool.

The ancient record in Gen. 4 is of the greatest possible value as showing us the beginnings of "the world" as we know it to-day. Its religious, social, and commercial history are all foreshadowed in the few incidents divinely written therein.

In keeping with this, we read later in Scripture: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father" (1 John 2: 16). For the time being, the offensive system is borne with in divine forbearance; the crash will come when the Son of man appears. Then man's entire edifice of civilisation will fall to pieces like a house of cards.

Yet God has from the first entertained the thought of a city for man. Out of harmony in spirit with the course of things here, Abraham and others have looked for the city of which the architect and builder is God. Not here, but above, is that city found — "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 11: 10; Heb. 12: 22). There holiness and blessing will abide — the fruit of redeeming love. To this sacred rest God will in His own time bring the willing feet of every sinner saved by grace.

THE RAPTURE OF ENOCH.

A very remarkable event took place in the early history of the human family — a man was taken to heaven without dying. Singularly, his name was the same as that of Cain's son, after whom the world's first city was called. "Enoch" means "dedicated." We may thus say of the one, that he was dedicated to the world; and of the other, that he was dedicated to God. Eternity will show which had the better part.

"Enoch walked with God." This is twice stated in Gen. 5. The meaning is that his heart found all its delight in the Creator. Others might spend their strength in ornamenting a ruined world if they were so minded; Enoch looked away from the ruin to God. We need not marvel at the statement of a later commentator, that "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11: 5). Nothing is so gratifying to God as to find loyal hearts in the midst of a revolted race.

His intimacy with the Creator led to Enoch being taken into the divine confidence concerning judgement to come. His prophecy as to this was for some reason held back by the recording Spirit until towards the close of the book of God. It will be found in the epistle of Jude. Divine forbearance was running out in Enoch's day, and destruction was imminent. The early judgement of the flood was typical of an even greater judgement that is still to come. (Compare Jude 14-15 with Luke 17: 26-27).

But while Enoch solemnly warned his contemporaries of the stroke so soon to fall (doubtless receiving in return the scorn that is the usual lot of faithful witnesses in all ages), he was himself removed from the earth before the storm burst. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him" (Heb. 11: 5). No hint is given of any public display on this momentous occasion; Enoch was simply missed, that is all. No grave was required for him; no funeral rites were celebrated over him; without tasting the pangs of death, he was suddenly transported into the divine presence.

Here surely is ample material for the contempt of the proud! What cannot be understood cannot be believed. Anything outside the range of human experience is necessarily untrue. What is even more serious, anything that brings in the power of God must be instantly rejected. Such is the condition of the public mind in Christendom in the twentieth century. But what a rude shock will be administered to men's materialism when presently the Son of God descends into the air, and accomplishes for myriads what was accomplished for Enoch so long ago! For it is undeniable that Scripture speaks of the Saviour's personal coming as the proper hope of every believing soul. Every sleeping saint will be raised, and every living saint will be changed in that blissful moment, which may come upon us at any hour (1 Thess. 4: 16-17). No public display need be expected; simply the abrupt disappearance of all who love the Saviour's name. But what moral gloom will then settle down upon this infidel world!

THE FLOOD.

The flood is a calamity of which men are "willingly ignorant" (2 Peter 3: 5-6). It is a disagreeable thought that this world, with all its works, was once swept bare by the judgement of God; because conscience naturally suggests that what has happened once may happen again. This, indeed, is exactly what Peter tells us in the chapter quoted above. "The heavens and the earth which are now . . . are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men." Never again will a deluge descend; as to this, God has pledged His word; the judgement that is now impending will be of a different character altogether.

About sixteen and a half centuries after the creation of Adam the flood came. Corruption and violence filled the earth. The spirit world, too, had broken bounds, and formed evil links with the human family. This is what is meant in Gen. 6: 1-4, where we read of the sons of God taking to themselves wives of the daughters of men, with marvellous progeny as the result of the union. The spirit world is exceedingly active in our day also, though after a different fashion. Under the name of Spiritualism, forbidden links are being formed between men and fallen angels continually, to the ruin of the men who are thus beguiled.

God never destroys without warning. Accordingly a hundred and twenty years' notice was given of the approaching desolation. During this period men were favoured with the ministrations of "Noah, a preacher of righteousness," the result in that scornful age being nil, none being saved but Noah and his house. The ark was constructed in obedience to the word of God, and according to divine specifications. In it were preserved two of every living species, but seven of those clean beasts and birds that would afterwards be required for sacrifice and food. Seven days after the hand of God shut the door of the ark, the stroke fell, the rain continuing for forty days and forty nights without cessation. The visitation was universal: "all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered" (Gen. 7: 19). This world-wide ruin is twice referred to in the ancient book of Job (Job 12: 15; Job 22: 16), besides being solemnly vouched for by the Son of God in the course of His oral ministry, and by the Spirit of God in the epistles of Peter and to the Hebrews. It is sheer fool-hardiness to doubt the fact.

The man who, "moved with fear," obeyed the word of God, was saved, with all his house. The scoffers of his day miserably perished. Salvation from the destruction that is now approaching is only to be found in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His atoning sacrifice has made it possible for God to extend the riches of His grace to all, even the most guilty. Divine long-suffering now lingers over the children of men, if haply they will turn to their God. But there are limits to the patience of God; when the limit is reached, heaven will once more interfere in the affairs of men — first the judgement of the quick at Christ's appearing, followed by the judgement of the dead a thousand years' later — to the

eternal confusion of all unbelief and pride.

THE COVENANT WITH NOAH.

It was a solemn moment when Noah and his family came forth from the ark, after being confined therein a year and seventeen days. It marked a fresh start for the human family. A new era now opened. Noah's first act was to build, not a house, but an altar, on which he offered sacrifices of every clean beast and fowl (Gen. 8: 15-22). The patriarch thus acknowledged that his only possible ground of standing before a holy God was atonement — an impressive lesson surely for men in every age. As that solitary column of smoke ascended to heaven, "Jehovah smelled a sweet savour." His mind ran on from that altar to Calvary, where in due time the great sacrifice would be offered, to which every other sacrifice pointed. He responded at once, and pledged His word that He would never again smite everything living as He had done. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." God fully recognised that man's heart was not one whit better for the judgement that had been executed; yet in grace He bound Himself by this covenant.

Noah's was the second recorded sacrifice, Abel's being the first. Abel's sacrifice shows the ground on which the believing individual stands with God; Noah's shows the ground on which the earth stands with God. It is because of Christ's atonement that God is able to bear with the appalling mass of evil that meets His eye as He looks down from above. Patience would be impossible were it not for the atoning sacrifice which is ever before the mind of God. The infidel thus owes the very air he breathes to the Saviour whose name he scorns.

For the second time in Scripture we read "God blessed" (Gen. 9: 1; Gen. 1: 28). He blessed the first man and his wife as they came forth perfect from His hand; now He blesses Noah and his sons — sinful men — on the ground of the atoning sacrifice. His covenant with the human family at this point is given at length in Gen. 9, the rainbow (not necessarily seen then for the first time) being established as the token of it. Flesh might now be eaten, in addition to the herbs granted at the beginning. Government was now instituted, there being no trace of anything of the kind before the flood. The fundamental principle of all government is contained in the words: "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man. "To slay one thus characterised is to aim a blow at God Himself; the offender in consequence forfeits his life. Maudlin sentimentality would abrogate this today in defiance of the Word of God. Yet Rom. 13: 4 should have checked the presumptuous idea; writing after the grace of Christianity had come in, the apostle says of the magistrate, "he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The sword is not, as the rod may be, for correction, but for putting to death. The two first recorded rulers, Noah and Nimrod, failed; the one being weak and the other tyrannical. Herein we have a true picture of all human government until the Son of man appears. Not till then will the earth experience perfection of rule and blessing.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

By the terms of the divine mandate men were to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9: 1). To be obedient to this, they must scatter, for how else could the replenishing of "the earth" be accomplished? But against this command of God the will of men rose up rebelliously. They would concentrate, and so consolidate their power and importance. A city and a tower were appointed

as the centre and expression of their unity. The site chosen for these was the plain of Shinar, for many succeeding centuries one of Satan's chief distributing points, and possibly to be so again before "man's day" closes.

The human heart is incorrigible in its evil. The mind of the flesh is ever enmity against God, and insolently insubordinate where His will is concerned. This is the only explanation of the presumption which led to the building of Babel so soon after the awful visitation of the flood. Men said: "Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth" (Gen. 11: 19). It was not a short road to heaven that was in their minds, but something imposing to look upon, worthy to be the metropolis of the human race.

Judgement followed, though not without investigation on the part of Jehovah, who "came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men had builded." Confusion of speech was the judgement inflicted, which not only brought men's building schemes to an abrupt termination, but also scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth, with diverse and often conflicting interests from that hour. This was the commencement of national life. What has since been called "patriotism" is simply jealousy for the interests of one's own nation in opposition to the interests of every other; or, in other words, corporate selfishness. But sin brought such a condition of things into our midst.

The Babel principle has been cherished in men's hearts ever since the day of Gen. 11, and indeed was never more popular than at the present crisis. The atmosphere is full of it under the various names of combines, alliances, co-operation and trade unions. It enters into every sphere, commercial, political, and religious. But in these last days, as in the world's earlier ages, it is infidelity and independence of God, little as some well-meaning supporters of the principle suspect it.

Scripture is very clear as to the ultimate issue of the Babel line of things. Everything professedly Christian will develop into the harlot of Rev. 17, and everything political in Europe into the blasphemous ten-horned beast of the same chapter. For a brief space the ecclesiastical will dominate the civil power once more, only to be utterly destroyed by it when sufficient strength and confidence are found for the onslaught. Then the confederated nations will turn upon the Lamb at His appearing, to their own ruin (Rev. 17: 12-18). Thus will Psalm 2. find its final accomplishment, and the Kingdom of the Man of God's choice be established on the overthrow of all man's foolish pride and glory.

THE CALL OF ABRAM.

To the cursory reader it may seem a comparatively small matter that God should reveal Himself to a man living in Chaldea, and lead him across the Euphrates into a position of separation to Himself in the land of Canaan; but in reality it was a step of the greatest importance in its bearing upon the whole future history of the world. The meaning of it will be universally understood when the Kingdom of the Son of man is brought in.

The position was this. A new and terrible form of evil had been introduced into the world since the flood in the shape of idolatry. Men did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and so fell helplessly into the hands of Satan. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Idol-worship is in reality demon-worship (1 Cor. 10: 20). Both Noah and Shem were still living when this new departure began, but their influence appears to have been nil. The new torrent of iniquity swept all before it. Then it was that God stepped in, and made Himself known to Abram, in grace giving him magnificent promises, which went far beyond his own need, comprehending in their scope the world at large unto the utmost bounds of time.

That caravan crossing the desert was thus a thing of no small interest to God. Its journey was no ordinary event. It marked an important step in the working out of the divine plans. The venerable figure at the head of that company was he through whom, in His own good time, God would bless the world. How good is our God! Men were everywhere in revolt against Him; human pride and presumption had occasioned the great Babel catastrophe; idolatry had become universal; yet He spoke of blessing! His object in the call of Abram was to establish a channel by means of which He might yet deliver a ruined world. Accordingly the promise ran thus: "I will make of thee a great nation; I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 3). The divine thought was more fully expressed after the offering of Isaac, in the words "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 18). The "Seed," on whom thus everything depends, is Christ, as the apostle shows in Gal. 3: 16. Isaac, whom Abraham received again from the dead "in a figure," is a type of the Lord Jesus, who went into death itself in order to make atonement for sin, and who now lives again in the power of an endless life.

In Gen. 10-11 we have the framework of the world (i.e., its national divisions) as we know it, and in the chapter following we have the man and the principle by which God would work in it. When Abraham's true Seed, the Lord Jesus, comes forth from heaven, and brings back into divine favour Abraham's children according to the flesh, the twelve tribes of Israel, the world's final deliverance will be brought in. Satan will be cast out, and fullness of blessing will be enjoyed from pole to pole. But while Israel remains obdurate, Christ remains seated in the glory on high, and the blessing promised to Abraham so long ago waits for its accomplishment.

THE FIRST BATTLE.

The expedition of Chedorlaomer and his allies against the King of Sodom and his confederates was not a very big thing in itself, but a whole chapter of Holy Scripture is devoted to it for two important reasons. First, because a saint of God (Lot) was involved in the affair; and second, because the world's first recorded battle is in many respects a foreshadowing of the last great catastrophe of Armageddon.

Faith accepts the record contained in Gen. 14, not because the tablets confirm it (however interesting this fact may be), but because the Spirit of God has written it. He who only accepts the statements of Scripture when outside evidences confirm them is at heart an infidel. This is a serious consideration for our souls in such a day as the present.

Lot's sufferings at the hands of the Gentile Kings were wholly due to his unfaithfulness to God. Had he stood, like Abram, in separation from the world and its ways, his path might have been as peaceful and happy as his. Seeking worldly advantages for himself and his family, he sank to the world's level, and accordingly suffered with it in the day of tribulation. He is thus a type of the erring nation of Israel; which, in consequence of unfaithfulness to God, has long been the football of the nations, and which is destined to suffer terribly in the world's last great scrimmage before the Kingdom of the Son of man appears.

Abram, in his swift destruction of the enemy and deliverance of Lot and his family, is a type of the Lord Jesus, who will be the hope of Israel at the end. When matters are at their worst for that nation, His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives, and the enemies of His people will melt away as snow before the sun (Zech. 14). The highest developments of scientific warfare will be impotent in the presence of His mighty power. In that day of glorious manifestation His saints will appear with Him, to

the astonishment of all who behold the sight.

Returning from their victory, Abram and his company were met by Melchizedek, King of Salem, priest of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth. Ministering to the victors bread and wine for their refreshment, Melchizedek took the mediator's place, by blessing Abram in the name of the Most High, and the Most High on Abram's behalf. Heb. 7 interprets this typical scene for us. The King-Priest represents the Lord Jesus in the day of His appearing, when He will meet famished Israel with blessing from God, proclaiming in that mighty moment the supremacy of God (so long disputed by rebellious man), and His rights over both heaven and earth. This step will reverse everything for Israel and for the world at large. It will be "the day of the Lord," when He alone will be exalted, and every proud imagination will be laid low. The consequence of this will be peace and blessing from pole to pole.

Meanwhile, men of faith see the great King-Priest in His present heavenly glory, and are by Him refreshed and blessed. It is He who maintains His own in the enjoyment of heavenly things, strengthening them thus to refuse the world even as Abram was enabled to refuse all that was offered to him by the King of Sodom.

THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM.

It was an appalling catastrophe, the destruction of the cities of the plain. Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim were all involved in the stroke (Deut. 29: 23) Sodom and her daughter cities had been favoured with exceptional prosperity, but their prosperity became their ruin. "Pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness" bred iniquity such as a righteous God would not tolerate indefinitely (Ezek. 16: 49). The evil of Sodom has contributed a word to our own Dictionary, the very mention of which fills every right-minded person with loathing.

God communicated His purpose concerning these vile cities to Abraham, who was breathing the pure air of the plains of Mamre, sufficiently removed from the pestilential atmosphere of Sodom and Gomorrah. To him God went, and announced what He was about to do. This led to the remarkable intercession recorded in Gen. 18, probably the most marvellous experience that any man has ever had with God. Beginning with fifty, and descending to ten, Abraham, overwhelmed by what God had revealed to him, pleaded that if that small number of righteous people could be found in Sodom God would spare the place. To what a condition of moral depravity had the city sunk when even the all-searching eye of the Creator could not discern ten righteous persons therein!

There was, however, one man there who must needs be delivered. Lot, however inconsistent in his ways, was at heart a true believer. Ages later, he was divinely described as 'just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked' (2 Peter 2: 7). He had no business in such company. Had he walked in separation to God, as Abraham, he might have enjoyed fellowship with God, and the ruin which fell upon his own family had never happened. The miserable story contained in Gen. 19 has been written for the warning of all who in every age profess to fear God. Believers who mix themselves with the world will in no wise be a help to it (even though this may be their hope); the world will but defile them, and lead them astray from God.

Lot having been pulled out of Sodom by the angels, "Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Gen. 19: 24, 25). Almost in a moment of time several once prosperous cities were so effectually wiped out of existence

by the judgement of God that to-day we have no certainty as to the spot upon which they stood. Well may the apostle exclaim: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 31).

The overthrow of Sodom has a voice to the men of this generation, the Lord Jesus having pointed out a solemn analogy between the desolation of that day and the judgement of the quick at His appearing (Luke 18: 28-30). In Lot's time people ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and builded, up to the very moment of their destruction. The visit of the heavenly messengers, instead of inspiring awe, only aroused their devilry to its fullest extent. And so the stroke fell. Equally careless, equally infidel, will the world be found in the dread day, not far distant, when the Son of man comes forth in all His glory to judge and make war.

THE EXODUS.

Viewed from a human standpoint, the Exodus was nothing more than the escape of a comparatively insignificant people from a state of bondage. But viewed from a divine standpoint, the event was an exceedingly important one in connection with the ways of God in relation to the earth. The people in question (Israel) had been divinely chosen to lead, and communicate blessing to, all the nations, in accordance with the promise to Abram, their forefather, "thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 17, 18).

The divine plan for universal blessing required therefore the emancipation of Israel from the house of bondage. Not that their servitude was in any way accidental; it had been foreseen, and even foretold to Abram when as yet he had no child (Gen. 15: 13-16). It was part of God's education of the people destined for so exalted a position, that they should sojourn in a strange land, and endure affliction there four hundred years. God is so truly the supreme Arbiter of everything that Satan was powerless to detain the people a single day beyond the appointed time.

Behold Israel now marching forth from Egypt. The power of the mightiest empire of antiquity had been completely shattered by the hand of God in order that the people of His choice might go free. They marched forth with but the feeblest sense of their high calling and destiny, yet were they marked out by the Disposer of all to govern and bless all the nations of the earth. Their miserable unbelief and sin has involved the temporary shelving of this marvellous purpose of grace. The world's blessing awaits Israel's repentance and restoration to divine favour. This will not be until Christ appears. As the Seed of Abraham and the Heir of David He will in His day make the crooked straight and the rough plain. Everything turns upon Him. He is the world's only hope. While He remains in the heavens, Satan continues the prince of this world, and men pursue their unhappy course as the tools of his malignity. His manifestation in glory will bring in rest and peace for Israel and for all.

Because everything thus turns upon Christ, and upon Israel in connection with Him, Satan devised the murderous conspiracy described in Ex. 1: 15-22. By Pharaoh's decree every male child of the people of Israel was to be cast into the Nile. Had this decree been carried into execution, what would have become of the purposes of God? Israel as a nation would have ceased to be; and what of the Christ who was to be born of that nation? (Rom. 9: 5). But God is never thwarted by the enemy, whatever seeming success He may suffer him to obtain from time to time. In this case, He so wrought, in His wisdom, that Pharaoh's cruel edict only resulted in his having to educate and train in his own palace the man who was destined to lead Israel forth in triumph from Egypt, completely destroying the might of that empire in the process. We refer, of course, to Moses, who became the adopted son of the King's daughter. What a wonder working God is ours! How worthy of the confidence of our hearts! He will yet vindicate Himself and all His ways before an adoring universe.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW.

The history of Israel is the history of man. God's dealings with that nation have demonstrated the irremediable evil of flesh, wherever found. If nothing but corruption has been discovered in the people most privileged by God (and certainly Israel has received divine attention and care in a remarkable degree) then it follows that nothing but corruption may be looked for elsewhere. All the world is therefore brought under judgement to God (Rom 3: 19).

The giving of the law was thus not a mere local incident, but an event having a world-wide bearing. The circumstances were most impressive. Sinai trembled at the presence of God. Fire and smoke enveloped the mount, from the midst of which came forth the mysterious trumpet-sound, and the voice of Jehovah. No wonder even Moses said: "I exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb. 12: 21). So terrified were the people that they entreated Jehovah not to address them in that manner any more. To this he graciously responded, promising to speak to them later in a man — a prophet raised up from among their brethren, like unto Moses (Deut. 19: 15-19). This is none other than the Lord Jesus, in whom — in His words and ways — all the heart of God has been expressed. Meanwhile, Moses was appointed to act as mediator between God and the people.

What was the divine object in the giving of the law? As to this, Christendom seems utterly confused. Certainly God never entertained the most distant thought that anyone would attain to righteousness by means of it. Such is man's state Godward, that his first need is life. This, as Gal. 3: 21 assures us, the law can never give, how then can it minister righteousness? The law was Israel's schoolmaster until Christ came (Gal. 3: 24); now that He has come, grace and truth are with us, and law is proclaimed no more. When it was first sought to incorporate law with Christianity, it was sternly opposed by the devoted Paul, who foresaw the disastrous consequences that would ensue if it were permitted. On no subject does he write more vigorously in his epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians. In Rom. 7 he goes so far as to assert that he who would go on with both law and Christ at the same time is as a woman trafficking with two husbands. Alas! the apostle has been so little understood that to this hour the yoke of the law is upon the necks of the majority in Christendom (leaders and followers alike), to the serious detriment of the grace of God.

Why then was the law given? The answer of Scripture is plain enough. "It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come" (Gal. 3: 19). "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3: 20). These statements show that the law was intended to show up man's evil, as a mirror may reveal one's external uncleanness. The law was thus intended to prepare the way for Christ, in bringing home to men their deep need of a Saviour. This is beautifully expressed in the law chapter — Ex. 20. Ere the chapter closes we read: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings in all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee and bless thee." The altar and the sacrifice speak of Christ and His cross. The sound of the ten commandments had scarcely died away when God began to speak of another principle altogether. His mind passed from Sinai to Calvary, where the mighty work was to be accomplished which would perfectly meet the sinner's need once and for ever.

It is tempting God, subverting souls, and perverting the Gospel to preach law now that Christ has come (Acts 15: 10, 24; Gal. 1: 7). As for Christians, they are dead to the law, Christ risen and glorified being now their Pattern and Object. Occupation with Him makes men practically heavenly, a blessed result which the law never even proposed to those under it.

THE ELECTION OF DAVID.

When Jehovah first took Israel into relationship with Himself, i.e., at the time of their deliverance from Egypt, He established Moses as the link between Himself and the people. Moses' office was that of mediator, as Gal. 3: 19 shows. But in this he had no successor. Joshua became Israel's military leader; but in all matters relating to God he was made subservient to Eleazar the priest, who asked counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before Jehovah (Num. 27: 15-23). After the death of Moses the high priest thus became the link between God and His people. Through him the light of God was transmitted to men. But this, as everything else that God had entrusted to human hands, proved a miserable failure, the climax being reached in the days of Eli. The priesthood became so corrupt that God would no longer make use of it as a channel of blessing for His people. Accordingly, judgement was pronounced upon it; first in the message of the man of God to Eli, later in the night vision to the child Samuel (1 Sam. 2: 3).

But God is never without resource. At every turn He manifests His triumph over the wickedness of man and the machinations of Satan. No sooner does one thing fail, through human infirmity and sin, than He sets up something else — something better. Accordingly, in Hannah's inspired song we find mention of a "King," which was afterwards confirmed in the sentence upon Eli and his house (1 Sam. 2: 10, 35). This was now to be God's provision for His people. The King was henceforward to be the link between Himself and Israel (His divinely appointed channel of blessing), and the priesthood was to fall back into the shade.

God's choice for the Kingship was David, but human impatience brought in Saul's forty years' disastrous misrule before the man of God's purpose reached the throne. Remarkably, in Ps. 78, where the whole story of Israel's unfaithfulness from the exodus to David is traced, no mention whatever is made of Saul and his administration. The failure and ruin of the priesthood, with the loss of the ark, is graphically described in vv 59-64; and then the Spirit of God passes on to God's election of David as His King, and of Zion as His centre and rest. The establishment of David upon Israel's throne was divine intervention in grace. God was thus setting up for the blessing of His people a new institution upon the ruins of the old. Saul's reign came in merely as an interruption; it formed no part of God's purpose in connection with Israel and the earth.

Let us see to it that we understand the significance of God's election of David and Zion. It was in reality an important step in the direction of the world's final blessing. David's throne was "the throne of Jehovah," and his metropolis was God's everlasting earthly rest (1 Chron. 29: 23; Ps. 132: 14). God's purpose was to govern and bless the nations of the earth by means of Israel and the house of David. The evil ways of the chosen people and their royal house have deferred the blessing, but the purpose of God's heart has never been abandoned. But everything now waits for Christ. When He appears He will take in hand, and give effect to, everything in which man has failed. The marred headship of Adam, the corrupted priesthood of Aaron, the fallen Kingship of David, and all else will be taken up anew by Him, with no possibility of failure for ever. But such is man's sinful condition that even the Son of God could only minister blessing to him on the ground of His own precious atoning blood. This makes everything sure and stable for eternity.

THE DISRUPTION OF ISRAEL.

It was a calamity for the world when the Kingdom of David was rent asunder in the hands of Rehoboam. The gracious purpose of God concerning the earth — to deliver it and bless it by means of

Israel and David's royal house - was thereby rendered impossible for the time being. The disaster added another to the already long list of disappointments through human infirmity and sin, and made it more than ever manifest that there is but one man in the universe whom God can trust — His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus.

Solomon succeeded to a splendid inheritance. David's victories had brought into subjection every Kingdom from the Nile to the Euphrates. Boundless wealth was at Solomon's command as one result of his father's triumphs. Much of this was employed in the construction of the magnificent temple which graced Mount Moriah for about four centuries. Such was the fame of Solomon's wisdom and glory that monarchs came from afar to render willing homage at his feet (2 Chron. 9: 1, 14). In the midst of his prosperity he entertained the painful reflection that possibly the heir to it all might prove to be a fool. "Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity" (Eccles. 2: 18, 19). As the royal philosopher feared, so it happened. Refusing to listen to the reasonable complaints of his subjects, Rehoboam drove ten of Israel's twelve tribes into revolt against the house of David, the mischief of which has not been repaired unto this day (2 Chron. 10).

But the disaster had another, and even deeper, cause than the folly of Rehoboam. Solomon himself fell into grievous sins in his old age (1 Kings 11). He had been given to understand by Jehovah Himself, at the beginning of his reign, that the continuance of his Kingdom depended upon his personal fidelity. "If thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, 'There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.' But if ye turn away, and forsake My statutes," etc. (2 Chron. 7: 17-22). Solomon, alas! did not abide faithful. His hand was not steady enough to hold the full cup of earthly glory and blessing which the great God put into it. His Kingdom therefore became doomed, its ruin being accelerated by the headstrong policy of his successor.

But no purpose of God can ever come to naught. His usual method in all matters is to commit things first into the hands of some responsible man; then, when he breaks down, to put aside that particular matter until the day of the Lord Jesus, and meanwhile take up something else. The result of these testings goes to prove that there is no goodness in man, let him be placed as favourably as he may, and that the only hope both for God and the creature is the Lord Jesus. This is a wholesome, if a humiliating, lesson for each individual soul to learn, for it serves to cast us, in all our guilt and need, upon the Saviour.

God certainly pledged Himself to David that He would establish his seed for ever, and build up his throne to all generations (Ps. 89: 4), but He did not bind Himself to maintain in power Solomon, Rehoboam, or any other. Everything now awaits the appearing of "His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1: 3). When He comes forth from heaven, the throne of David will be set up anew, and be once more the throne of Jehovah upon earth. Satan will be forthwith consigned to the abyss, and all the earth will be delivered and blessed. Israel's national breach will then be divinely healed for ever.

THE SUPREMACY OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

While God still tolerated the people of Israel and the house of David, He did not suffer any other

power to become supreme amongst the nations. After the disruption of Israel, David's heirs ruled over their attenuated dominion for nearly four hundred years, continuing this indeed more than a century after the deportation of the revolted ten tribes. During all this time the ancient powers of Assyria and Egypt contended for supremacy in the earth, but neither was permitted to attain its object. When the time came that God could no longer bear with the evil ways of the chosen nation, He Himself raised up Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who was strengthened to subdue, first Assyria, and then Egypt, all the minor contiguous Kingdoms falling an easy prey to his arms. As late as the days of Manasseh, Babylon was still a vassal city of the Assyrian Empire (2 Chron. 33: 11).

The divine setting up of Nebuchadnezzar was one of "earth's notable events." It marked an epoch in the history of the world. Israel was by no means the only iniquitous nation, all others having departed from God in perhaps an even greater degree. Accordingly while God was chastising His own people, He took occasion to chastise other guilty nations also. "Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith Jehovah of hosts." Such is the word of the Lord in Jer. 25: 29. A complete break-up of the whole political framework of the world ensued, Nebuchadnezzar becoming God's hammer for this purpose. Very early in his reign, the Chaldean was granted the vision of the great image (Dan. 2), in the interpretation of which he was told by the prophet that it was the God of heaven who had given him his Kingdom, strength, and glory, and that his continuance in this position of exaltation depended entirely upon his faithfulness to Him who doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4: 35). It was impossible that God should uphold the house of Nebuchadnezzar, if unfaithful, after having desolated the house of David for its sin.

It happened with Nebuchadnezzar and his heirs as with all others to whom God has committed trusts. Sin marked their career, though Nebuchadnezzar himself became converted as the result of God's heavy dealings with him described in Dan. 4. After less than a century of supremacy, Babylon succumbed to the arms of the Medes and Persians; these in their turn yielding to Alexander and his Macedonians; who, later still, fell before the power of Rome. None of these received their authority directly from God, as Nebuchadnezzar. They followed one another providentially, being divinely permitted in each case to destroy its unfaithful predecessor and then supersede it in the earth. The next Kingdom that God will establish is that of His Son (comp. Dan. 2: 36-38, 44). After the recrudescence of the fourth empire (Rome) for a short period, God will bring once more upon the scene the Lord Jesus who will take all the affairs of earth into His own blessed hands, and rule for the divine glory. As Son of David, He will rule over the house of Jacob; as Son of man His dominion will cover the whole earth. But the entire political framework of the world must once more be shattered before His glorious Kingdom can be brought in. When HE obtains His throne, every thing will be established on an immutable basis for ever.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY THE CHALDEANS.

It was a sad day for many pious hearts when Jerusalem capitulated to Nebuchadnezzar, and it was a yet more melancholy occasion when the temple was destroyed by the King's officer a month later. Both days were formally observed as fasts for long afterwards (2 Kings 25: 1-10; Zech. 7: 3; 8: 19). But perhaps few realised the full significance of what had happened. Doubtless many cities and temples had been devastated by Nebuchadnezzar, but the overthrow of Jerusalem could not be put into the same category with them. Jerusalem was the chosen resting place of Jehovah (Ps. 132: 14), its sanctuary was His house, and the throne of David was His throne (1 Chron. 29: 23). Accordingly the giving up of

these to the enemy was the abandonment (at least for a season) of a divine purpose. Jerusalem was destined to be the centre of light and blessing for the world, and the seat of its administration. But God will be no partner with iniquity. He could therefore do no less than chastise His people when their ways became utterly corrupt before Him.

God has now no earthly throne and no earthly dwelling-place. He has withdrawn from the active government of the earth. "I will go and return to My place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face; in their affliction they will seek Me earnestly" (Hosea 5: 15). In keeping with this He is styled "the God of heaven" in the later Old Testament books. His title, "Lord of the earth," so familiar in Joshua's day will not be put forward again until the last great crisis arrives (Joshua 3: 11; Rev. 11: 4). The heart of God felt the necessity for this change very keenly. Among many touching outbursts, we hear Him expressing Himself thus in Jer. 12: 7: "I have forsaken Mine house, I have left Mine heritage; I have given the dearly-beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies." The reference is to Israel, the failing, but loved, people of His choice.

It is vain to look for universal conversion, and equally vain to search for a place of worship on earth, while Jehovah's relations with Israel are suspended. When, in the day of the Lord Jesus, He shows mercy once more to that nation, Jerusalem will become the centre of the world's government and worship, and all the woes of men will be banished. From Jerusalem, then "an eternal excellency," will flow fullness of blessing to all the nations. But until the ways of God permit of this blissful consummation, He is occupied with another kind of work altogether. By the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven on the basis of Christ's atoning blood, He is gathering out an elect company from every nation to share the heavenly glory of His Son for ever. When this purpose is concluded, the Lord Jesus will come, and take the whole host of His heavenly redeemed ones into the Father's house. Then the clock of prophecy will begin to move once more. The divine attention will again be directed to Israel and Jerusalem, and the last great tragedy will begin which will usher in the earth's final deliverance and blessing.

THE RETURN FROM BABYLON.

To the casual observer it must have seemed quite a small matter the restoration of about 42,000 Jews to the land of their fathers under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2). And when we remember that in the days of Jehoshaphat Judah was able to maintain a standing army of 1,160,000 men, the returned remnant was poor indeed (2 Chron. 17: 12-18). It was "a day of small things," as Zech. 4: 10 expresses it.

But the interest of all heaven was concentrated upon that band as it traversed the Syrian desert. These were the people who formed the centre and pivot of the divine ways in connection with the earth, and upon whom the world's blessing depended instrumentally. From their nation the Christ was to spring, "who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9: 4-5). He was the destined bruiser of the Serpent's head, the deliverer of the world from the thralldom of evil as the fruit of His great atonement. The prince at the head of the returning remnant was in the direct line of the Messiah's ancestry.

It was necessary that some part of the chosen nation should be restored to the land in order that the Christ might be presented to them. The "Lo Ammi" sentence was not revoked, nor will it be until the Millennial Kingdom. Only by the sufferance of their Gentile masters were they permitted once more to tread the soil of the promised land. In the wisdom of God they returned in order that they might be submitted to the supreme test of Christ. They had possessed the law for about nine centuries, and had violated it from first to last, slaughtering prophet after prophet who had been sent to recall them to

their duty. God was ere long to say: 'What shall I do? I will send My beloved Son: it may be they will reverence Him when they see Him.' The parable of the vineyard. (Luke 20: 9-15) gives Israel's entire history both in connection with the law and with the Son.

Our God works upon a set plan. Accordingly He revealed to Daniel the very time that the Messiah should appear. This will be found in the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, which was given at the epoch of Zerubbabel's expedition (Dan. 9: 24-27). The "weeks" are weeks of years, and were appointed to commence with Artaxerxes' decree as recorded in Neh. 2, and which was issued about ninety years after the restoration from Babylon. This important prophecy shows how perfectly everything is before the divine mind. Sixty-nine of the seventy weeks should run their course, and then "shall Messiah be cut off, and have nothing." That is, He should be crucified by those He came to bless. This has occasioned a hiatus in the prophecy. The seventieth week yet awaits fulfilment. At its close Israel's sorrows will be ended for ever.

Everything fails in human hands. The returned remnant might have been the nucleus by means of which God would have blessed the world. The rejection of His Son has made this impossible. Hence a fresh scattering ensued in due course, with no hope for Israel or the world until God acts apart from man altogether, and Himself establishes His Son upon His holy hill of Zion. But while this consummation lingers, individual sinners of every nation may be pardoned and blessed through faith in the Saviour's blood.

THE BAPTIST'S MISSION.

For nearly four centuries the prophetic voice had been silent in Israel. After the return from Babylon, the remnant were privileged to listen, first to Haggai and Zechariah, then to Malachi, after whose day the divine voice ceased to be heard. The Old Testament was thus completed, and the people were left in expectation of the promised Messiah, whose coming, if only they would receive Him, would end, not Israel's griefs merely, but the griefs of the whole creation.

The deep importance of the coming of the Messiah, and the tremendous issues dependent upon it, led God in His great mercy to appoint a forerunner who should prepare the way for His reception. This gracious arrangement put altogether beyond excuse those who refused Him. The forerunner thus holds an important place in Scripture, and in the development of the ways of God in connection with the earth. Both the first and the last of the prophets - Isaiah and Malachi — predicted his coming (Mark 1:1-3), and described beforehand the character of his mission. His own account of his errand runs thus: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ' make straight the way of the Lord'" (John 1: 23). His whole business therefore was to prepare men for the Christ. It is true he himself attracted much attention, the whole country being filled with discussion concerning him, but with all inquirers he sought to divert attention from himself, and to fix attention upon his more glorious Master and Lord. "I am not the Christ." "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1: 20, 29). This is after all the proper function of every true servant of God in every age.

Such was the condition of the human family, and of the favoured nation in particular, that a preparatory ministry was urgently needed before the Christ showed Himself from heaven. Long before, it had been written: "Who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth?" (Mal. 3: 2) John was accordingly sent in advance "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3: 3). John was a great leveller. All came under his lash; no class being spared. The religious sects, both Pharisees and Sadducees, were denounced for their hypocrisy; soldiers, tax-gatherers, and the multitude in general, all had their sins brought home to them vividly and

convincingly. Men must learn how sick they are ere they can appreciate the physician; it was to teach this great moral lesson that John the Baptist was sent into the world. But it was rapture to him, after having so heavily scourged all ranks and conditions of men for years, to be able, when the due moment arrived for it, to point men to their only Hope. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1: 29). The appointed sign, by which John knew certainly that it was He, was the descending Spirit. "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1: 34). This point having been reached, John's mission was ended. The preparatory work was over; the herald's unique duty was discharged. The Baptist accordingly fell into the shade, and the Christ of God was left before the eyes of men for their acceptance or rejection, as their hearts might be disposed. Not only in that day, but ever since the Saviour's manifestation, every man's eternal destiny has depended upon the attitude of his soul towards Him. The great test question for every child of Adam is this: "What think ye of Christ?"

"THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

The cross alone exceeds the incarnation in its deep moral significance. It was wonderful indeed that God should have stooped to human flesh; it was infinitely more wonderful that, having humbled Himself thus, He should have bowed His head in death — and such a death!

Ever since the day of Adam's transgression, men of faith had the hope shining before them that in God's good time One would undertake their cause who should be truly man, and yet infinitely more than man. He was to be the woman's Seed, the man having no place whatever in the prediction (Gen. 3: 15). Later, He was foretold as the virgin's Son (Isa. 7: 14), and by a contemporary prophet Bethlehem was designated as the spot where the mysterious event was to take place (Micah 5: 2). The prophets speak as distinctly of the Deity as of the humanity of the heavenly Visitant. Those already cited, Isaiah and Micah (leaving other witnesses aside), testify to Him as the Mighty God, the Father of eternity, and as the Governor whose goings forth have been from everlasting.

Here then we are face to face with a fact — an event which should bow down all our hearts in deepest adoration. God has been manifested amongst us in flesh. In our midst He lived and laboured; eating, drinking, weeping, praying even as ourselves; and then, His testimony being finished, He suffered and died. What grace is this; what transcendent love! Concern for men's salvation brought Him thus from on high. Sin can only be expiated by blood, but how could creature blood avail for this? How could the effusion of it settle a moral question, such as the question of human guilt? Angels and men were alike powerless for this stupendous undertaking. Only He against whom the sin had been committed was competent to purge it away. And it was for this He descended from heaven. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and this salvation is based entirely upon His atoning blood.

It is customary in some quarters to speak of Christ as though He were the flower of the human family, the crown of the human race. The guile of the serpent is here. Under the appearance of doing Him honour, men, in speaking thus of Him, deeply dishonour Him. He did not come from heaven to glorify man, as such sentiments would suggest; nor to rehabilitate man in his forfeited position in this world. He came to suffer for sins, the Just for the unjust, having it before Him to inaugurate in resurrection a new order of heavenly blessing for all who believe in His name. He may now only be known as Man upon the throne of God. Having taken upon Him the form of a servant, He will never again lay it aside. But not a single divine prerogative has He thus surrendered. He is indeed Man, truly Man at this hour, but in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the God-head bodily" (Col. 2: 9). Most blessed are they whose hearts have been drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit, and who are now consciously accepted in His acceptance, blessed with all His blessings, and loved even as He Himself is loved.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

It is becoming that we should in spirit draw our shoes from our feet, for we are standing upon holy ground. The cross of Christ is beyond all controversy the greatest moral wonder in the universe. That the Being who was before all worlds, who created them all, and who ever sustains them by His power — that such an One should have stooped to death, is a marvel too profound for the finite mind to grasp in its full value and significance. But no fact is more certain. Not only is it solemnly recorded in God-breathed Scriptures; the fact is more than accredited by its mighty influence upon the hearts of millions during nineteen centuries of the world's history. The evidences of the fact of the cross of Christ are around us on every hand.

The cross of Christ may be viewed in a twofold way. It was at once the full manifestation of the evil of the heart of man, and also the perfect revelation of the love of the heart of God. Considered from its human side, the cross is the greatest crime that has ever stained the dark pages of human history. It was perfect goodness violently rejected; more, it was God Himself cast out of the world His hands had made. All classes fell into line that day, in order that their own part in that most sinful of sins might be fully played. Jews and Gentiles were for once agreed; rival leaders buried their jealousies; proud religionists joined hands with the rabble for which at another moment they expressed their deepest contempt (John 7: 48-49). The whole human family was (representatively) one in casting out with execrations the Son of God. Even persons of education and refinement thought it not beneath them to scoff at His dying woe. The crime lies at the door of the world as such, and must yet be avenged by the Righteous One to whom the holy Sufferer committed His cause (John 17: 25; 1 Peter 2: 23). Only those who, in defiance of the world's enmity and scorn, come out distinctly in their confession of Him as Saviour and Lord will be exempted from the destruction that will most certainly fall when the long-suffering of God reaches its end.

The Cross of Christ ended the probationary periods of the world's history. The irremediable evil of flesh has now been fully demonstrated. Hence the words, "Now is the judgement of this world" (John 12: 31). Men everywhere are divinely written down as "lost"; wise indeed are they who humbly acknowledge themselves as such, and then cast themselves unreservedly upon the infinite grace of God. For all such there is salvation full and free.

But what a marvel of divine love is the cross of Calvary! Where man did his worst, God accomplished His very best. For sinners He sacrificed His well-beloved Son, and this in pursuance of a gracious purpose formed before the world began. There is no love like the love of God. Human love might possibly go the length of dying for a good man, "but God commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5: 7-8). Callous indeed must the heart be that can refuse attention to so touching a commendation. "Love is so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all." So mighty is the appeal of the cross of Christ to all who have come under its subduing influence that henceforward the heart is closed to the world with all its folly and sin.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain." Thus wrote the devoted apostle to the speculative Corinthians. Not that any among them questioned the fact of Christ's resurrection; it was rather the resurrection of men's bodies in general concerning which some had their doubts; but the apostle met their reasonings by insisting upon the indubitable fact of Christ's resurrection, indeed hanging his whole argument thereupon. If the Saviour has really been raised, then it follows that the

resurrection of the body is a divine truth. Every man will therefore be raised from the tomb when God's time comes for it.

The resurrection of Christ is the keystone of the arch of Christianity. If this mighty fact could be shaken, the whole superstructure of our faith must needs totter and fall. But in the mercy of God the fact is beyond all quibble. The action of the authorities in sealing the stone and setting a watch, the unbelief of the disciples, and the large number of persons who saw (some even eating with) the Risen One during the space of forty days, establishes the fact beyond dispute for every reasonable mind. He who suffered and died upon the cross of Calvary is indeed alive again, and enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The resurrection of Christ is a fact of great moral significance. (1) It was God's vindication of the character of His beloved Son. Men called Him a malefactor, and put Him to death as such (John 18: 30); God, to whom He appealed in His woe, intervened on the third day, not suffering His Holy One to see corruption (Ps. 16: 10). As Peter put it: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2: 24). (2) The resurrection was God's public expression of His acceptance of the atoning sacrifice. He who put the Saviour to grief in the day of Calvary, has Himself raised and exalted Him to His own right hand. What more striking proof could be looked for of God's perfect satisfaction with the work of His Son?

The fact of Christ's resurrection has also an important bearing upon the blessing of believers. (1) It is the assurance of our justification. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4: 25). In His perfect clearance from all charge of sin we perceive our own. None dare lay anything to the charge of God's elect, for God has justified them. (2) It is our moral severance from all things here. Those who have been baptised unto Christ Jesus have been baptised unto His death (Rom. 6: 3). In His death we read our own, God having accepted the death of Christ as on our behalf. His resurrection opens to us a new world of heavenly blessing which should henceforward possess and absorb the soul (Col. 3: 1-3). Such immense weight did the apostle attach to this that he burst forth in Phil. 3: 10 in holy yearning "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection." Finally, the resurrection of Christ is the earnest of resurrection from among the dead for all who believe in His name. "Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15: 23). What God has done for His Son, He will presently do for all His saints. It is impossible that God should involve them in the resurrection of judgement at the epoch of the dissolution of all things; He has purposed for them a resurrection identical in character with that of His Son. This will take place in the moment of His descent into the air according to 1 Thess. 4: 15-18. Then every sleeping saint will be raised, and every living believer will be changed, that all may enter in one complete company into the eternal blessedness of the Father's house on high.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

The disciples were doubtless deeply perplexed when the Saviour said to them: "What then if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" (John 6: 62). Their expectation was that He had come from heaven to set up a visible Kingdom, with Jerusalem as its centre, and themselves as its principal officers. No other thought seems to have possessed them during the time of their companionship with the Lord. Their hopes were for the moment dashed to the ground when they beheld Him crucified, but His resurrection revived them again in all their vigour (Luke 24: 21; Acts 1: 6). That He had visited the earth to settle the sin question seems never to have been understood by them during the years of the Saviour's sojourn.

Yet this was the mighty work which He came to accomplish. The Kingdom was indeed offered to Israel, and will yet be established spite of their scornful unbelief, but the greater work of making atonement for sin must needs be wrought (and was wrought) in the hour of His rejection and woe. It has thus come about, in the wonderful ways of God, that the precious blood, so guiltily shed by the hands of wicked men, has made propitiation for sin, even for the sin of shedding it. The answer to this, for the Holy Sufferer Himself, is glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

There is thus a Man accepted in heaven. Upon the throne of God He sits, with all the favour and love of God resting upon Him eternally. Never again will He touch the sin question (save for judgement at the last day); never more will the wrath of God be poured out upon Him. His one perfect offering has answered every possible demand of the throne of God. In His acceptance, every believer in His name is entitled to see his own. "Accepted in the Beloved" is God's account of His people (Eph. 1: 6). Faith's triumphant response to this is thus expressed: "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4: 7). He who looks into his own heart may well be troubled, and even filled with despair; but he who, taught by the Holy Spirit, looks away from himself to the accepted Saviour in the glory on high, enjoys rest and peace, full and eternal.

It was indeed a "notable event" for the earth when the Saviour took His departure from it. Its deliverance from the bondage of corruption was thereby indefinitely postponed. Refused as King by all, Jews and Gentiles alike, how could He establish the glorious kingdom so "abundantly spoken of by the prophets and psalmists in the Old Testament Scriptures? Earth had signified that it had no room for Him; what then could He do but return to the glory from whence He came? With anxious eyes the disciples beheld Him ascend from the Bethany slope of Mount Olivet, gazing intently after Him until a cloud received Him out of their sight. But ere any expression of grief or disappointment became possible, two shining ones stood by them with the assurance that the same Jesus, who had been taken from them into heaven, should so come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1: 10-11). Fortified with this divine comfort "they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24: 52). The long-hoped-for Kingdom must now stand over until another day; meanwhile they waited in prayer in the city of David for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which would fit them for the great spiritual enterprise that was henceforward to occupy their lives.

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

It was a great moment when the Holy Spirit of God descended from heaven to earth to take charge of the interests of the absent Christ. This took place ten days after the glorification of the Son. It was in answer to the Son's request, and in fulfilment of His promise to His disciples before His departure. The atoning sacrifice of Christ having satisfied all the claims of divine righteousness; nay, more, He by His costly sacrifice having perfectly glorified God, no blessing nor privilege was too vast or too wonderful for God to bestow upon His people. Accordingly the Holy Spirit was poured forth — that precious gift of love which remains with us during the whole period of the Saviour's session on high.

The Spirit's coming has proved the world to be in a most solemn position in relation to God He is the personal demonstration to it of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement (John 16: 8-11). The very fact that Christ has to be represented here by a Vicar is witness that the world has been guilty of the enormous sin of rejecting Him; else would He not still be here to carry on His own interests? The Spirit's presence is proof too that righteousness has glorified the Son on high, and that the world as a system is now under divine sentence for its murder of Him.

Never in any previous age was the Spirit personally present on earth as now. This marks the period in which we live as the most wonderful in all the ways of God. One result of the Spirit's coming is that a divine unity has been created amongst the saints. Prior to Pentecost (Acts 2) believers were so many units dotted about on the face of the earth, those of the Jewish nation holding aloof from all others as outside the constituted fold. The death of Christ has abolished the fold altogether, and the coming of the Spirit has baptised all believers into one body, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, whether they be bond or free (1 Cor. 12: 13). Every Christian thus belongs to the assembly (or Church) of the living God, of which Christ is the exalted Head, and of which the Holy Spirit is the bond and the power. No other Church or spiritual organisation of any kind whatever has any place in the Scriptures. "Churches" may, and will, have an end; but the "Church" remains indestructible and indivisible for eternity. Divine workmanship can never fail.

The Spirit, moreover, is given to each individual believer as the Seal, the Anointing, and the Earnest from God (2 Cor. 1: 21, 22). He has graciously constituted Himself the servant of the saints for Christ's sake. Each saint, however insignificant, is guarded by His power and grace, and is tenderly nourished by His priceless ministry of Christ from day to day. The New Testament Scriptures are the Spirit's testimony to us concerning the One who has gone up from us. All that He was when Man on earth; all that He is as Man in the glory of God; and all that He will be in the ages that are yet to come, constitute the exhaustless theme of the Spirit of God in His gracious instruction of our souls. Who amongst us can take it all in? But what we are able to apprehend of these divine unfoldings should at least have the effect of delivering us completely in heart and mind from the present evil world. He to whom Christ is precious can never accept a home and a portion in the scene where He was slain.

PETER'S OVERTURE.

Israel having scornfully rejected the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit having now come from heaven to form another people for God, the door would seem to have been definitively closed to the guilty nation. But not so, for the riches of divine grace and forbearance are unsearchable. Accordingly the true nature of the Spirit's new work was not declared for the present, and another overture was addressed to Israel by divine command (doubtless in answer to the Saviour's prayer in Luke 23: 34), Peter being the instrument employed for the purpose. The terms of the overture are given in Acts 3: 19-21. The people assembled in Solomon's porch were told that if they would repent and be converted, their sins should be blotted out, and times of refreshing should come from the presence of Jehovah. God would, moreover, send back to them Him who was foreordained for their blessing, even Jesus whom they had crucified. He had gone up from them into heaven, and there He must remain until the times of the restitution of all things. It was now made to rest with Israel when this blissful era of universal restoration should be brought in.

Surely it was a moment of suspense for both heaven and earth. During long ages God had been speaking by His prophets of a glorious time when the earth shall be fully and finally delivered from the thralldom of Satan, and be brought back to its Creator. But it had been abundantly shown that earth's deliverance depends upon the Lord Jesus — the Man of God's right hand, the Son of man whom He has made strong for Himself (Ps. 80: 17).

Israel's sin had driven Him out of the world, and He was now in heaven. Earth can experience no Millennium of blessing while He remains away. His continuance in heaven, as Peter showed, is contingent upon Israel's attitude towards Him. While the nation which has been so divinely chosen to be the centre of light and blessing for the earth remains obdurate and unbelieving, Christ cannot return,

and universal blessing cannot be established.

How much, therefore, depended not only for that nation, but also for all the peoples of the earth, and for the brute creation as well, upon Israel's answer to the overture of Acts 3: 19-21! It was a momentous evening. Both heaven and earth waited, as it were, for Israel's "Yes" or "No" to the infinite mercy of God. The answer was not long delayed. While Peter was yet pleading with his audience, the priests and the captain of the temple, with the Sadducees (the "Higher Critics" of that day) came down upon him in rage, and dragged both himself and John off to prison. Those who should have been the instructors of the people in all that related to their true obedience to God thus openly declared themselves the very emissaries of the devil. Jesus they would have none of, whatever might be the consequences both for themselves and for others. Their hatred found an even stronger expression a little later when Stephen met his death at their lawless hands, as the reward of his faithful remonstrance with their souls as recorded in Acts 7. In this manner did they send a message after the rejected King, saying, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us '(Luke 19: 14). Accordingly universal blessing stands over until Israel comes to a better mind. Meanwhile the executors of God's judgements destroyed the murderers and burned up their city; God throughout the present period of Israel's unbelief being occupied with another work of grace altogether, even the gathering out from the world of the heavenly Church to share Christ's glory on high.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY TITUS.

Jerusalem as the earthly throne of Jehovah was captured and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar about six centuries before Christ. This was in consequence of its people's sins. A century and a half later the city was rebuilt under a decree granted to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes Longimanus, King of Persia (Neh. 2). Ninety years previously the temple had been restored by permission of Cyrus (Ezra 1). It was necessary in the ways of God that the city and sanctuary should be re-established in order that the Messiah might be presented to the people according to Jehovah's ancient promises of grace. Daniel was even informed when the long-expected One should come. Sixty-nine heptads — 483 years — from the publication of Artaxerxes' decree, the Messiah should be found in the midst of His people (Dan. 9: 25). How faithfully and punctually this prediction was fulfilled all the world knows But Israel (that is, the returned remnant) refused the Messiah, with the result that deliverance and blessing have been deferred both for the chosen people themselves and for the whole creation.

The Saviour felt keenly the disastrous unbelief of the people. It had indeed been foretold that thus it would be, Dan. 9: 26 explicitly stating, "Messiah shall be cut off, and shall have nothing," but this did not mitigate the painfulness of the circumstances when they came to pass. Twice at least in the course of His ministry He warned His hearers of the impending desolation of their city as the fruit of their unbelief. In the parable of the Vineyard He declared that God would miserably destroy the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21: 41); and in the ensuing parable of the Marriage Supper He spoke of the King sending forth His armies and burning up the city of the despisers of His Son (Matt. 22). In addition to this, at His last approach He apostrophised guilty Jerusalem with tears, saying: "The days shall come upon thee, that thine Enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee around, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19: 41-44). Then in His great prophecy on Mount Olivet (all these utterances being delivered during the last sad week) He said to His disciples: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. . . . These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. . . . There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21: 20-24). Titus and his Roman legions were the instruments of this vengeance, as Josephus tells us in his lurid story of that most fearful catastrophe. The council of priests in our Lord's day felt that their choice lay between Christ and the Romans (John 11: 47-48). They were indeed right, but not in the way their murderous hearts supposed. To sacrifice Jesus, they thought, would be to escape the Romans; instead, their bloody deed brought the dreaded legions upon them as the ministers of the wrath of God.

And so Israel remains scattered, and Jerusalem continues in the hands of its Gentile masters until He comes whose right it is to reign. While Israel remains obdurate, His world-kingdom cannot be brought in. Earth's next notable event is the public manifestation of the Son of man. In power and majesty he will appear, to the confusion of all His foes. With that mighty day Israel's repentance stands connected in the purposes of God, to be followed by the deliverance and blessing of all the earth.