

The Coming and the Day of the Lord

2 Thessalonians 2

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(Section 2 of Three Prophetic Gems.)

Introduction and Background

The Jewish, Christian and Gentile portions have already been shown in the Lord's prophecy on Olivet. Let us now see what the Word of God reveals as to those (not born of God) who may bear the Christian name for the present, but will abandon it. No doubt "the world" comprises more than those who outwardly profess the Lord's name. It also embraces all the nations that are heathen, besides Israel. Scripture is not silent about any of these, and the light of God is as bright and sure on the future as on the past.

This is an important principle to hold fast in reading the written word. People are apt to judge of God by themselves. Since to speak with certainty of the future is impossible for us, man imagines that when *God* speaks about it, it also must be somewhat uncertain. This is the principle of infidelity. What difference does it make to God whether He is speaking about the past, the present or the future? He assuredly does not “think” in the sense of having to reflect, nor does He merely give an opinion. He knows all things. The only real question can be whether God communicates what He knows, or how far He has been pleased to do so. The prophetic word professes to do this! If God has communicated His mind about the future, as the Scriptures openly assert, it is simply faith to accept all. The moment our faith rests upon His Word, the light shines. What seemed confusion when we did not believe, turns to order when we do. The light was really there in Christ. It was our unbelief that caused the dimness and confusion.

The Word of God is the perfect revelation of His mind, no matter of what He spoke, or when, and God has been pleased to speak about the future. It is the special mark of His confidence. He told Abraham what He was going to do, what concerned not merely himself but others, even the cities of the plain. Abraham had no direct relation with those cities, though Lot had; yet not Lot but Abraham was told of the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot only learned it just in time to be saved, so as by fire. But Abraham knew it in peace beforehand and interceded with God for righteous Lot. Our portion ought to be that of Abraham rather than of Lot. Yet there are those of the future who will be saved just in time to escape destruction. They will be in the sphere of judgment and will pass through it in a measure, but will nevertheless be preserved. The mass will be destroyed for their lawless evil, along with others who are unbelieving: “remember Lot's wife.” But a remnant will be delivered, as the angels rescued Lot and his daughters. Theirs, however, will not be the happier portion: it is for those on high.

God has provided better things for us in every respect. He has given us the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Accordingly says Paul, writing to the Corinthians, “We have the mind of Christ,” the intelligence of Christ, the capacity of spiritual understanding. Of course, not even the apostles had the same measure as the Lord who had and was Himself absolutely the wisdom of God. We have nothing except in and by Him, and hence only in dependence on Him. However, we do not have only the mere mind of man, but of Christ, as Christians having the Holy Spirit.

The intelligence of Christ is given. This shows why what was true in principle of Abraham is distinctly and characteristically true of the Christian, for it could not said, in the full force of the term, that Abraham or any Old Testament saint had the mind of Christ. The Holy Spirit was not yet come, for Jesus was not yet glorified. Now that the Lord Jesus has accomplished redemption and gone up on high, He has sent down the Holy Spirit to dwell in His saints, to make them the temple of God. Even the body of each believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, just as His own body was: He on earth having His body perfectly holy and ever fit for the Spirit without redemption; we only in virtue of His blood. Hence never till the blood of Christ was shed could any saint here below become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was the living temple of God; we are only so because our sin is judged in His cross and our guilt blotted out by His blood. Therefore the Spirit of God comes down to dwell in us, putting honor on Christ Jesus for the redemption that is in Him. Because of this we Christians receive a divine power by the Spirit opening (in our measure) into all that God communicates.

This, though a digression, is very important to the subject which we are examining. Few things more indicate divine intelligence than profiting by the communication of the future. The Old Testament makes, in the main, this challenge to the false gods, a challenge which could only silence them, even if they had pretended ever so loudly before to give out oracles. As long as it was merely a question of

baffling inquirers, they might deceive by equivocal answers, but Isaiah in the most severe style shows their utter impotence to disclose the future. Now, a large part of the Old Testament consists of revelations of the future, not only of what was future then, but of what is future still. Even the historical part of Genesis is cast into typical forms of prophetic character, exhibiting throughout the mind of God. So does the intermediate poetical portion in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The prophets inspired by Jehovah expand in blessed terms on the bright future that yet awaits the world. Isaiah depicts the day of Jehovah when all that now obstructs the light of glory shall be removed, when all that thwarts the honor of the only true God shall fall, when Satan must lose his delusive power, when the nations of the earth, long groaning under oppression, shall be set free, and when the Jews (who ought to have been the leaders of all that is good and true) shall be delivered from unbelief's most withering thralldom and rise forever to the place that God's promise assigns them as the head of the nations then blessed, the priests of the world. They, converted and restored to Canaan, are destined to fill the foremost place when the earth itself is raised out of its long degradation. Jehovah has spoken it and His hand will accomplish all in due time. It is these prospects of the world on which the Old Testament prophets speak at great length and with graphic minuteness.

When the Lord Jesus came, on whom the accomplishment of prophecy depends for the realization of the kingdom of God, He was rejected. He was the King who brought in the kingdom in His person and presented it with final responsibility to Israel. Then in the cross came a mighty change of immense consequence to the world, when every bright hope seem blasted, when all expectation of glory for Israel was set in a deeper darkness than before. God made use of that moment of fallen hopes for the earth and for the earthly people, and for the nations of the world, for "some better thing." He made the cross of Christ bring in a completely new state, when Israel vanished for a season. It was a state distinct from that which prophets prepared the minds of men of old to expect, for their great testimony is to Israel restored and repentant under the Messiah reigning over the earth, blessed beyond example, and all creations and the nations, in happy subjection.

The reason for so unexpected a change is simple, and the ground when once taken was plain. The rejected Christ was raised from the dead. Having ascended to heaven, He took His seat there to begin another and heavenly order of blessing. He is seated there until a moment unknown and undisclosed, before which God effects altogether new things. This is Christianity which is therefore essentially of heaven. The prophets did not speak of heaven except incidentally. Prophecy refers to the earth. Although there are here and there allusions to heaven, no prophet and no prophecy gives a detailed opening out of what the Lord Jesus is doing now as Head of the Church at the right hand of God.

It was not the object of prophecy to speak of the Church. Prophecy is a lamp to which those who love the Lord do well to pay attention, for that lamp shines in a dark or squalid place, and the earth for the present is so. Such is the revealed use of prophecy: Christianity recognizes it fully. But there is a brighter light, not *the* day but daylight, as the apostle says, "Till day dawn and a daystar arise in your hearts." What does he mean by this? The accomplishment of prophecy? No, but more and better. Till the day of Jehovah comes for the world? No. He speaks of day dawning and a daystar arising *in the heart*, not of the day arising upon Zion and the world. This would be the accomplishment of prophecy, but he is intimating what the Spirit of God delights to bring into the heart of the Christian now.

The Jewish believer still was encouraged to use and value the prophetic lamp. More, the word of prophecy derived confirmation from what was seen on the holy mountain. Yet there ought to be through the gospel a far clearer light — the light of day, the brightness of heaven, not of the lamp. They as Christians were already to enjoy its effect. But it might now be so with those slow to learn more. Not

only were Christians born of God, as all saints are; they were all sons of light and sons of day (1 Thess. 5: 5). They thus are exhorted not to sleep, but to watch and be sober, and here to have their heavenly portion made good in their souls. The person of our Lord Jesus is our hope, the daystar — not merely the general light of heavenly dawn, but the daystar arising in the heart. This is the dawn of the proper Christian hope on the new affections. Many, then as now, were lukewarm and came short.

The actual arrival of the day of the Lord is another matter. It will occur in its own time. It was, however, a good thing to hold fast the prophetic lamp until a better light comes. There are far brighter associations into which the Christian is introduced now through Christ Jesus, but prophecy does not speak of them. The prophetic word does not contemplate the arising of the daystar in the heart. There it is the very reverse of Christ. The daystar of prophecy is rather the title of the Lord's enemy (Lucifer) as seen in Isaiah 14. The daystar that the Christian ought to have arising within is Christ while He is outside the world in heaven, before He shines as Sun of Righteousness upon the earth. By the gospel day dawns, and the daystar or heavenly hope of Christ arises in the heart while the Christian is here, as he enters into Christian privilege by the truth.

In consequence of this present privilege we stand in a wonderful position. Believing in the Lord Jesus, we have a Savior who is already come and has accomplished the redemption of our souls and given us remission of sins. We have eternal life and the knowledge of our absolute cleansing by the blood of Jesus in the sight of God through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Yet the condition of the world is no better, but far worse. The world has been led on by its prince to reject its only true King, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Son of God. We are in the secret of it; we know that the Anointed King has been refused, and we enlightened from above are with Him. We can afford to wait for the great day, but meanwhile we have daylight in the gospel before the day comes. The light cannot yet shine on the world, but it can shine in our hearts. So it is evident that we have more than the *lamp* of prophecy: we have the daylight and a heavenly hope in Christ. We are sons of the light and of the day.

Hence the Christian is to judge what is passing around, through God-inspired communications. According to the Word it belongs to our proper heritage. The Lord reproached the Jewish chiefs because they were unable to discern the signs of the times. We ought to be able not only to read what is before us according to God, but also to speak of the future with calm confidence because we believe the Word of God. We may humbly concern ourselves with all that God has communicated as having at heart the family interests, for if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. It would be unbecoming for the heirs not to make themselves acquainted with the inheritance. How strange, if Christians indwelt by the Spirit of God, could not understand! For this reason then, if we only knew our own privileges and depended on the Lord for it in living faith, we would be led into an immense field of blessing entirely outside the natural perception of man.

When the Lord was here below, He showed clearly what was to befall the earth. He says, "The field is the world," and He has told us what will become of the world where people would be Christianized. From the first He has shown us clearly what would be the result and why so. Good seed was sown, but there was an enemy who sowed bad seed. He does not even suggest that the bad seed would be improved. He intimates that the servants were zealous enough to remove the bad effects, but He reproves them. He warns that their effort to correct the evils brought into the field, the attempt to use the name of the Lord for reforming the "Christianized" world, only results in rooting up the good as well as the bad, if not more so.

When that consummation comes, there will be a process of discrimination in judgment. The wheat

will be removed on high, the darnel consumed below. Consequently, then will be the harvest, but this implies evil abounding up to the end of the age. Never will there be a time for this age when the preaching of the gospel or discipline can root out the evil sown by Satan from the beginning under the Christian name. This age will close by divine judgment on the lawless and on all the stumbling-blocks. The new age will be characterized by the Son of man's righteous rule over the earth in power and peace.

Therefore, those who expect the gradual removal of evil in this age are in opposition with the distinct teaching of the Lord Jesus. We are not saying this to repress efforts toward winning and building up souls. It is one thing to work in faith and another to expect the general and true blessing of the world as the result. Granted that this will surely come, but it is reserved for the Son of man. Should the bride of the Lamb be jealous? Such a result is not for the Church, which has been guilty from early days of being dragged down into the snares of the world, into its human activity, its politics, its ease, its honors, its gold and silver, and what not.

If Christendom is now suffering the buffets of the world, the world (once eagerly sought by Christians for its own things) is now turning against those who gave anything except true testimony to Christ and to what a Christian should be. But it will be worse and worse with the world. Ungrateful for whatever of God has been shed around by Christianity, it will turn again and rend her who abuses the name of the Lord for her own selfish and earthly interests. Evil was planted under the pretext of Christ's name, and this evil can never be rooted out until the judgment to be executed at the end of the age. It is presumptuous unbelief to expect or attempt it. The angels dealing judicially are quite distinct from and contrasted with the servants who sow and watch the good seed.

We repeat that the end of the age is not the end of the world. The phrase "end of the world" in Matthew 13: 39-40 in the KJV is an unequivocal error. Far from being the end of the world, the next verse proves the contrary. The Lord sends His angels and purges from the field (or world) what is offensive to Him. The lawless are judged, the scandals removed, the bad crop and the bad fish destroyed. In short the living wicked are punished and the righteous shine in the kingdom of their Father. The kingdom of the Son of man is the earthly part of the kingdom of God; the kingdom of the Father is its heavenly part, as the Lord explains. The heavenly things and the earthly things of the kingdom of God (compare John 3: 12) will be found then in undiminished brightness and harmony. In the Father's kingdom, according to His own counsels, the glorified saints shine to His own praise. The field or world which had been spoiled by Satan's wiles will be cleared of all its corruptions and their lawless agents. Thus, far from being the end of the world, the harvest which closes this age will be the beginning of the world's going onward in blessing under the displayed kingdom of the Son of Man and Son of God, the Head of the Church which will then be exalted and reigning with Him.

In the present age, Christ is on high and does not appear in glory or reign over the earth. There will follow another age when Christ, instead of being hidden, will be manifested to expel Satan and remove all that contaminates men and dishonors God. This connects itself with the Old Testament prophets. They all refer to the times of restitution of all things, the kingdom of Messiah over the earth, as the apostle preached to the men of Israel in Solomon's porch (Acts 3: 19). The mistake is in applying these things to the Church now. The *principle* often does apply in the New Testament: no one means to contest this, but there are limits. The fulfillment is another thing.

In the future kingdom both Jews and Gentiles will be blessed. Of this truth the apostle avails himself, pointing to the fact of both enjoying the blessings of grace, and this is sufficient to stop the mouth of the Jew. Thus we find the Old Testament applied in Romans 15: 10, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles,

with his people.”* How then could the Jew consistently object? Was it just to fly in the face of their own prophets? Did the Jew not affirm God's blessing on both to be contrary to the Bible? For the Gentiles are certainly blessed no less than the Jew by the gospel, and this the narrow and proud Jew could not endure. Yet the apostle never says that the prophecy is now therefore accomplished to the full or to the letter. The *principle* is true under the gospel; the *fulfillment* of the prophecy awaits another age and a different state of things when Christ appears and reigns in visible power and glory.

*But this principle the apostle does *not* call "the mystery kept secret since the world began; he only says that his gospel thus preached is *according to* the revelation of that mystery, which is but referred to, but opened out in the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Colossians. To say that scripture gives no grace to the church, except the mercy to the fathers and the oath to Abraham, is not only blank unbelief but flagrant contradiction of the apostle Paul.

In the prophecies we find intimations, not merely of the coming blessing for all the earth, but of the Jews treated as a rebellious people, while God is calling out those who were not a people. Take the beginning of Isaiah 65. The Gentiles are there designated as those who had not known Jehovah, while His people Israel are judged as disobedient. Compare again Hosea 1 and Hosea 2 with Romans 9. Thus the Spirit of God gives here and there hints, dim enough once, but now clearly interpreted by Him, which have a partial bearing on the present time. But none of these Old Testament Scriptures discloses to us the heavenly glory of Christ at the right hand of God as the center of union to saints on earth, and He the Head of one body to the Christians (Jew and Gentile alike). These things compose "the mystery." None of them is ever developed by the prophets. It was then a secret hid in God.

We have the *fact* of the Lord sitting at the right hand of God in Psalm 110, but the great use the psalm makes of that fact is to show that He sits there till His enemies are made His footstool. There is not a word about what meanwhile is being done with His friends. The revelation of the counsels and ways of God with His friends now is Christianity. The psalm speaks of His sitting there till judgment is executed on His enemies. It tells us also that Messiah is Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, but it is silent about His present intercession there for the Christian. The psalm dwells plainly on the future executive of judgment when Jehovah sends the rod of Messiah's strength out of Zion.

What the apostle calls the revelation of the mystery is now verified. It is a secret which the Old Testament never brought out, though giving certain intimations that are accomplished, as for instance in calling the Gentiles. Moses told Israel, "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the works of this law." But the great central truth of Paul is that the mystery or secret that was of old hid in God concerning Christ and concerning the Church is *now* revealed to His holy apostles and prophets* through the Spirit, as in fact it was made known to us by Paul himself.

*These were exclusively of the N.T., as they in fact composed the foundation on which the church was built (compare Eph. 2: 20, Eph. 3: 5, and Eph. 4: 11).

The character of the Church supposes that God abolishes at present the difference between the Jew and the Gentile, which the promises and the prophecies kept up. The grand fact of earth's future is that the Jew is exalted to the first place and the Gentile blessed, but subordinately. The old superiority of Israel will be maintained then, however blessed the Gentile will be. To deny this is to deny the truth. In the kingdom they each will be recognized and blessed, but in a different position, not as now when both are made one. The future millennial kingdom supposes the reinstatement of Israel in more than former favor, and the nations will rejoice, but in a place secondary to that of Israel.

In the Church of God all this disappears. The Church is heavenly, as Christ is, and according to the

nature of things in heaven. On high people are not known by their nationality; on earth they are, and they will be in God's kingdom here. But, the Christian being essentially called on high or upward, all these earthly distinctions for him disappear. Hence there came a new state of things and a fresh testimony, for God has now revealed in the New Testament that which comes in between the first and the second advent of Christ which is as different from the future on the earth as from the past before redemption.

When the Lord comes again, the Old Testament prophecies resume their course. There is the additional confirmation of a small portion of the New Testament which refers to that time, in order to give a combined testimony, and all the more because so great a change had come to pass.

One may now see clearly what has been pointed out already, that the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples from the first not to expect the world to progress or end in joy and light and blessing. On the contrary, old evils were to go on and new evils begin and take root from early days by the crafty power of Satan, never to be done away with till the end of the age. This then is a great lesson taught in Matthew.

Luke 21 gives a further view of the world's course. It says, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." This distinctly points to the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, when it was invested with armies perhaps more completely than at any point of its eventful history. But not a word is here about "the abomination of desolation" or that "then shall be great tribulation" such as never had been, nor shall be. It only tells us "these be the days of vengeance": two very different things. Here again we read, "But woe unto those who are with child and to those who give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people." This was fulfilled in what befell the Jews when Titus took the city and "this people" passed into captivity for the second time. "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 by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." So it came to pass. Jerusalem has been for many centuries trodden down by Gentiles. One national power after another was to have possession of the holy city. So it is still: that treading down yet goes on, for seasons allotted to Gentiles are not yet fulfilled.

Much more follows: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, sea roaring and rolling waves, men ready to expire through fear and expectation of the things coming on the habitable earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," etc. These scenes did not take place when Titus took Jerusalem. We have had the capture of Jerusalem in verse 20, etc., after which Jerusalem is trodden down and must be till the seasons of Gentiles come to an end. But in the following verse we are transported into the final scenes. "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." The earth's destruction is not here intended, but the blessing that comes after the end of the age when God terminates the time of man's wickedness and misery and trouble and suffering. The coming of the Son of man is never coupled with the end of the world in any such sense, but with the close of Satan's misrule and the shining forth of the kingdom of God. For the world there can be no permanent general blessing till the Son of man comes in displayed power and glory to reign over it to God's glory.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 1-2

Now we turn to our primary scripture. The statement of the Spirit of God is most explicit. He beseeches the saints by the hope of Christ's presence, who will gather them together unto Himself,

against the unfounded rumor that the day of the Lord, *the day of judgment for the living*, had actually arrived. The KJV wrongly reads “Christ” instead of “Lord,” and “is at hand” instead of “is present.” The day of Christ, as in Philippians 1: 10 and 2: 16 has different associations from the judgment of the living. However, the mistranslation of the verb is far more important because it falsifies the bearing of the passage, from which even those who correct it find it difficult to recover. The Greek means “is present” and nothing else. The true sense seemed so unintelligible if not incredible, to translators and commentators, that they gave the different meaning of “is at hand” or “imminent.” The same tense in the New Testament imports elsewhere definitely and invariably “present” (Rom. 8: 38; 1 Cor. 3: 22; 1 Cor. 7: 26; Gal. 1: 4 and Heb. 9: 9). In all these it unequivocally expresses the then present, repeatedly even in contrast with “at hand” as future, no matter how near.

Here are the two opening verses of 2 Thessalonians 2 according to the best text: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence (or, coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in (or, from) your mind, nor yet troubled, either by Spirit or by word or by letter as though (or, from) us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” In verse 1 there is only one article binding together our gathering and the Lord's presence. The second “by” in the KJV must therefore disappear. Again, in the last clause of verse 2 “Christ” is read only in inferior copies and versions.

There remain the important questions of how to render ὑπὲρ in the first verse and ἐνέστηκεν in the second. As to the first, the connection with a verb of entreaty has not been adequately considered — that connection being the unique one of a motive from joy and hope to counteract a false alarm. As there is no other instance in the New Testament, it is not surprising that the rendering “by” or some equivalent should be unexampled there. “By” or “for the sake of” suits the sense.

As to the true and only legitimate meaning of ἐνέστηκεν, there ought to be no doubt. It was a common athenian word meaning something actually going on and not merely close at hand. “Present” seems the one and only meaning of the word in the known authors of Greece. There is not a single instance of “imminent”! It does not occur in the Septuagint except in the Apocryphal writings in 1 Esdras 9: 6; 1 Maccabes 12: 44; and 2 Maccabes 3: 17; 12: 3 where it can only mean “actually there,” nowhere “imminent.”

The American revisers here cleave to the misconception and render it “is just at hand,” but they cannot point to a single case where any correct Greek writer ever employs the verb in any other tense except “present.”

It is well known that there is a different phrase (ἐγγύς) for “nearness” in the New Testament and in all other writings, and if emphasis were sought, the verb in the perfect was used (ἤγγικε), as also ἐφάστηκε (2 Tim. 4: 6). No exact scholar would sanction the laxity of supposing that the apostle confounds the meaning of two kindred words, each of which has its own precise sense: ἐνέστω. “is present” and ἐφέστω. “is close at hand.” On the face of it, the erroneous rendering makes the apostle contradict himself, for in Romans 13: 12 he tells the saints that the day [of the Lord] *is* at hand. How could the misleaders in Thessalonica be charged with error if they had only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand?

The false teachers of Thessalonica fraudulently alleged the apostle himself taught the untruth that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. This error was filling the saints, not with enthusiasm, joy or excitement, but with panic, especially as inspiration was pretended and the teachers supposedly had a letter from Paul himself. Its effect was agitation and trouble that the dread day was present, not overwrought warmth about His coming as very near. Thus in every point of view the KJV rendering is a

blunder which would set the apostle at war with himself, and also conceive a state among the deceived Thessalonians which disagrees with what is clearly described in the same verse.

SIGN OF FALSE TEACHERS

There is an unquestionable sign of false teachers which is here commended to the notice of all Christians, for we need it in these days and may need it yet more before the Lord comes. Observe that the false teacher ordinarily does one of two things, sometimes both. Either he lulls asleep those who ought to be roused, keeping them entranced in the deadly slumber of fallen nature, or he tries to alarm true believers by endeavoring to shake their confidence in the grace and truth of God, filling their minds with groundless fear. Not possessing peace himself, he is often deceived as well as a deceiver, for he does not know in his own experience the peace and joy in believing. The false teacher either injures the children of God by weakening their confidence in God, or he lulls with opiates those whom God would have to be awakened from their dangerous insensibility. In short, false teachers flatter the world or seek to alarm the true children of God. Very often they cause mischief in both ways.

The truth does exactly the contrary. Its effect is always to rouse people from their state of guilty indifference or their self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. It tells them of a divine Savior and a present salvation. There is also the comforting, establishing and leading on of believers into all their privileges and responsibilities, their proper joys in communion with the Lord and one another, and their growth in the knowledge of His mind and ways for worship and service.

BACK TO VERSE 1 AND 2: THE DAY OF THE LORD

The Revisers assume the apostle is entreating the saints in verse 1 regarding what he had just written and was about to teach them more, for which $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota$ would be the correct preposition, as we may see in John 17 and elsewhere. But if he besought them, as I am persuaded he did, by their joyful hope of the Lord's coming against the false notion that the day of the Lord with its terrors as actually come, it is no mere question of the sense of $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho$ in general, but of what is required in this context, of which there is no parallel known to me in the New Testament. In other words, what led to the choice of "touching" here was a wrong interpretation of the verse in which the preposition occurs. Had the real difference been seen, all would have agreed, if not in the "by" of the KJV with most translators till of late, in the nearly equivalent "for the sake of" which is its frequent usage.

What were those up to who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to have the Holy Spirit and word for their cry that the day of the Lord was come. Growing bolder in their impiety they pretended to have a letter from the apostle, affirming that "the day of the Lord is present." It is certain from the terms employed that the "letter" alluded to was *not* the apostle's, for he says "that ye be not soon shaken in your mind or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter *as from* (or, through) us." Thus is intimated, not the letter that he had written, but a letter "*as by us*" — purporting to be from us — with which he had nothing to do. It was a forged letter, not his First Epistle which we have.

The pretended letter was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already there. Now the day of the Lord, according to the Bible, is to be one of trouble and anguish, a day of clouds and darkness for the world. You may read this abundantly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and the prophets generally. On what pretext then was the cry raised by the forger? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth's sake. Indeed the apostle had in 1 Thessalonians 3: 4-5 expressed his concern lest the tempter might tempt them somehow through the tribulation they were passing through,

but *he* gives no license for calling it the day of the Lord. The false teacher seems to have used the existing fact of much trial to allege that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. In the Old Testament the “day of Jehovah” is repeatedly applied in a partial or incipient sense (Isa. 13, Isa. 19) etc. The saints indeed knew from 1 Thessalonians 5 that it would be a day of fearful trial, everything meanwhile growing worse and worse till the evil would finally be put down by the victorious power of the Lord.

Accordingly the apostle in 2 Thessalonians 1 points to the revelation of the Lord from heaven, with angels of His might, in flaming fire rendering vengeance to those who know not God (the Gentiles) and to those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (wicked professed Christians or Jews, etc.), when He shall come [not to take up the saints for the heavenlies, but] to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at in all who believed . . . “in that day.” Why fear it then?

THE LORD COMES FOR US FIRST

On this occasion the misleaders had contrived to excite considerable anxiety and trouble as if the day of the Lord had actually come. Not at all, says the apostle: how can you forget the bright hope that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself?

“We beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him, that ye be not soon shaken in your mind nor troubled.”

He thus appeals in verse 1 to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope; and from verse 3 he goes into the prophetic reasons which demonstrate its complete refutation. It is never said that the saints await the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. The coming of the Lord effects their translation before His day as we shall see. They are to be an object of wonder in that day when seen glorified with Him.

Thus “the presence of the Lord” and “his day” represent two connected but different thoughts often confounded by people — the one for the heavenly saints consummating grace, the other executing judgment. There is little reason why they should be confounded because the apostle had already clearly spoken on them both in his First Epistle. In 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17 he describes the coming of the Lord, not His day.

“For this we say to you in the Lord's word, that we the living who remain (or, are left) unto the presence of the Lord shall in no wise precede those put to sleep. Because the Lord Himself with call of command, with archangel's voice and with the trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then (ἔπειτα) we the living who remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air; and thus we shall ever be with the Lord.”

This was a new revelation, as he implies in opening the subject (v. 15). The day of the Lord was not a new revelation, for there is hardly any great topic more frequent in the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi. Even where this phrase may not be employed, it is involved habitually. But in no case did the Old Testament make known what the Thessalonian saints are here taught by the apostle. They are distinct truths.

Hence having finished the statement of the new truth of the coming of the Lord for His saints at the end of 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle turns to the old truth in the beginning of 1 Thessalonians 5.

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that ye should be written to.” [What a contrast with the foregoing new revelation!]

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they may say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman

with child, and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief,” etc.

Is it possible to conceive a sharper distinction? We see on its face what a mighty difference there is between “the coming of the Lord” and “the day of the Lord,” as the apostle describes them. At His coming for us, all saints until then departed, and we the living who remain, are caught up to meet Him in the air. “The day of the Lord” comes later. His presence is to our everlasting joy, our great triumph over death, whereas the day is His unsparing judgment of the living wicked. How astonishing that any saints should lump them in one!

This is confirmed by what was written some time after to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 15: 51-52.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all be put to sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Paul does not call the resurrection “a mystery”* when he wrote of it in this very chapter. It was not a mystery, for the Old Testament had revealed it. The early book of Job tells us of the resurrection of man (Job 14); not only the privileged case of the just in Job 19, but that of “man” who must die and rise, yet not till the heavens be no more — in perfect accord with the two resurrections of Revelation 20. There is no “mystery” in the two resurrections. It was a truth for both just and unjust, which the Jewish adversaries also received, as Paul told them before Felix the governor. But the coming of the Lord to raise the dead saints and to change the living and translate both to Himself, is the fresh word of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4 and the “mystery” of 1 Corinthians 15.

Thus the Lord's coming *with* His saints was a truth announced by Enoch and again by Zechariah (Zech. 14: 5). This thus was not a mystery any more than their resurrection. It is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 3: 13 and elsewhere in the New Testament. The “mystery” is in His coming *for* them as in 1 Corinthians 15: 51 and 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17 in order that they might come *with* Him, as well as for other ends.

One of these objects for the earth which required the rapture to heaven is the divine purpose to prepare a people here below for the Lord at His appearing. After the rapture God will work for a remnant from both Jew and Gentile during the frightful crisis when He fills the earth with His chastening judgments, which culminate in the Lord's personal infliction when He comes to judge and reign. The Psalms and the Prophets shed much light on especially the godly Jewish remnant. He works by His Spirit on their hearts before and during the great tribulation. The Revelation is as plain at the end of the New Testament as the Gospel of Matthew at its beginning, that there is to be a wave of blessing for Jews and Gentiles during that brief and awful time after the Christian witnesses are withdrawn and seen in heaven. Revelation 7 and 14 are distinct testimonies to this, along with the fact that there is no longer a hint of a Church on earth. Rather, a new sight is behold above — the twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders who represent in symbol the saints of the Old and New Testaments in heaven around God and the Lamb. “The things which are” will then be over and “the things which are about to happen after these” will next be accomplished.

The sealed of Israel's tribes and the countless crowd out of all the nations (Rev. 5-7) are in different ways objects of divine goodness at that time of trouble. They are not joined together in one body as is the Church. They are separately blessed at this preparatory epoch as they will be in the millennial reign when Israel will form the nearest circle on earth. The nations will be blessed richly but will be willing and glad that the firstborn Son of Jehovah should have the first place in honor and

dominion here below. What confusion it would make to conceive the Church co-existing with this! Take a Jew converted by the gospel of the kingdom and looking up for Christ's redemption by power. Consider his perplexity if he heard the Church with Jewish and Gentile distinctions removed, praising in the Spirit concerning a redemption by His blood already enjoyed, and for Christ in each the hope of heavenly glory with Himself on high. Which redemption, he would ask, am I to receive and confess? These heavenly glories with Christ the Heir of all things, and this union in one body so opposed to Law, Psalms and Prophets? Or my portion in distinction from the Gentiles and waiting for the Messiah to accomplish, for us the children, the promises to the father and the new covenant to both houses of Israel?

The book of Revelation clears all up since it presents the saints of the heavenly calling on high, and earthly saints, Jewish and Gentile, here below during the tribulation, alike awaiting the Lord's appearing for the glory to be manifested both in heaven and on earth.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

There is also another reason on the heavenly side which calls for the heavenly saints to be with the Lord above before He and they are manifested in glory. Each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God. We shall therefore all be placed, though in differing times and for opposite ends, before the judgment seat of God (Romans 14). It is to Christ personally that we shall then bow. We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ that each may receive the things [done] through (in) the body, according to those he did, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5). This will take place for the saint in his glorified state (and what a comfort this will be), but before the Lord comes in His kingdom, for the respective place of each in the kingdom is determined by that manifestation of ourselves to Christ.

The glorified saints are shown perfectly at home above in God's presence from Revelation 4 to 19 during the sad season of earth's greatest darkness and abomination and misery. Only before the "bridals" of the Lamb come do we hear of His wife making herself ready! That judgment seat manifestation to Christ is needful for her! The marriage of the Lamb is followed by His appearing and His saints with Him (Rev. 19). They obviously had been caught up and in the Father's house long before.

RECEIVE US, THEN REIGN

There are three applications of the Lord's presence at three separate occasions — to the Christians, to Israel and to the Gentiles. Matthew 24: 31 wholly differs in context from Matthew 25: 31. The latter is severed from the former by a considerable interval of time. If Israel thus is dealt with before the Gentiles, it is the right order for the earth. But proof is at least as strong that the Lord's first and highest object is to receive to Himself on high those destined to be with Him where He is in the intimacy of divine love and heavenly glory, as well as to reign over those delivered earthly Jews and saved Gentiles.

The heavenly saints take precedence and are caught up to be with the Lord for the Father's house before these Jews or Gentiles on earth are converted. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so is Christ's taking His bride above. Christ's rejection by Jews and Gentiles on the earth gave occasion to God's highly exalting Him above after a new sort.

Those who identify the Lord's presence here with Matthew 24 and kindred Scriptures would do well to weigh what has satisfied their brethren that they refer to distinct acts and differ in nature, each

with its own personal object — the latter for the earth and the former for heaven. There will be points of resemblance between them because their respective objects are to be blessed in a new and wondrous way above and below. But our blessing will be by a removal on high characterized only by grace; theirs by a judgment that overwhelms their enemies below.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 we see only the risen and changed saints who are to be with Him then and always. These are those who hear His call and, seeing Him as He is, are henceforth like Him, their bodies of humiliation transformed into conformity to His body of glory. In Matthew 24 it is a question of “flesh” being saved through the preceding perils, without a hint of resurrection or change when they see the appearing of the Son of man. Then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, which is foreign to 1 Thessalonians 4. “They shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” but nobody is said to be changed by it. Rather, after this He is said to send His angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect (of Israel) from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. This description widely differs from the heavenly saints changed and caught up to Him on high, as in 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 3, and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Colossians 3: 3-4 goes farther and positively excludes Matthew 24 from the possibility of being classed with these Scriptures. It states that there is no appearance of the Lord to all mankind when He comes for His joint-heirs, *till* they are already changed and manifested with Him. “Whenever Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory.” Till then our life is hid with Christ in God. When He appears, we (are not caught up, but) appear with Him in glory.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 the apostle had explained the contrast of “the day” with “the presence” or coming of the Lord for His own. The latter was a new revelation which they had not known before. As to the former, they knew accurately that the day comes as a thief in the night. Whenever men may say Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them as the throes upon her that is with child, and they shall in no wise escape. The apostle's assurance is clear that this was for the sleeping world, not for sons of light and day as they all were. Hence it was inexcusable for the Thessalonian saints to listen to the fraudulent alarm of their misleaders that the day of sudden destruction had arrived. Likewise, it is inexcusable for others to confound the joyful meeting of the Savior and the saved above, and the terrible destruction on the men of the world. It is this confusion that underlies the mis-rendering of ὑπὲρ in 2 Thessalonians 2: 1, and of ἐνέστηκεν in 2 Thessalonians 2: 2.

Nearly all teachers take for granted that in the former the apostle alluded to what he was about to teach them. On the contrary, it is an appeal to the comforting hope of the Lord's coming and their gathering together unto Him, as a motive for rejecting the false teaching about His day. Further, from verse 3 he shows the prophetic grounds why that day, *not* His coming, could not arrive till the evils were fully out in the open which then were to be judged.

It is urged by some that the saints only go up into the air to meet the Lord there, and immediately come down with Him. Where is their proof? They may use Matthew 24: 31, but this verse clearly applies to the gathering of the elect of Israel after the Son of man is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In this connection there is no hint of the resurrection or of the translation above.

Colossians 3: 4 is plain and conclusive that the words of Matthew do not and cannot legitimately apply to the risen saints. The apostle Paul clearly states that “when Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall ye also (not be caught up, but) *be manifested with Him in glory.*” Matthew 24: 31 thus cannot refer to the glorified ones spoken of by Paul because this Gospel considers elect Israelites gathered from all parts of the earth to the Son of man after His manifestation: Paul considers Christians

manifested along with Christ in glory when He who is now hidden is revealed. Colossians excludes all question of Israel here, and considers only the saints changed into the likeness of Christ's glory: the context of Matthew 24 is occupied with the future saints of the chosen people on the earth and has nothing to do with the risen believers for their rapture or their manifestation with Christ. The earthly people are in view, and the Son of man coming to judge and establish His kingdom here below.

Further, in the latter half of Revelation 19 we have the beginning of the day of the Lord (or of the presence of the Son of man). It is the prophetic description of what the apostle briefly sketched in 2 Thessalonians 8 when the Lord Jesus shall destroy the lawless one with the breath of His mouth and shall annul Him by the appearing of His coming. Here we are not told of the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but of the armies in heaven following the Lord when He emerges to judge and make war in righteousness. Those armies are saintly and not angelic (though angels also are present then). This is clear, among other proofs of special association with Christ, from their garb of "white pure byss"* just previously interpreted as "the righteousnesses of the saints." The glorified saints therefore follow the Warrior-King out of heaven: a truth which already had been implied in Revelation 17: 14.

Indeed, the scene just preceding those coming armies is the marriage supper of the Lamb which is *in heaven*. This proves still more strongly that the saints who form the Bride were already there. When the evidence is traced in Revelation, those saints in a glorified state are symbolically shown to be there from chapters 4 and 5. Who can think of disembodied spirits being seated on thrones?

The coming or presence (παρουσία) of the Lord is a wider term, embracing the day as well as what is just before the day. It may be qualified by "the Son of man," that is, of the Lord in a judicial point of view, so as to coalesce with "the day," and not simply imply His presence, but its display, as in the phrase, "the coming of the Son of man." Thus His coming applies to His day, but the appearing, manifestation, revelation or day is fixed to the time when He comes with all His saints to set up His kingdom by judgments. The first object is to gather home those He loves. Love always secures the object of affection first. Taking vengeance is *not* the primary object.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 3

The coming of the Lord then is closely associated with the gathering of the saints, just as the day of the Lord is clearly associated with the judgment inflicted on His enemies here below. Hence we find here,

"Let no man deceive you by any means. For it [will not be] except there come the falling away (or apostasy) first."

"That day shall not come" in the KJV is an insertion of the translators, marked therefore by italics, though substantially correct. The day was not to come till *the* apostasy had first arrived — the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom. How men deceive themselves when they think that all goes on to progress and triumph for the gospel or the Church through existing means!

We will have the victory when Christ comes, not before. Scripture reveals a very different and more humbling prospect. "The day" will not come unless the apostasy comes first. The charger of modern infidelity is preparing the way for the *apostasy*. People are bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance. Leaders still carry on the dead forms while the spirit of real Christendom has fled. This will grow and extend. The outward and public recognition of the truth is being destroyed everywhere on earth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity. The

governments of the world are gradually stripping off all real respect for the Bible as God's revelation, even if they yet keep up a formal connection with Christendom.

It was a most seductive evil when the Christians in Constantine's day accepted an alliance with the world, but it is a totally different and most solemn issue for the world when *it* casts off all its profession of Christianity. Deep was the Christians' loss when they sought the world's recognition, but what an awful day for the world when it is so tired of the union as to throw off the profession! The consequence will be that the slender tie which attaches people generally to the reading of the Bible or attending service will be broken. Granted that there is no reality, no divine life, no true or acceptable honor paid to the Lord, in carrying on a merely outward profession, but people who "go to church" (as it is called) hear the Word of God and Christ named with honor. When this is no longer recognized, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice and go to shoot, fish, ride or drink on His day. They will occupy themselves in reading anything but the Bible. The most rapid moral decay will ensue. Not so with the elect of God. As the evil progresses, the real saints will become more evident. They will by the Holy Spirit rest only on the Word of God and such testimony of Jesus as is then rendered, but unbelievers will be engulfed in the apostasy.

This is what is before the world as its doom: the written Word says so. People prefer to look for a pleasant prospect because they dislike and dread the divine warning. But this unbelief only hastens the evil day.

First Thessalonians was the first written by the apostle; the second epistle was written shortly after. Thus, from the beginning of revealed Christianity, from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches, such is the solemn warning. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it before the end comes, for that day will not come "except there come the falling away first." It is not merely *a* falling away here and *a* falling away there, but *the* falling away, *the* apostasy in the fullest sense.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 4

Further, "that man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition." There was once a man of righteousness, the Savior, but He was rejected. There will be a man of sin, the son of perdition, "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped."

We are aware that many apply this to the Pope of Rome. Although we regard his system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon, how can people believe that "the apostasy" has arrived yet. No, the apostasy will be the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal and then rejecting them and *all* divine revelation in cold, proud, reckless and definite unbelief.

The apostasy will occur as far as Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue. It does not mean the end of the Jews or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherein the Lord's name has been professed. Christendom has not yet abandoned openly and avowedly the New Testament as a falsehood, and the Savior as an impostor. It is surely coming for Protestants as well as Papists, and all the rest. The day of the Lord cannot come till all is fully out. "Because [it will not be] except the falling away shall have first come, and the man of sin been revealed."

The mystery of lawlessness still is at work (v. 7), which was working when the apostle wrote: so early had the principle of utter ruin entered. There is piety in all orthodox sects and even in Popery, where in spite of its corruption and idolatry, the fundamental truths of the Trinity and even of the

atonement are owned more than in some Protestant sects. The present mixed state of truth and error is not what is here meant by the apostasy, any more than the Gnostic departure of “some” from the faith referred to in 1 Timothy 4: 1-3. It is a general, complete and open departure.

While we abhor the Papist system, the chapter before us with others, speak of a still more awful revolt from the gospel, the Church, the Christ, the Trinity and of God's revelation as a whole before the end comes, or even before the revelation of the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus is to destroy, personally appearing for this purpose as well as for other blessed objects.

The climax is the lawless one who “exalts himself.” Jesus humbled Himself and only exalted God, Himself God but become man, the Man of righteousness. Here is a man, “the man of sin,” pre-eminently the opposer and self-exalter against all that is called God or object of reverence. He is the personal adversary of the Lord Jesus. As the Lord said to the Jews, they would not have Him who came in His Father's name, so they will receive him who comes in his own name (John 5: 43). At the end of this age he will come. Accordingly, he is found as Satan's winding-up, not merely of apostate Christendom, but also of apostate Judaism. It is man, Jew and professing Christian, in revolt.

The connection with Christendom already has been shown. Now we may briefly touch on Judaism. This personage “opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly above all that is called God or object of veneration; so that he himself sitteth down in the temple of God, showing forth himself that he is God.” As the true Church began in Jerusalem, the great result of the apostasy will find itself conspicuously in Jerusalem. It was this city which saw Pentecost; so far as the world could discern, it beheld on the earth the Assembly which belongs to heaven. Jerusalem will see the judgment of that which, long a counterfeit, will end in a manifestation of hell — the fruit of the amalgamation of Christendom with Judaism.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 5-7

The apostle speaks in verse 5 of what he had said of the coming apostasy and of the man of sin with his blasphemous assumption and defiance of God in His very temple. “Remember ye not that, being yet with you, I told you of these things.” It is after this, in verse 6, that he goes on, “And now ye know that which restraineth, that he may be revealed in his own season.”

He does not say that he had mentioned or explained the restraining power to them, but that they knew that by its action the man of sin could not be revealed till his own season. They may have gathered what that power was from the known place of the Holy Spirit as exercising power for good.

When that evil hour arrives, the powers that be, at least as far as the Roman earth is concerned, will no longer be ordained of God. The dragon will give its emperor its power and his throne and great authority (Rev. 13: 3). The ten horns, his satellites, receive authority as kings for the same hour with the Beast (the symbol of that Empire in its last form). They have one mind and give their power to the Beast (Rev. 17: 12, 13). Finally, the Beast and False Prophet perish awfully together, as do the kings and their armies. The Roman empire is long gone, but He who restrains is still here. And He will restrain till the moment comes for that very empire (which existed when the apostle wrote and ceased to be as now for so many centuries)* to emerge from the abyss. It is to be ordained of Satan on its revival, to its everlasting destruction.

While the Roman Empire was in power, God owned it, heathen though it was, and the restraint still wrought. But the Empire fell in the fifth century, and the man of sin did not rise. God's providence wrought, and He owned in His providence the Teutonic hordes and the kingdoms which took the

shattered empire's place, as He did the Romans before, and does the powers that be still. The restraining power still works, and will work till the dreaded time when the Church joins her Head for heavenly glory. For a while after that event the Holy Spirit still will work and control, according to the Apocalyptic expression of "the seven Spirits of God sent into all the earth." It is only in the latter half of the unfulfilled seventieth week of Daniel, the 1260 days of which the Revelation treats, that Satan plays that terrible game on earth when he sets up the Beast and the man of sin sits down in God's temple.

Now if this is the simple and sure truth of Scripture, we can better understand why the apostle was reticent. God may not have revealed to him, as He did through the beloved John, that strange quasi-resurrection of the fallen Roman empire, destined to rise again under Satan's power when the restrainer is gone. Yet it is to receive from the appearing Lord, its doom in the person of its eighth head in the lake of fire. The Spirit of God, as a spirit of government, has restrained all through and will till just before the end of the age. When the dragon is allowed to govern without check for a brief time, He will cease to restrain. To imagine (as some do) that the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with the powers that be since the Papacy is as great an error as to overlook the Satanic reign of terror and blasphemy during its allotted "little while" before the Lord is revealed in flaming fire to destroy it and to bring in His own world-kingdom in power, righteousness and glory.

The truth of the Holy Spirit governmentally restraining may have been known to the Thessalonian saints in a general way, but not written down for wiser and better reasons than any dread of the Roman government. Daniel had already given the empire's destruction, as foreshown to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, 34-35, 40-44, and to himself in Daniel 7: 7-8, 19-26, as it was yet more fully shown in Revelation 13, 14, 16, 17, 19 after the death of the apostle Paul.

The Thessalonian saints, like others who believe in that unspeakably terrible consummation at the end of the age, knew that it will result from the allowed apparent triumph of the lawless one, the instrument of Satan to the last degree. They knew therefore that God, working by His Spirit as He had always done, and now especially to Christ's glory since Pentecost, alone could hinder that cherished aim of the arch-enemy. The Roman empire while it lasted might be and was an outward hindrance; and when it fell, other governors, ordained of God stood in its way. To have named only the Roman Empire would have been a mistake which divine wisdom avoided. The particular barrier, τὸ κατέχων, might vary, as it did, but ὁ κατέχων the restrainer, abides to use providentially "the powers that be" till the Roman empire rises from the abyss for the final crisis.

Further, being both a power and a person (*i.e.* spoken of as neuter as well as masculine) the Restrainer can not apply to an empire, but can apply to none so well as to the Spirit of God. He still, to sustain His testimony to Christ and for the sake of the children of God, continues to hinder the final manifestation of Satan's power. However, when the Church is gone up on high, it seems that the Spirit will act not only to convert people, but as a spirit of government (Rev. 5: 6) till God allows Satan to do his worst for his short time. The Spirit of God then will cease to restrain the working of the evil one, who will dare all things against the Lord.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 8

THE APPEARING OF HIS PRESENCE

“And then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of

His mouth and shall annul with the appearing of His coming.”

The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this fearful “lawless one” who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says John, but when *the* antichrist comes, he will be brought down by the Lord Jesus in person appearing from heaven. The addition of “Jesus” (to the KVJV) is certainly genuine. It gives more definiteness to the expression and thus excludes any mere dealing in providence.

Here recall the first verse. The apostle does not say the day of the Lord or the appearing of His coming, when Christ gathers the saints. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.” These two wondrous events are so closely associated by one article in the Greek, that the second “by” in the KJV is an injurious intrusion. But, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, Paul speaks, not of His coming merely, but of the appearing, the epiphany of His coming. If it were a display when the Lord comes to gather His saints, why should “the appearing” of it be expressed in verse 8 only? Why is its “appearing” avoided when He comes (v. 1) to gather together His saints to Himself?

Is it not manifest from the phrase itself that the coming of the Lord does not of itself imply His appearing? How else do you account for the indifference in the wording of verse 8? When His appearing was meant, it was necessary to say so, and this is when He judges. When it is the dealing of His grace in translating us to heaven, His coming or presence is named, but not a word about His appearing. When the lawless one shall be destroyed, it is not merely His presence or coming, but the appearing of it. He could not appear without coming; He might come without being seen beyond a select company, but now we hear of *the display of His presence*. When He comes to take up His saints, what will the world have to do with it? It was His own love which saved them. They belonged to Him, not to the world. He comes to claim His own. He does not make the world a spectator of His actions before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

Where is, or what implies the world here? The apostle is showing how God will bring the departed saints with Christ. The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a call of command *κελεύσμεν*, with archangel's voice, and trump of God. It is exclusively to raise the sleeping saints and change us who remain alive for His presence, when both are caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Not a word implies that the world hears at that moment; not a word that earth and heaven are shaken. Not only is there total silence as to these bold importations, but we are expressly taught by the same apostle that, “when He shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory” (Col. 3: 4). We must therefore have been caught up before the common manifestation of Him and His in the same glory.

We have seen how different it will be when the Son of man comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory to gather together His elect of Israel from the four winds. Here the rapture on high is not hinted. It is His presence for the earthly people, and therefore for all on earth to see (Rev. 1: 7).

The distinction therefore of 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 and 8 (the presence of Christ simply, and the appearing of His presence) is precise, instruction and undeniable. The one is to gather together the saints to Christ above; the other is for Him (and for all His saints thus gathered, to appear with Him) to crush His enemies. It is then that every eye shall see Him, as His appearing concerns every person on earth. Timothy was solemnly charged in the First Epistle to keep the commandment spotless and irreproachable till the Lord's appearing because responsibility always refers to that day. The rapture is grace to all the saints equally caught up to Christ on high. The appearing will manifest the fidelity or

the failure of each saint. Hence the apostle still more narrowly charges His appearing and His kingdom on Timothy in preaching the Word and in all his other service. Paul connects the crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge will render “in that day” (not at His presence simply) with His appearing, to those who love it.

The epiphany or appearing of Christ is not secret. The Spirit of God draws a plain and sure distinction between the presence of the Lord to gather His own and the appearing of His presence to destroy the lawless one and his adherents. If His presence necessarily conveyed appearing, how could the apostle write both 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 and 8 in the same context? If he meant us to learn the distinction, how could he have intimated it more exactly?

The world will have bowed down to the antichrist. Gentiles as well as Jews will have accepted him. Just as the blessed Lord Jesus is both the true Messiah and the God of Israel, so this lawless personage, the man of sin, will set himself up to be both Messiah and Jehovah of Israel. Kings, classes, and masses will be led away by the fatal delusion. The same unbelief which rejects the true will cling to the false. It is Satan's woe for the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea — for men under settled government and for those in a revolutionary state. These are the dismal prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. A far different future fills the imagination of men generally. Why wonder at this? How can they truly predict what is to be? No man can discern the future unless by faith he profits from the light of God's prediction and declines going beyond it.

2 THESSALONIANS 2: 9-12

What is particularly awful for that day is the intimation in verse 12 of our chapter, in connection with the lawless one.

“Whose presence is according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this reason God sendeth them a working (energy) of error, that they should believe the lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Here we see that Satan will work in imitative counteraction of God's power that wrought in Christ. It is no trickery of priests or monks, no winking Madonnas or liquefying blood or profane fire ostensibly of the Holy Spirit. The same terms are here used for Satan's energy in the man of sin, as Peter employed in Acts 2: 22 of the Lord Jesus as demonstrated by God to the Jews. On the other hand God will give up people by a judicial blindness to believe the lie of Satan that especially this man of sin is supreme God, so that he even dares to sit down in the sanctuary, showing that he is God. It will be divine retribution: people had rejected the truth: they had no love for it that they might be saved. They imputed the undeniable works of power and wonders and signs of the Lord Jesus to Beelzebub: they ascribe to the only true God those works of Satan by this minion of his, the man of sin. As the Jews were at last given up to blindness for their unbelief, so will Christendom be given up. Jews, professing Christians, etc., will combine to worship the son of perdition, as Jews and Gentiles united to crucify the Lord of glory. The last will be worse than the first. “I am come in My Father's name and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.”

At this very time among the distant and till then heathen nations, there will be a great and true work of God's mercy. Godly Jews, forced to flee from the antichrist in Jerusalem, will be used of God to win a countless throng of Gentiles by preaching the gospel of the kingdom, as we learn by

comparing Matthew 24: 14 with Matthew 25: 31 to the end, also with Revelation 7: 9 and Revelation 14: 6-7. It is an “everlasting gospel.”

The lawless one here depicted must await the dreaded hour when God sends judicial darkness and when the wetsern powers and the Beast (animated by Satan like the False Prophet) combine against Jehovah and His Anointed. But the Lamb shall overcome them (for He is Lord of lords and King of kings) and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful (Rev. 17: 14, Rev. 19: 14).

God alone knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it, and we have the responsibility of believing or of being infidel. A man cannot truly believe these things without their leaving a divine impress upon his soul. If you have Christ the hope in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead by seeking to stand true to Him whom you believe. The Lord Jesus is coming, but He is to appear also. He is not merely coming to receive His own, when the result will be in a moment, in the twinkling on an eye (1 Cor. 15: 52).

The Lord has many ways of taking His own to Himself without death. Suppose the Lord were to cause a tremendous earthquake. The wise men of the world would say that the Christians had been swallowed up in the earthquake. It is easy enough to conceive a way in which the Lord could conceal the matter, but He does not conceal from us, nor will He from men, what He will do to the misleader of the Roman world. He will not conceal His judgment from the world, or even the various forms and times in which it will fall. Then certainly He will be manifest to every eye. Hence we find that, whenever judgment is in question, manifestation characterizes it.

When the Lord Jesus in His sovereign grace called Saul of Tarsus, his companions were allowed to feel the tokens of some extraordinary action going on, though they knew nothing about it. There were many going to Damascus, yet only one man saw the Lord Jesus. All the rest heard only an inarticulate sound. They did not heart the words, but Saul of Tarsus did. Then, again, we find Philip caught up and carried to another place, but what did the world know of all that? There was a subsequent occasion when the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven. But this was so far from being divulged for the sake of the world, that the apostle says only “whether in body or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth.” Nothing, then, is easier than for the Lord to conceal or show things partially on these occasions, but He will display them on the grandest scale when the judgment of the world comes, after previously His people.

SERVICE AND THE LORD'S APPEARING

There is a bearing on service. Timothy was to keep the injunction, laid on him, spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6: 14). There is a pressure of responsibility, and responsibility in Scripture is connected with His appearing, as sovereign grace is connected with His coming and receiving us to Himself for the Father's house. But it is false to conclude that our abiding on earth till Christ's appearing is implied in keeping the apostle's injunction, any more for us than for Timothy. Neither departure to be with Christ nor being caught up to be with Him at His coming hinders like fidelity on our part or on his.

In 2 Timothy 4: 1, 8, responsibility is again stressed, not only for Timothy but for all saints who love His appearing. The verse is as plain as it is solemn and important. “Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of *righteousness* which the Lord the *righteous Judge* will award to me in that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved (and do love) His appearing.” His coming for us would here be quite inappropriate because it would simply imply being caught up to be ever with Him. But His

appearing is the day when faithfulness will be revealed publicly, and the work of each will be made manifest. If the work abide the test of that day, each shall receive reward according to his own labor. Besides, even now to love the appearing of the One who will judge every evil thing and set right the world long disordered by the Serpent, is the deepest joy because all will be to His praise whose appearing will alone bring it to pass. Were one filled with earthly care or courting wealth and honor of men, how could one love His appearing who will judge it all and establish His righteous reign? It is indeed a “blessed hope” (Titus 2: 13), though it will be much greater to be with the Lord Himself in the Father's house, beholding His glory outside and above the world (John 17: 24).

REVELATION 17 AND 21 CONTRASTED:

THE HARLOT AND THE BRIDE

In Revelation 17, two evil objects of judgment are set before us; one called the great Harlot, the other the Beast. The unclean one is seen sitting upon many waters “with whom the kings of the earth,” etc. (vv. 1-6). At first the two are together: the corrupt woman is seated upon a well-known and remarkably characterized Beast — the Beast with seven heads and ten horns. Much may be gathered by comparing verse 1 here with Revelation 21: 9-10. “And there came unto me” etc. Is it not plain from the comparison that the one is the counterpart of the other? Babylon, the harlot, is Satan's sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife! The bride of the Lamb is the holy city having the glory of God. Babylon corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, to their corruption also. This explains why she is called “Harlot.” She likewise is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings.

It is not so with the Church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb's wife. “And the nations shall walk by her light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory unto her” (the heavenly city). The bride is said to be “the holy city, Jerusalem,” that comes down out of heaven from God. This, then, is the *holy* (not the great) city — a known error in the KJV. The fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the Church glorified, helps us understand Babylon. What is the religious body which under the shelter of Christ's name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can anyone hesitate? Was there ever a system of such varied idolatry, hypocritical corruption and atrocious cruelty in the Savior's name.

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon, but, as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, she once dominated the Beast as none else ever did, arrayed in all the world's splendour and earth's richest ornaments. Next, she abandoned herself to illicit union with the kings of the earth for their gifts of patronage. Then, her golden cup was full of abominations, and “the unclean things of her fornications” was beyond all rivalry. Lastly, she is a vindictive claimant, the most unrelenting of persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. So clear is her identification that one needs not even to mention her name. Surely the truth must be very evident when it is unnecessary to say who she is to the most unlettered, where the Bible is read.

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Nor is this all we are told here. The last verse says, “The woman is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” There is a distinction we may now note. The chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. It is the *woman* that is declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. The better history is known, the more it will be felt that Rome is meant. This one city ruled more and longer than any other since the world began. Everybody in the apostle's day would know where this city, built on

the seven hills, lay and what was its name.

This city was to become the harlot, and to exercise power over the Roman beast (empire), the Beast of seven heads and of ten horns. At first sight, there is a difficulty here, for the Roman empire has disappeared. It existed and has fallen. How then are we to understand the chapter? The historian tells us that the Roman empire long ago declined and fell. There he stops; he could not lift the veil because he didn't believe in God's revelation. History doesn't explain prophecy, but prophecy explains history. Prophecy is the true and divine key to the prospects of the world. Accordingly, here is the explanation: the Beast that then was, the Roman Beast, would cease to exist. "The Beast that thou sawest was, and is not." Its vast power was to perish: the unsaved historian has recorded that fact. But behold in the Word another thing which history could not know! The Roman Beast is to revive! Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. And those who dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the Beast that was, and is not, and "shall be present" — the true reading and sense. Here we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed, under the most terrible influences for a little, before the age ends and the Lord appears in judgment.

Let us look back for a moment at the history of the world and compare it with the present and the future. In the time of John, the Roman empire ruled the known world. The empire had one governor or chief. Gradually the power began to weaken and wane. First came the division into east and west. Then some time afterwards the Germanic barbarians broke up the Western empire and founded those separate kingdoms of Europe, which, after feudalism, passed into the constitutional monarchies of modern times. Such has been the result of the breaking up of the Roman empire. Here we find the two conditions: the Beast that *was*, and the Beast that *is not*. But it "shall ascend out of the abyss (or, bottomless pit." This will be a new power in the world's history. The worst of powers is better than anarchy; the most grinding tyrannies are safer than no authority at all. But a new state is to rise absolutely without God and under Satan's unhindered agency, drowning men in perdition.

Whatever changes may have occurred in the world's affairs, there has never been a power without the sanction of God, bad as its exercise of authority may have been. The letting loose of the power of Satan has not yet occurred, because there is One who still withholds (2 Thess. 2), but when He withdraws the hindrance, the Beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. Here John speaks symbolically of the Roman empire in its last Satanic uprising to power. In the end of this age Satan will be allowed by God to re-establish that great object of human ambition. Men are even now yearning after an energetic central authority in the West. It is plain fact that the kingdoms of Western Europe have no political coherence. One of their marked features has been that they are constantly in danger of war with each other. They have sought, by what they term "the balance of power" to maintain a measure of mutual understanding, peace and order. But in consequence of this arrangement, no one power has been allowed to get the upper hand.*

At the appointed time the Beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, except that the little horn acquires three. Thus there will be the revived Roman empire with distinct kingdoms. The future state will consist of the imperial headship along with the subordinate kingdoms of the once united western empire. The so-called balance of power then will be required no longer in the West. In the East and North there will be mighty adversaries. One will besiege and the other be besieged. And the day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God also will accomplish His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself. Then the world will be allowed to have its little moment when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (Rev. 17: 12-13)

The state here described never occurred before or since the fall of the Roman empire. Here the principle of national independence will have disappeared. The time will have come for a vast change in the world: a great imperial power will arise, called the Beast. It will not absorb all the nations, but will control and use the separate powers of the West. The Beast is a symbol of strength, but absolutely destitute of reference to God. The western imperial system will have thrown off all owning of God or thought of Him: yea, it will defy Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the distinctive Roman dominion, the western nationalities of Europe.* The kings will be flattered with the idea that they each have a separate existence and will. But they are only as the muscles of the strong head who uses and controls them all. That follows their destruction of Babylon? "These shall make war with the Lamb." What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, and from what men dream to be the optimistic future!

*This is plain from Dan. 2, etc. For though the final blow falls on the feet of iron and clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, will have representatives in a separate though feeble form, to share the common irreparable ruin.

THE COMING SAINTS

The saints then come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives (compare Rev. 19: 14). Being changed, they are to be forever with the Lord and thus follow Him out of heaven. So, when the final contest arises between the Lord Jesus and Satan (represented by the leader of the West) the Lord is accompanied by His saints. They are here styled as "called and faithful and chosen." Some have thought these are angels, but angels are never called "faithful." Further, they are said to be not merely chosen, but "called." How could an angel be "called"? Calling is an appeal of grace which comes to one who has gone astray in order to bring him back to God. This is never true of an angel. The gospel is God's calling of fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and because of redemption, a place with Christ in heaven. Those who believe on Him are here shown to be with Him, and they are "called, and faithful, and chosen." They have been above from just before Revelation 4.

THE HARLOT'S FATE (REV. 17)

What about the woman? We hear about her also in verse 15, where we discern her vast quasi-spiritual influence. It is not a national body, but an idolatrous, persecuting, pretentiously religious system, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends her corruption over all the world. Although Rome is her center, she sits upon the many waters — peoples and crowds and nations and tongues. How easily seen who and what she is! There is only one such in Christendom, though she has daughters too.

Further notice (as in verse 16) what a change takes place! Instead of these "horns" or kings of the West being any longer subjected to Babylon, they, with the Beast, turn furiously against her. Would it not be an incredibly strange thing for the Pope to turn against his own church or city? Hence the Pope is not the Beast and has nothing directly to do with destroying Babylon. Rather, the Beast is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, when the Beast from the abyss is thus joined by the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the West against that impure and most guilty religious system.

Babylon had long intoxicated men, persecuted the saints and dallied with the kings of the earth. Now the turn of the tide comes: Babylon was not of God, but a corrupt idolatrous impostor. Yet, there is nothing of Christ's mind in her destroyers. It is Satan against Satan, and his kingdom shall come to

nought. The end of the haughty world-church is come, and soon after comes the end of her destroyers. The Beast and the ten horns _ the whole Western empire — have their one mind in this revolt from the Roman harlot. They strip, eat and burn her, according to the language of the prophecy.

The Beast will be steeped in blasphemy. He and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while at the same time they will at last hate the Harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the vileness of Babylon, but no less a rejection of divine truth.

Do men call it “the Eternal City”? Alas! the Romish priests keep it hidden from their hearts that Babylon, the great city of the West, is doomed to be thrown down and found no more at all. Her smoke is to rise up unto the ages of the ages like Sodom and Gomorrah, when the Lord reigns over the earth and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF 2 THESSALONIANS 2

Coming to take vengeance is not the primary object of Christ's leaving heaven. Such though is flagrantly opposed both to 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17 and to 2 Thessalonians 2: 1. God's Word proves the importance of distinguishing between “that day” and “the presence of the Lord” which has for its primary object the gathering of His saints to Himself above! Not a hint is breathed in 1 Corinthians 15: 56 of vengeance or judgment in any form or degree, but of “a mystery.” Raising the dead saints was not a mystery, but an Old Testament truth. But the apostle adds the new revelation that “we” (Christians) “shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trumpet, for it shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” 1 Thessalonians 4 says, as an equally new revelation, that after the dead saints rise, we the living who remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus we shall be always with the Lord. These verses are the divine expression of grace and of nothing but grace.

Some confound this heavenly gathering together with the wholly different gathering together of the “elect” of Israel in Matthew 24, where not a word implies any catching up to join the Lord. The Jewish elect are scattered to all quarters and thus need to be gathered when the time comes for the Son of man's presence on the earth. They are expressly called His “elect” in Isaiah 65: 9, 15, 22, as well as in Matthew 24: 31. As (in the same verse) “a great sound of trumpet” summons the elect of Israel, so in that day (Isa. 37: 12-13) a great trumpet shall be blown summoning them to worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem. The Lord clears and confirms this in Matthew 24.

The context decides whether the elect are of Israel, of the Church or of the Gentiles, for it is true of all three as the different parts of the Lord's prophecy on Olivet prove. As blessed as the elect of Israel and the Gentiles are to be on earth, it is quite distinct from those caught up to meet the Lord for heavenly glory. For these, all thought of vengeance is excluded. Israel's deliverance is accompanied by the destruction of their enemies. Our rapture to the Lord is entirely and exclusively a question of sovereign grace. Our being thus ever with Him, is our best and brightest privilege. Even His presence for the earth, though necessarily involving vengeance on the wicked, has for its “primary object” the deliverance of the sorely tried and scattered or beleaguered Jews, and the gathering of His elect of Israel.

By not distinguishing things that evidently and profoundly differ, the whole truth on this subject is thrown into confusion. The kingdom of God embraces earthly as well as heavenly things. How sad to misuse the less to darken or deny the greater! There is to be the Father's kingdom where the righteous

are to shine as the sun; there is to be the Son of man's kingdom where His earthly people shall be blessed and honored as never before, but for this to occur the sword of divine judgment must clear the way for the Lord's righteous scepter. However, no earthly dealing applies to the heavens or on our behalf before going on high. There, the Lord went up triumphantly and in peace; there and thus at His call shall the heavenly saints be caught up. How can saints overlook the contrast or fight against it!

2 THESSALONIANS 1 SUMMARIZED

Again, let us consider the testimony which 2 Thessalonians 1 renders. Here is the execution and display of the Lord's retributive judgment. The apostle's aim was to make known the general character of the day before taking up and refuting the false teaching that the day of the Lord had arrived, as in 2 Thessalonians 2. The apostle boasts in them in the churches of God, for their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations. He calls this a manifest token of God's righteous judgment to the end of their being counted worthy of His kingdom, for the sake of which they also suffer, "if at least it is a righteous thing with God to award tribulation to those who trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us [who were no less fellow-sufferers] at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven." This of course implies His presence, but it says more. It will be His unveiling after being hidden from view, His heavenly saints being already with Him.

His revelation is described as with angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on two classes — those who know not God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who are such as shall pay as penalty everlasting destruction from the Lord's face and from the glory of His might, when He shall have come [not to receive His own to Himself, but] to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all who believed (for our testimony unto you was believed) in that day."

Such is the character of "that day": not sovereign grace in associating saints with Himself for heaven and the Father's house, but righteous requital of friends and foes; to the wicked trouble, and repose to saints whom they once troubled. The trouble now would bring vengeance of flaming fire on unbelieving Gentiles and Jews, excluded forever from the Lord's face and from the glory of His might. But at the same time the Lord will have come to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at in all who believed. His saints, all who believed, come with Him.

It is not said "in all those who believe": this is a serious error. A great harvest of blessing would begin on earth after the rapture, not for Israel only, but for all the nations. However, here it is only the saints who come *with* the Lord in that day. Henceforward it would be for the world to "know" that the Father sent the Son and loved those heavenly ones as He loved Christ (John 17: 23), for the world would see Christ and His own in the same displayed glory.

2 THESSALONIANS 2 SUMMARIZED (VERSES 1-4)

2 Thessalonians 2: 3-12 gives us the awful introduction which brings on that day of judgment and manifestation, for this was the subject, not the Lord's coming which was a motive to cheer. This display of judgment coalesces with the narrower application to Israel given in Matthew 24. It is about the same time. It is "seen" as the lightning. 1 Thessalonians 5 pronounces it "sudden destruction." It will be both "sudden" and "seen." But it completely differs from 1 Corinthians 15: 51-52, 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17 and Jude 24, where we plainly are given the previous dealing of the Lord's grace (the rapture), that when He will thus come in public judgment of His living enemies, the heavenly saints might accompany Him in manifest rest and glory before all eyes. No one is entitled to imagine lightning or

flaming fire when the Bridegroom comes for His bride. Any such judicial terms or thoughts then are entirely absent.

The apostasy means the coming abandonment of all revealed truth. It far exceeds the departure of “some” “from the faith,” as we read in the earlier verses of 1 Timothy 4. This was realized first in Gnostic folly and yet more in the systematic departure of Romanism. 2 Timothy 3: 1-9 was still far short of the apostasy, when all form of godliness will be discarded with scorn.

The man of sin, the son of perdition, issues from the apostasy and is its crown of shame. He is John's antichrist, though most confound him with the first Beast of Revelation 13, the head of the civil power in defiance of God at that day, whereas he is clearly the quasi-religious (but really most irreligious) Jewish chief who rivals Christ's position, no longer as Priest, but as Prophet and King. Accordingly, he does not have seven horns and seven eyes (the seven Spirits of God), nor even three, but “two horns like a lamb.”

We shouldn't be surprised at the common confusion, for these two Beasts of Revelation 13 equally cast off God and slay His saints and are as closely allied as their great enemies, the final Assyrian or king of the north and Gog, Prince of Rosh, Meschech and Tubal (Ezek. 38-39), who sustains his ally. These two are foes to the emperor of the west, and to the willful king who is to reign in the land of Israel.

Babylon, the corrupt, cruel and idolatrous religious system is expressly called “a mystery,” the loathsome counterpart of Christ's bride, and quite distinct from, though long associated with the Beast or imperial power and its vassals. They at last turn against her in hatred and strip, devour and burn her. It will be no longer the mystery of lawlessness then, of which she, when she sits a queen, is so great a part. The man of sin will next be revealed, with the Beast and the willing kings, of whom the False Prophet is the director in that day.

The distinctness of this person is confirmed by the words of 2 Thessalonians 2: 4, “That opposeth and exalteth himself against (or, above) all that is called God or object of veneration, so that he should himself sit down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” The lawless one is to be a sinner beyond sinners, the man of sin, and desiring to be God, claiming the honor of the Supreme on earth, in His temple, not in mere earthly things or personal vain glory like Herod in Acts 12. The Christ who was God, became on earth a bondman to glorify His God and Father at all cost. It is a mere imposture for the Pope to dub himself vicar of Christ and head of the church on earth, while acknowledging formally the Lord in heaven. But for this reason he does not fulfill the arrogant self-exaltation of this future adversary who raises himself above all that is called God or object of religious veneration. The temple of God, literally in Jerusalem before the age ends, will be used to support his blasphemous claim. Many of the Jews will be back there in unbelief and will receive him, while a godly remnant flee as the Lord directed.

Though the apostasy is the starting-point, the man of sin revealed is a great advance of an audacious and unbounded impiety under Satan's power, to which the total abandonment of the Christian revelation leaves the door open. Grace scorned, and Christ the gift of God for sinful men utterly derided, the man of sin follows; man not only without God, but ignoring and spurning all divine restraint. It is atheistic lawlessness, denying sin and wallowing in it without shame or fear. As God was Himself in Christ, the image of Him who abides invisible, the man of sin will be His personal adversary, exalting himself above all that is called God or object of veneration. “Who is the liar, but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2: 22). Though beginning as a false Christ, at last he will flout the hope of Israel and the Christian

testimony. As the culmination of extreme defiance in claiming to be God supreme he seats himself in the temple of God. Thus apostate Judaism amalgamates in that hour with Christian apostasy, and the first temptation for man to become as God in Eden ends in the lie of man ousting God and showing forth himself to be God in His very temple.

As for the alleged difficulty raised on the sitting of the man of sin in the temple of God on Mount Moriah at the end of the age, it is essential to bear in mind that the apostle here incorporates the testimonies of two prophets who speak of Jewish iniquity at that very time. The first of these, Daniel 11: 36-39, explicitly defines the place as the land of Judaea. The second, Isaiah 11: 4, is equally clear that he is the “lawless one” destined to his awful doom at the breath of the lips of Jehovah Jesus. Into neither Scripture can one put Christendom.

Haggai also enables us to see that, whatever is the iniquity, destruction or renewal, the house of Jehovah has its unity to the ear of faith. “Who is left among you who saw *this house* in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. . . . I will fill *this house* with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts” (Haggai 2: 3-9). Neither the hostile Antiochus IV, nor the evil patronage of the Idumean Herod nor the blasphemous self-deification of the antichrist, destroys God's title and rights. It is His house throughout, whatever the faithlessness of His people and the seeming triumph of Satan.

Thus, in 2 Thessalonians 2, the apostle predicts a time when the Church will have been gathered on high, the Jew and the once professing church becoming alike apostate, and the man of sin revealed. He is the awful contrast of Jesus' revelation, who, though true God, became the most humbled bondman for our redemption to the glory of God. Thus there is no real difficulty in the lawless one seating himself in the Jewish temple to show off as God. There have been many an d various antichrists, but they all point to one individual at the end who as here written will surpass every person who preceded in impious and audacious setting up to be God in God's own house. Jew and Gentiles will unite to worship him as they did of old to crucify the true King of Israel, yea the true God incarnate.

VERSES 6 - 8

From apostolic days the germs were sown and actually there, which were to bear these fatal fruits when the divine restraint (vv. 6-7) should be removed and the season come for their full display. The departure in the churches of Galatia from the sovereign grace of God that saves sinners was an early stage in declension. So was at a later day Satan's effort at Colosse to interpolate philosophy — the principle of Gentiles — and religious ordinance — the principle of Judaism — between Christ the Head and the members of His body. Both principles struck a death-blow at Christ's union with the Church.

Other evils already noticed in the two Epistles to Timothy contributed their quota, as did that slipping back or away, of which Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 treat; which, if yielded to, could only end in apostasy and irremediable ruin. How could it be otherwise, if those who had in any measure enjoyed the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence or who had owned Christ's sacrifice and eternal redemption, renounced that salvation of God's grace and power? All this was the mystery of “lawlessness” at work, which when the apostles were gone, went on to greater ungodliness, with tradition, human and angelic mediators, Mariolatry, transubstantiation, earthly priesthood, the mass, the confessional, relics, Papal assumption and all the other heterodoxies and horrors of Rome.

The end will be still worse. It will be bold and open rebellion against God, as our chapter (2 Thess. 2) intimates. The Restrainer, the Holy Spirit, will be out of the way only when the saints are translated, in whom He dwells individually and collectively. Then the temple of God will be no longer on earth in a spiritual sense. Soon after that, the Holy Spirit ceases to act in ordaining the powers that be. Satan's brief season will then come — the season proper to the revelation of the lawless one, the man of sin. Daniel 11: 36-39 is plain and positive proof that his field of operation is “the glorious land.” It is no less plain that the apostle applies that prophecy to the personage he here describes for his blasphemous self-exaltation and self-deification above every object of reverence or worship, real or false. It is also equally plain that he applies Isaiah 11: 4 to the Lord's slaying him with the breath of His mouth, the true reading of verse 4. This again confirms the locality of this wicked person.

Neither text has to do with the Church or professing Christendom, for all that either will be gone to glory or have sunk into the apostasy and the blasphemous worship of man as God. All these texts explain why the daring man of sin will be in the temple of God in Jerusalem. There, the blessed Spirit came down and filled all the confessors of the Lord Jesus. At this time He will be gone, and Satan will have possessed his minion, the antichrist, who will be worshipped as God in the temple by both Jews and Gentiles.

Though it cannot be drawn from the words of the text that the apostle had explained to the Thessalonians the details of the restraint and the restrainer, yet it is not improbable that he told them of these things. What he says is, “And now,” *i.e.*, since things are so, as he had set out in verses 3-4, “ye know that which restraineth as to his (the man of sin's) being revealed in his own season.” God raises a barrier meanwhile. “For the mystery of lawlessness already worketh: only [there is] He who restraineth at present, until He be gone out of the way.” Every saint ought to know who that mighty agent is, now here below to resist the overflow of Satan's power. It may be that the apostle taught those young believers who He is in a general way. Assuredly, they to whom “our gospel” came, not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, should of themselves be conscious that neither the Church nor any world-power could avail to keep down the frightful energy of Satan if let loose to do his worst, as it will be.

The Church has a chief place as an instrument of that restraint. As long as such a witness of the mystery of godliness bore up, Satan could not force his scheme to efface or trample down the truth and set up his undisputed lie.

The Roman empire too had its authority from God, as the apostle Paul in particular and all the apostles were careful to affirm, whatever its abuse in the hands of its head. Never did it have a more extravagantly wanton head than when the Epistle to the Roman saints laid subjection down as the Christian's duty (Romans 13). But even then Romans 13 is written in terms so broad as to cover all change in the form of government. “Those who be” are set up by God. As long as this authority from God continues, believers are bound to respect and be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience. It was not merely the empire, but any government divinely sanctioned. They knew that Satan could not set up his man of sin as long as there were rulers in God's providence. It is not likely that these young Thessalonian saints were instructed in the possible control of the Spirit, governmentally, for a while after the rapture of the saints, till the last half-week of the seventieth week of Daniel, when all restraint ceases. Then the dragon, in a great rage and knowing his short season, begins the final campaign of this evil age on the earth, given up to his worst (Rev. 12).

There is an element in the restraint far more direct and influential as well of nearer interest. The Spirit of God has in the Church a most special and congenial sphere of loving care and continual action

personally in connection with the Father and the Son. To the Church He has imparted unity, constituting believers, Jew or Greek, the one body of Christ. Also, by His indwelling He makes it God's house or habitation. No factor in the barrier against the antichrist is so decided as this.

The Spirit is here acting in power according to Christ's victory over Satan, not only in life, but in redemption. Who but the Spirit could adequately restrain Satan? He made us of an earthly government and yet more of the Church, yet who but He, working on earth, could be the real restrainer? Of course the Holy Spirit has no such close or intimate relation to any world-power. Yet when the Roman governor talked of having authority to crucify as well as to release, the Lord told him, "Thou hadst no authority against Me except it were given thee from above." The powers that be are ordained by God, and the Spirit is the agent in their unsuspected control so that, however godless the nations or their rulers may be, the issue is by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Both the Jews and their rulers, because in unbelief they didn't know their own Messiah, fulfilled the voices of the prophets by condemning Him.

The Spirit's presence in the Church then, as long as it is here, is the greatest part in that restraint. Satan thus cannot go beyond "the mystery of lawlessness" while the other great mystery of Christ and His Church is being carried on. Hence the man of sin cannot be revealed till his own season shall have come: the Restrainer forbids it. When that heavenly work is completed on earth and the last member of Christ's body is in his place, the Lord will come and receive to Himself not only them but all who were His from the very first. Though the rapture will close that unique association here, the Holy Spirit will still act for a time as He did before Pentecost, both spiritually and governmentally. Both Jews and Gentiles, not then joined in one body as now, will still be brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, as is plainly taught in the Revelation. This book also discloses the later epoch, when for the first time in the history of man, Satan, no God, ordains the Roman empire in its last and fatal form, and empowers the False Prophet who shall reign as king in the holy land (Dan. 11: 36-39). He does his own will, as Christ ever and only did His Father's will.

These are the proofs and marks that the Restrainer then will be gone. Almost all versions unwittingly add to the Word here. The Greek does not say "taken" as might well be of an earthly power that does not vacate, but is forcibly removed (ἀρθη). Not so the true Restrainer, who is behind all the visible and varying forms of the restraint. He goes of Himself. He *leaves* the scene, judicially leaving it open for a while to Satan's abominable pride and mischief. Rather, the Greek says, "till he *become* out of the way," which precisely suits the Holy Spirit.

VERSES 9 - 11

In verses 9-11 the true force points to an evil not yet accomplished and far more tremendous in the personal antichrist. "Whose presence (or, coming) is according to the energy of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." It greatly weakens the truth of that awful fact then allowed to Satan in an exceptional way, to think of the works of that evil man as simply tricks of a deceitful priesthood or "lying wonders" as in the KJV.

As the Lord will manifest His presence in overwhelming power and glory, so will the presence of the lawless one be according to Satan's energy in every form of power and signs and wonders of falsehood to deceive and destroy. The same disbelief which refused the evidence of God's power and truth in Christ will fall under Satan's lie in these powers and prodigies. They are superhuman. Wonders were wrought to a certain point by Pharaoh's magicians. In another way we see surprising effects by

natural agents in Job's trials. But here similar language is employed about the man of sin as the apostle Peter used about the Righteous One (Acts 2: 22). They will be real miracles to promote falsehood, not pretended ones. The issue will be, not only his own perdition, but the deceiving of all his followers to everlasting ruin because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. His lie, the deceit of unrighteousness, will be incompatible with salvation by Christ and the truth. They *all* perish.

The apostle then gives the moral reason for so stern a judgment. "And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe the falsehood, that all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (v. 12). God's sending a working of error is judicial hardening. Satan follows with his deceiving marvels of power to drag down all its followers to perdition. It is divine retribution. They renounced the truth and salvation with it; they loved the lie. They must perish. The elect of that day escape solely by divine grace, as is true of all the elect in any day.

How strikingly portrayed, in contrast with the perdition of that awful time, are the position and privileges of the Thessalonian saints! "So then, brethren, stand, and hold fast the traditions ye were taught, whether by word or by our letter" (v. 15). As all Scripture was not yet written, they were called to heed what they had been orally taught as well as by the apostolic letter. They were beloved by the Lord, chosen of God unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith of the truth, whereto He called them "by our gospel" to obtain our Lord Jesus Christ's glory (vv. 13-14). "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father who loved us and gave everlasting comfort and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish [them] in every good work and word" (vv. 16-17). The judicial hardening, the energetic action of the enemy and the day of the Lord were to fall exclusively on those who despised Christ and renounced the gospel. Everlasting comfort and good hope through grace, were the portion of those who believed, so present establishing in every good work and word were besought on their behalf.

OPPOSITION TO THE RAPTURE: THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT FIELD

We now will look at a Scripture which is used more frequently than any other to oppose the rapture, at least before the day of manifestation. We refer to the parable of the wheat field and the Lord's explanation in Matthew 13. We refer to the only similitude in the chapter that is historical (ὡμοιωθή, "likened," not merely "is like"). The bondmen of Him who sowed the good seed proposed to root up the darnel of the enemy's sowing. He said No: their work is of grace. "The field is the *world*." It is not the Church where discipline is essential, but the kingdom where they must be left for judgment at the end, when the kingdom is no longer in patience, but come in power.

"Suffer (permit) both to grow together unto the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers (or harvesters), Gather first the darnel and bind it in bundles to burn it, but the wheat bring together into My granary."

The crop was spoiled. There can be no effective remedy until the end of the age arrives, with its judgment.

The harvesters, unlike the bondmen, are angels. The angels bind in bundles the sons of the evil one at the fit moment for their activity and as their first revealed act. The angels are instruments of divine providence, and at that season they will be employed in a measure, even before the sons of the kingdom are translated to the granary above. The wicked in the field will, by this means, be brought into close

association, with a view to burning them (πρὸς τὸ κατακαῦσαι αὐτά). It is not yet hell that awaits them, but the preparatory act of God's providence which disposes them suitably for their doom. Nobody can conceive such a work by visible angels before Christ takes to Himself the saints on high.

At present real Christians are mixed up in fleshly and worldly combinations. But when the harvest season begins, it will not be so. The bundles will be made up exclusively of the guilty objects for His judgment. None but the wicked will be collected and bound.

The wheat, the sons of the kingdom, are not left like the darnel on the field, but next brought together into Christ's granary. This means to meet the Lord in the air when at His call all the saints, dead and alive, are changed in a moment and caught up to join Him, "and so shall we always be with the Lord."

The Lord's explanation adds to the original parable. Here, information is given of what will be manifest to all eyes. In the providential action the bundles were not said to be removed from the field. They were left there to await their awful end. But later on during harvest

"the Son of man shall send His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all offenses and those who do lawlessness, and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

The other side of glory is equally clear:

"Then (not before) shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who hath ears to hear let him hear."

This is not the rapture to heaven, but the revelation from heaven. It is the display of His presence, the *appearing* of His coming, His day, when the saints are beheld with Him in the heavenly glory. Christ and they are manifested together: they are already with Him, not He alone before them, nor coming for them.

Thus, everything here is consistent with that later word which the apostle divulged in the Lord (1 Thess. 4: 16-17). As both are parts of the truth of God, they harmonize perfectly, while each contributes its own portion suitably to the divine purpose on the appropriate occasion. We await the future in a perfect peace that rests on the blood of His cross. We also await it in a fullness of joy created by His love which is as rich in grace and glory as it is altogether beyond the mere creature, and as sure as God's Word can make its revelation.

PARABLE OF THE NET

In the parable of the seine or sweep-net (Matt. 13: 47), we have the distinction kept up between the angels who executed the judgment and the fishers who drew it to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast out the worthless — a work uniquely suited to closing scenes. The Christian laborer is occupied with the good; he is an agent of that grace which saved himself. He leaves the worthless aside for those angels who excel in might, whose function it is to deal with them individually. It is no more a question of discipline with the fish than with the darnel. Any thought about wheat becoming darnel, or *vice versa*, is outside the Word of the Lord. There is no question of a good fish turning worthless or of the worthless rising to good. The bondmen like the fishers have a charge only to secure the good. This was a right and intelligent work, and in contrast to the bondmen's readiness, ignorant of self and of God's way, to uproot.

Here, it is again the kingdom, not the Church. Who can fail to see that they are plainly distinct?

The kingdom was a familiar truth, though it took the form of “mystery” now. The Church is first announced in Matthew 16: 18-19. The confusion of the two is a doctrinal blunder which has wrought great practical havoc in all ages to this day. In the Church we are bound to judge evil (1 Cor. 5); in the kingdom we are forbidden (as in verse 30 of this chapter). Punishment is a work for angels' hands, not for Christians. Christians are not called to resist evil, but to suffer, giving God thanks.

Here again we find that “in the end of the age the angels shall go forth and sever the wicked out of the midst of the righteous and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” As there was a providential gathering of the dandelion before the execution of the judgment, so there was a spiritual work by saintly men in sorting the good into vessels before the execution of the judgment to clear the wicked out of their midst. There is the great common principle that this judgment belongs to the angels, not to the saints, but there is a marked difference in that the gathering of the wheat was immediately into the heavenly garner, but the dandelion were subjected to a longer process, with the same sad end as the worthless fish. It is the inverse here, for these wicked ones are severed from among the righteous there, as the worthless were taken out for the terrible judgment of everlasting fire.

Not a word implies any visible act in the binding of the dandelion into bundles first, and then of the sons of the kingdom, the wheat, gathered at once into the garner. True, the Lord comes down into the air and the changed saints are caught up to meet Him there. The garner is not on earth or in the air, but in heaven. Then in due time, the saints follow Him out of heaven (as Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 19: 14 distinctly teach), for the day of the Lord and His judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet, the kings of the earth, the dandelions too, and every other object of divine retribution, and the judgment of the living, is come. This easily falls in with the added explanation of both parables: on one side the display of the glorified saints, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father; and on the other, of the Son of man through His angels clearing out of His kingdom all offenses and those who work lawlessness, into the furnace of fire.

The day of the Lord is the open introduction of the age to come by terrific judgments, and is never in Scripture mixed up with His coming to receive His saints to Himself for the Father's house. Hence we saw that the apostle appealed to His presence to gather the saints to Himself, as their bright hope, against the false and foolish notion, introduced by fraud and calculated to agitate and alarm, that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. Its imminence was not the error, for its imminence is an indisputable truth, which is important practically for souls.

1 TIMOTHY 6: 14

A favorite argument is that the Church must be on earth till the Lord appears, because Timothy is exhorted to keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord. This is misinterpretation! Scripture connects responsible service and also the walk of all saints with the day or the appearing, never with His coming as such or our translation to meet Him on high, which is a matter only of sovereign grace. Responsibility attaches to His appearing because, when we come with Him, our place in the kingdom is decided according to our measure of previous faithfulness. To confound the two things is to lose the distinct truth and the special blessing of each. We are called to *wait* for Him with unclouded joy, but we are also *bound*, each to his particular work, and all of us to watch, abounding in mutual love, in order that we be confirmed blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

It might have been hastily anticipated that this confirmation takes place when He comes for us.

Such however is not the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 3: 12, or any other Scripture. It will be at His coming *with* all His saints. Infinite love gave us the holy nature capable of proper walking. In giving us Christ as our life even now, we are to walk in love accordingly. This will have its consummation in that day, and in the communion of all who share it when the Lord comes to be glorified in all who are His in the fullest and most evident way. The establishment in holiness by love of the saints toward each other would go on and not stop short of that glorious day when the Lord is wondered at in all who believed, and this is only by their manifestation with Him in glory. How admirable Scripture is in thus binding up every day's walk as saints, with Christ's appearing in glory and of us together with Him in it!

Asleep or alive when He comes, Timothy and all other people of God will have their due place in the day of His appearing. In no case does it imply remaining on earth till that day, which would directly contradict Colossians 3: 4 and is inconsistent with other Scriptures that reveal the glorified saints accompanying Christ, and out of heaven too.

It is the grossest error to look for the *resurrection* of those who compose the Church, or of the Old Testament saints in Revelation 20: 4. Both are there, but already changed, in those seated on the thrones to whom judgment was given. The raising from the dead which then follows is exclusively of the Tribulation sufferers, slain after the first general class of the glorified saints were caught up to be with the Lord. The two classes of Revelation-martyrs are now seen to be raised in order to share the reign with Christ for the thousand years.