

# The Prospects of the World according to the Scriptures

2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12

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I have previously shown the hope and calling of the Christian in the parable of the virgins. We shall now see what the word of God reveals as to the future of those not born of God, who may bear the Christian name for the present, but who will abandon it, as we learn from the very portion of Scripture just read. No doubt the world comprehends more than those who outwardly profess the name of the Lord. Besides Christendom, it embraces the Gentiles or heathen, and the Jews. Scripture is silent about none of these; and the light of God is as bright on the future as on the past.

## GOD ONLY CAN FORETELL THE FUTURE

This is an immense principle to hold fast in reading the written word. Men are apt to judge of God by themselves. To speak with certainty of the future being to us impossible, man forthwith imagines that, if God speaks about it, even then it must be somewhat uncertain. If we only reflect a moment, we cannot but see that this idea 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. On the contrary; He knows all things. The only question is whether God communicates what He knows, or how far He has been pleased to do so. Does not the prophetic word profess that He has done so? Is it a true profession? If God has communicated His mind about the future, as evidently the Scriptures assume and even assert, it is simply faith to accept it; and the moment our faith rests upon His word, the light shines. What seemed confusion, when we did not believe, turns to order before our minds when we do. The light was really there always. It was our unbelief that made confusion.

The word of God is the perfect revelation of His mind, no matter what He speaks, or when; and God has been pleased to speak about the future. To do so is the special mark of His confidence. He tells Abraham what He was going to do what concerned not merely himself, but others, even the cities of the plain. Abraham had nothing directly to do with them though Lot had; yet it was not Lot but Abraham who was told of the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot only learned it just in time to be saved, as he was, by fire. But Abraham knew in peace beforehand, and interceded with God. Our portion ought to be that of Abraham rather than of Lot. There are those who in the future will be saved just in time to escape destruction. There are those yet to be in the sphere of judgment, who will pass through it in a measure, who will be preserved only at the last moment. Some will be destroyed. Remember Lot's wife. Others will be rescued, as the angels rescued Lot and his daughters. But theirs was not the happier portion, like that of Abraham.

God has "provided some better thing for us" in every respect. He has given us the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Accordingly, says Paul, writing, not to the Ephesians or the Philippians, but even to the Corinthians, "We have the mind of Christ", the intelligence of Christ, the capacity of spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 2: 16). Not, of course, that we have the same measure as the Lord, Who had and was Himself the wisdom of God, and this absolutely. We have nothing save in and by Him, and hence only in dependence on Him. However, as Christians having the Holy Ghost, we have not the mere mind of man only but of Christ. The intelligence of Christ is ours; and this shows why what was true in principle of Abraham is increasingly — so to speak — true of the Christian, for it could not be said, in the full force of the term, that Abraham had the mind of Christ. The Holy Ghost had not yet come, for Jesus was not yet glorified. Now that the Lord Jesus has accomplished the redemption, and has gone up on high, He has sent down the Holy Spirit to dwell in His saints, to make them the temple of God, and even the body of each believer the temple of the Holy Ghost, 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 other here below be the temple of the Holy Ghost. Jesus was the temple of the Spirit; we, I repeat, are only so because our sin is judged in His cross, our guilt blotted out by His blood. Therefore the Spirit of God comes down to dwell in us, putting honour on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and because of this we have a divine power opening into all that God communicates.

This, though a digression, is of immense importance on the particular subject which we are examining, for there is nothing that more clearly proves divine intelligence than the communication of the future. The Old Testament makes, in the main, this challenge to the false gods, a challenge which — and we need not wonder at it — could only strike them with dumbness, 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 trenchant and severe style, shows their utter impotence to disclose the future.

## **THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN FORETOLD**

Now a very large part of the Old Testament consists of revelations of the future, and not only of what was future then, but of what is future still. The Old Testament prophets expand largely, and in the most blessed terms, on the bright future that yet awaits this world. Isaiah depicts the day of Jehovah, when all that now obstructs the light of glory shall be removed; when all that rises up against the honour of the only true God shall fall; when Satan will lose his delusive power; when the nations of the earth, long groaning under oppression' shall be set free; and when the Jews themselves, who truly ought to have been the leaders of all that is good and true, but alas! abound with teachers of the infidelity that

now poisons the world, shall be delivered from every bitter thralldom, and will come forth to the place that God's promise assigns them as the head and priest of the world. They are destined to fill the foremost place when the earth itself is raised out of its actual and long degradation. The Lord has spoken it, and His hand will accomplish all in due time.

These are parts of the prospects of the world on which the Old Testament prophets descant at great length, and with graphic minuteness. When the Lord Jesus came, on Whom the accomplishment of prophecy depends for the realisation of the kingdom of God — for in truth He was the King Who brought in the kingdom personally, and presented it with final responsibility to Israel — He was rejected. Then came a mighty change of all consequence to the world, when every bright hope seemed blasted, when all expectation of glory for Israel set in clouds and a deeper darkness than before. God made use of that moment of fallen hopes for the earth and the earthly people, and the nations of the world, for "some better thing". He used the cross of Christ to bring in a wholly new state, when Israel vanished for a season — a state distinct from that which prophets prepared the minds of men of old to expect. The reason is simple, and the ground plain. The rejected Christ is raised from the dead, and, having ascended to heaven, takes His seat there to bring in a new and heavenly order of blessing. He is seated there until a future moment, unknown and undisclosed during which God brings in altogether new things. This present interval is Christianity, which is therefore essentially of heaven. The prophets did not speak of heaven, save incidentally. Prophecy refers to the earth. No doubt there are here and there allusions to heaven; but-by no prophet and in no prophecy is there an opening out of what the Lord Jesus is doing now at the right hand of God.

## THE LAMP AND THE DAY-STAR

It was not the object of prophecy to do so. Prophecy, the prophetic word, is a lamp, and very useful, to which those who heed the Lord will do well to pay attention, for that lamp shines in a dark or squalid place (2 Peter 1: 19). Such is the revealed use of prophecy for Christianity. But then there is a brighter light, even the light of day, as the apostle says "Till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." What does he mean by this? The accomplishment of prophecy? Not at all. Till the day of Jehovah comes for the world? In no wise. He speaks of day dawning, and the star arising in *the heart*, not of that day arising upon the world. This would be the accomplishment of prophecy; but he is intimating what the Spirit of God can bring into the heart of the Christian now. The Jewish believer was encouraged still to value his prophetic lamp. The word of prophecy derived confirmation from what was seen on the Holy Mount. Yet there was to be a far clearer light — the light of day, the brightness of heaven, not of the lamp. Further, the person of our Lord Jesus is our hope, the day-star, not merely the general light of heaven, but the day-star arising in the heart. This is, as I understand it, the dawning of heavenly hope in the heart, of which Peter spoke.

The actual arrival of the day of the Lord is another matter, and this will be in its own time. It is, however, a good thing to hold fast the prophetic lamp until we get a better light. There are far brighter associations into which the Christian is introduced now through Christ Jesus; but of these things prophecy does not treat. The prophetic word does not contemplate the arising of the day-star in the heart. There it is the very reverse of Christ. The day-star of prophecy is the name of the Lord's enemy, as you may see in Isaiah 14: 12. The day-star that the Christian knows is Christ, while He is outside of the world in heaven, before He comes to earth. Day dawns, and the day-star arises in the Christian's heart while he is here.

In consequence of this present privilege we stand in a wondrous position. Believing in the Lord

Jesus, we have a Saviour Who is already come, and has accomplished the redemption of our souls, and given us remission of sins. We have life eternal, and the knowledge of our absolute cleansing in the sight of God through the Holy Ghost. Yet the condition of the world is no better, but rather worse. The world has been led on by its prince to reject its only true King — I mean the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the Supreme. We are in the secret of its declension; we know that the King of kings has been refused; and our hearts are with Him. We can afford to wait for the great day; but meanwhile we have the light of day before the day comes. The light cannot yet shine on the world, but in our hearts; so that it is evident we have more than the lamp of prophecy, even the light of day.

We are children of the light and of the day ourselves. Hence therefore it is the part of the Christian to be able to read all that is passing around, as well as the communications of God as to the future. According to God it is a part of our proper heritage. We ought to be able to understand the signs of the times. We ought to be able to read not only what is before us according to God, but also to speak of the future because we believe the word of God. With all that God has communicated we may and should interest ourselves. We have the family interests; for, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; and it would be a poor thing that the heirs should not make themselves acquainted with the inheritance; and how strange if Christians should not understand by the Spirit of God! For this reason then, if we only knew our own privileges, we are led into an immense field of blessedness entirely outside the natural ken of man. This is what I shall endeavour a little to expound and apply, in looking at a few of the principal passages that bear upon the prospects of the world according to the Scriptures.

## **ROOTING OUT TARES A MISTAKE**

Now the Lord, when He was here below, showed clearly what was to befall the world (Matt. 13). He says, "The field is the world", and He has told us what will become of the world, where men would be Christianised — that is, He has shown us clearly what would be the result. Good seed was sown; but there was an enemy who sowed bad seed. Now He does not give us the smallest idea that the bad seed would be ameliorated. He shows us that the servants were zealous enough to remove the bad seed, but He reproves them. He shows that the effort to correct the evil that is in the world, the attempt to use the name of the Lord for reforming the world, always ends in rooting up the good as well as the bad.

We see this habitually in Popery. It is the principle of the reprov'd servants; but, instead of making the world better, in effect it ends on the contrary by destroying the wheat, not the tares. Babylon, above all that ever were, has killed the saints, and made herself drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17: 6). This is a matter of divine revelation to every one, and history verifies it as a fact of Rome, not pagan only but papal yet more. Scripture had said so long ago: he would be a bold man who would dare to deny it. Yet, as of old so now, there are men who talk of making the world better! This delusion goes along with another fundamental error which is found in Popery (and far beyond it too), and that is the notion of men getting better themselves. The two delusions go together. The fact is, that Christianity denies both; one's very baptism indeed denies it, particularly as to man (Rom. 6). To be saved one must take the ground of death with Christ, not of improving the first man; and he who sees and knows what man is ought never to be drawn into the delusion of the world's improvement. Further, the Lord Jesus sets aside the latter error when He tells us the nature of the harvest that is coming; and the harvest is the end of the age, this present evil age, not of the world (Matt. 13: 38, 39).

When the consummation of this age then comes, there will be a process of discrimination and

judgment. The wheat will be removed on high, the tares dealt with here below. Consequently then will be the harvest; but evil will abound up to the end of the age. Never will there be a time in this age when the preaching of the gospel or the zeal of the children of God will root out the evil that has been sown by Satan from the beginning under the Christian name. The new age, the millennial kingdom, will be characterised by righteous rule over the earth in power.

In short therefore those who expect the gradual extirpation of evil are in antagonism with the distinct teaching of the Lord Jesus. I am as far as possible from saying this to repress efforts towards winning and edifying souls; and I fear those who yield to such thoughts, or at least to such words, are guilty of slander. It is one thing to work in faith, and another to expect the general blessing of the world as the result. I grant you the latter will surely come, but its introduction is reserved for the Son of man. Should the bride of the Lamb be jealous? Such a work and result is not for the church, which has been very guilty from early days, dragged down into the snares of the world, into its activity, its honours, 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 the poorest testimony to what a Christian should be. So it will be more and more with the world. Ungrateful for whatever of God has been shed around by Christianity, it will turn again and rend her who abused the name of the Lord for her own selfish and earthly interests. Evil was planted in Christendom under the pretext of Christ's name, and that evil can never be rooted out until the judgment which is 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 (alas, how poorly!) the good seed. It is astonishing how men continue to confound the two.

## **END OF THE AGE BUT NOT OF THE WORLD**

I repeat also that the end of the age is not the end of the world. The phrase "end of the world" in Matthew 13: 39 is an unequivocal error of translation. There is no scholar who ought not to be ashamed of such a blunder. Far from being the end of the world, the very context proves the contrary. The Lord sends His angels and purges from the field or world what is offensive to Him. The evil is judged, the scandals removed; the bad crops or 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 will appear to any attentive reader. The heavenly things and the earthly things of the kingdom of God (compare John 3: 12) will be found then in unsullied 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 lawlessness. 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 blessedness 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.

It is the end of the age, the present age, during which Christ does not appear in glory and reign over the earth. There will follow another age, when Christ, instead of being hidden, will be manifested, and will expel Satan, removing all that contaminates men and dishonours God. This judicial purging 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. The mistake is applying them to the church now. The principle often does apply in the New Testament, as we all see. I do not mean to contest this, but there are limits. The fulfilment is another thing.

In the future kingdom there will be not only Jews blessed but Gentiles too. Of this the apostle Paul avails himself, pointing to the fact of both enjoying the present blessings of grace; and this fact amply suffices 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 Jews consistently object to the apostle's preaching to all men? Was it right of them to fly in the face of their own prophets? Did they not affirm God's blessing on both to be contrary to the Bible? But the Gentiles are certainly blessed no less than the Jew by the gospel; and this the proud Jew could not endure. Still the apostle never says that the prophecy was therefore accomplished to the letter now. The principle of it is true under the gospel; the fulfilment of it awaits another day and a different state of things when Christ Himself appears.

In the prophecies we find intimations not merely of the coming blessedness, but of the Jews treated as a rebellious gainsaying people; and of God calling in those who were "not a people". Take the beginning of Isaiah 65. The Gentiles are there called as those who knew not the Lord, while His own are treated as disobedient. Compare again Hosea 1: 10 with Rom. 9: 24-26. Thus the Spirit of God gives here and there hints, dim enough once but now clearly interpreted by Himself, which were to have a special 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, or of Christians united with their Head in heaven. These things compose "the mystery"; none of them is ever developed by the prophets.

We have the fact of the Lord sitting at the right hand of God in Psalm 110; but the only use the psalm makes of it is to show that He sits there till His enemies are made His footstool. There is not a word about what is done with His friends. The revelation of the counsels and ways of God with the latter now is Christianity. The psalm only speaks of His sitting there till judgment is executed on His enemies. We see 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 now accomplished — for instance, in calling the Gentiles. For as Moses told Israel, "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the works of this law" (Deut. 29: 29). But the great central truth of St. Paul is that the mystery or secret of God concerning Christ and the church is *now* revealed by His holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit (Rom. 16: 25, 26).

It would be easy to furnish further proofs, were this the fitting time. The character of the church supposes that God abolishes at present the difference between the Jew and the Gentile. The grand fact of the future is that then the Jew is exalted to the first place, and the Gentile blessed, but subordinately.

In the kingdom they will each be recognised and blessed, but in a different position, not equally as now both are. It is quite evident that the future millennial kingdom supposes the reinstatement of Israel in more than former favour., and the nations will rejoice, but in a place secondary to that of Israel.

In the church of God all this disappears, the church being heavenly, as Christ is, and according to the nature of things in heaven. People are not known by their nationality on high: on earth they are, according to God's providence. But the Christian being essentially called on high, all these earthly distinctions entirely disappear. Hence after Pentecost there was a new state of things and a fresh testimony, for God has now revealed that which comes in between the first and second advent of Christ.

When the Lord comes again, the Old Testament prophecies will resume their course, with the additional confirmation of a small portion of the New Testament which refers to that time in order to

give a harmonious testimony.

One may now see clearly what has been shown already, that the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples from the very first not to expect that the Christian economy would, so far as the world was concerned, end in joy and light and blessing. On the contrary, evil must take root from early days by the crafty power of Satan, and never be corrected till the end of this age. This then is the first great lesson that we are taught in the Gospels.

Again, in Luke 21 is a statement to which we may refer as giving a further view of the prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. It is said, "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 more completely than at any point of its most eventful history. But there is not a word here about seeing "the abomination of desolation." Nor does this chapter say "then shall be great tribulation," such as never had been, nor shall be: "these," it only tells us, "be the days of vengeance" — two very different things. Here again we read, "But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people." This was fulfilled to the veriest tittle in what befell the Jews when Titus took the city, and the Jews 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 of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." So it was, in fact. Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles. One national power after another was to have possession of the holy city. So it is now; that treading down still goes on, for the times of the Gentiles are not yet fulfilled.

But 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, the sea and the waves roaring," etc. Some people have made the mistake that these scenes took place when Titus took Jerusalem. There is no authority for such a supposition. We have had the capture of Jerusalem long ago; then that Jerusalem is trodden down after the siege, while "the times of the Gentiles" flow onward; thence we are transported into the final scenes. "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory; and when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." It is clear that destruction is not intended, but the blessedness that is coming in at the end, when God terminates the time of misery and sorrow and trouble and suffering. The coming of the Son of man is never made to be the annihilation of the world, or the end of it in that sense, but the end of Satan's misrule, and the shining forth of the kingdom of God. For the world there can be no real permanent general blessing till the Son of man comes in power and glory.

## **THE FIG TREE AND ALL THE TREES**

In this chapter (ver. 29), we find the parable in an enlarged form compared with Matthew: "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees." As being of Luke, it speaks about the Gentiles explicitly. Therefore "all the trees" are in the scene. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that "summer is nigh." "The kingdom of God is nigh at hand." Is it not evident, therefore, that the kingdom of God is coming in a sense different from what men look for and say? Its approach is true now to faith; but we do not see it. Then it will be manifest, and it will put down all that opposes itself against God. The yoke of evil will be broken then, which it is not now. Satan is still the prince of this world. We have to fight against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (Eph. 6: 12). The term "high places" is an error of the translators, which falsifies the sense. It has led persons to oppose the higher authorities; for instance it led the Roundheads to oppose

the government of their day. Such an interpretation is as false as the translation. The rendering and the doctrine are both wrong. The doctrine of the New Testament is that we have to do with the most serious fight that ever can be carried on by man here below; we have to combat Satan, not only to hold our own, but to hold the Lord's own against all the power of the enemy. But in no case is the Christian to wage carnal warfare, only against Satan.

This spiritual conflict is what is going on now, but it will not be the case when the kingdom of God comes. Satan, animating the empire in its last uprising, and the nations in general, against the Lamb, will be put down: then the stream will steadily flow on for God's glory. Now we have to swim against the current. Now it is a question of life and faith, where Satan reigns, and only the power of the Spirit sustains. There will be no power of death then against which the saints of God will have, as now, to make good His will in the name of Jesus. There are, no doubt, those who will tell you that the kingdom is gradually winning its way among men; but this is a grievous mistake, a short-sightedness not without danger as to the word of God. It ignores the utter ruin of man and the world, the incurable evil of flesh, the power of Satan, the honour reserved and due to Christ. It overlooks the heavenly calling and the future reward and the present rejection of the Christian. It is manifest that, if this present advance were the fact, a very great part of the New Testament would cease to be applicable directly the power of Satan was broken. The doctrine and exhortations which suppose we have now to fight against Satan would be no longer true. There is a plain contrast between the character and circumstances of the millennium and those of the present day.

Romans 11 will tell us a little more of the world's prospects as God teaches us in His word. We read there that the Gentile, who is now the object of God's calling and of His dealings under the gospel, is warned to take heed from the fate of the Jew: "Because of unbelief they were broken off; and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (vers. 20, 21). It is impossible to apply this to the believer as such. The apostle is speaking of the general professing body. It is the danger of what is commonly called Christendom, of those baptized to the name of the Trinity, who are here warned of excision if they continue not in the goodness of God which He is now displaying. If the Gentiles do not stand by faith, they will be cut off, just as the Jew was before.

This judicial act has nothing to do with the believer's security. But God deprived His chosen nation of their place of privilege and testimony. He always guarded His own people, Israel, as He cares for His own people now. God always is faithful to His saints; how could He be otherwise to those who, renouncing themselves, confide in Him, that is, in His Son? As the Lord Himself told the disciples, they were in His hand and in His Father's hand (John 10: 28, 29). But He is here speaking, not of individual saints, but of the professing body. As the people which had the law were cut off because of their infidelity, so those who are now unfaithful to the gospel will be cut off because of their infidelity. He is speaking of the olive tree, that is, the line of those who profess the name and testimony of God in the world.

## **THE OLIVE TREE OF PROMISE**

The Jews were the beginning of the olive tree. The olive tree being founded on the promises given to Abraham, it does not take account of persons before God's dealings with him. The olive tree begins with the first soul called out as a public witness for God in the world; Abraham's seed, the Jews, followed as a nation; and Christendom is now the public witness for God. But, as the Jew had been false to his calling, so Christendom has been faithless to theirs. The fact is certain, not so much from

our own thoughts or from secular history, but from the unerring word of God.

They are told, if they do not abide in the faith, they must be cut off; also, if they (the Jews) do not abide in unbelief, God will graft them in again. The tree was Jewish; then some branches, not all, but some, are brought in under the name of the Lord. Meanwhile the Gentile was Christianised; but when they become unfaithful, the Jews will be grafted in again. This will be when the kingdom of God comes upon the earth.

In Romans 11: 25 we read, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits."

This is exactly what Christians have become. They dream that things are always to get better and better. Is not this one way of becoming "wise in their own conceits?" He says again, so "blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." You err if you suppose that Christ will be always at the right hand of God, as He now is. When He returns to the earth, when He espouses Zion, there will be a place given to Israel, the old promised place, on the ground of divine mercy; as God has said, "For this is My covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11: 27).

What is going on now? The Jews are the enemies of the gospel. And one great cause of their enmity is that they first rejected Jesus Himself; then they became furious when redemption through the blood of Jesus was preached to the Gentiles; they could not bear such grace to the world, they were the adversaries who dogged the steps of the apostles wherever they went to preach to the nations; they tried to get hold of the chief women and men, and stir them up against the apostles. So they have been antagonists of Christ ever since. Men wonder what is going on in the infidelity of the day. The Jews are mainly at the bottom of this wickedness. Satan has set up their famous men as objectors to the truth; Spinoza was one of them. But latterly this opposition has taken a new and more apostate shape. It is the old error with a fresh burnish, but with aggravated guilt given to it.

The unbelieving Jews, I am grieved to say, are the mainspring of the world's opposition to the truth of God. They have lost the earth, and they gnash their teeth at heaven. They cannot bear that the Christian should get a blessing which they do not want themselves. The same thing was found wherever the heralds of the divine mercy of God went forth in early days with the message; and so it is now, with the sorrowful addition that the Gentiles were to be unfaithful like the Jews, and foes of the truth also. What an awful thing it is that those who bear the Christian name, shepherds in chief perhaps, are pioneers of the most abominable infidelity! This is the case not merely in Protestant countries, but equally so in Catholic countries. The Protestants are more open and plain-spoken; the others pay their priests if they do not go to mass, or are priests themselves, believing as little as they like. A little hush-money suffices to keep up the delusion.

There is infidelity everywhere in Christendom, and not less but more, I believe, in the lands of Popery, than even in Germany and Holland. Nor do the priests care much about it; so long as men or even women only keep up outward forms, it is all right, and they are "the faithful"!

In Protestant countries, as we know, the Bible is too much read and known for such a vain show. People too are more honest about God and His word; if they do not believe, they say so. Some, it is true, have been learning a novel lesson at Oxford lately: it is to profess the truth, but to insinuate, preach, and print the contrary. This is almost the lowest form of infidelity that has been seen yet. In former days infidelity went outside the profession of faith; this had at least an appearance of low and rude integrity about it. If a clergyman became an infidel, he gave up his profession; but the

characteristic of modern free-thinking is that you find men of amiable habits and character who adhere to forms of Christianity which they do not accept as divine and ultimate truths, but only as a step in human progress; and thus they try to destroy the faith of the truth. The influence of this immoral, easy-going scepticism extends, as does the equally unbelieving system of Ritualism; and what will be the result? There will come an uprising of public indignation against Babylon; there will be a revolution in religious things as well as political. This I shall show by the word of God.

The general truth, however, as we have seen before coming to details, is that the Gentiles are warned that they must be cut off, while Israel will be brought in again. The prophets, and yet more, the apostles, are clear enough about it. We go farther, however; and in the Scripture which we have read tonight the statement of the Spirit of God is most explicit. He encourages the saints by their hope of the return of the Lord Jesus, Who will instantly gather them up to heaven, not to be troubled with the false rumour that the day of the earth's judgment had already come.

## THE THESSALONIAN ERROR ABOUT THE DAY OF THE LORD

I must particularly call your attention to this passage, though it has been often done of late. The phrase in question should be, "The day of the Lord is present." There is an error in the common English version, as also in the commonly received text. This is conceded by almost all competent scholars and intelligent Christians. The meaning of the last verb in 2 Thess. 2: 2 is not "at hand," but "is present." I am not aware of a single case where this form of word could have any other meaning. Nor does it occur seldom in the New Testament: see Rom. 8: 38; 1 Cor. 3: 22; 1 Cor. 7: 26; Gal. 1: 4; Heb. 9: 9, in all which it unequivocally means *present*, repeatedly in *express* contrast with what is *at hand or future*. In 2 Timothy 3: 1, is a different form of the word; but there too it means that difficult times shall be there, not merely imminent. These are all the occurrences in the New Testament. Without exception, they are every one clear and explicit in their sense as to this. "The day of the Lord *is at hand*" would be a different phrase. When the apostle means "at hand" he says so, using quite another word. Further, this erroneous version, as in the English Bible, makes the apostle contradict himself, for the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 13: 12) tells the Romans that "the day is at hand." How then could the misleaders at Thessalonica be consistently charged with error if they only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand — the same thing as Paul afterwards teaches himself? But no; these false teachers had given out that the day was (not coming ever so soon, but) *actually arrived*; and this was filling the saints with panic, especially as they pretended to a revelation for it, and even more, as we shall see.

There is an indubitable sign of false teachers that I must here commend to the notice of all Christians, for we need it in these days, and may need it yet more if the Lord tarry. Observe then 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 endeavouring to shake their confidence in the grace and truth of God, filling their minds with groundless alarm. Not possessing peace himself, he is often deceived as well as a deceiver; for he knows not in his own experience peace and joy in believing. The false teacher then either injures the children of God by weakening their confidence in God, or, at the same time with this, he lulls with opiates those whom God would have to be awakened from their dangerous insensibility. In short, false teachers either flatter the world or try to alarm the true children of God.

The truth does exactly the contrary; it always has for its effect to rouse men from their state of guilty indifference or of self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. But it tells them of a divine Saviour and of a present salvation. Along with this there is the comforting,

establishing, and leading on of the 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. For all these things are the portion of the believer.

What then were those about who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to the word and Spirit for their cry that the day of the Lord was come; false teachers often do as much. But they did more; they grew bolder in their iniquity; they pretended to have a letter of the apostle Paul affirming that "the day of the Lord was present." I am aware that some learned men have thought they alluded to the former Epistle. Thus Paley\* says that the apostle writes in the Second Epistle, among other purposes, to quiet this alarm and to rectify the misconstruction that had been put on his words; in that the passage in the Second Epistle relates to the passage in the First. But this is an oversight. It is certain and evident that the epistle alluded to here was *not* his; for he says "that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter *as* from us." He does not say the letter that we wrote, but a letter *as* from us, or purporting to be from us. It was a suppositious letter, not his First Epistle.

\* Works (*Horae Paulinae*), vol. v., p. 284 (ed. 7).

The pretended letter of the apostle was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already come; but the day of the Lord, according to the Bible, will in general 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 many of the prophets. On what pretext then was the cry raised at Thessalonica? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth's sake. The false teachers seem to have converted this into that day, alleging that the day of the Lord had come. All indeed knew it to be a day of fearful trial, and that all meanwhile goes on worse and worse till the evil is then put down and the power of God is victorious. Hence the saints that did look for that day, according to the First Epistle, became troubled by this cry and were shaken in mind. For, as we have seen, false teachers naturally shake the righteous, instead of seeking to comfort and stablish them. On this occasion they contrived to excite no little panic and anxiety as if the day of the Lord had actually come.

Not at all, says the apostle: do you not know that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself? "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming (or presence) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind nor troubled." He first appeals to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope and then goes on to a prophetic reason, thus giving the idea a complete refutation. But you may notice that it is never supposed that the saints wait for the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. It is the coming of the Lord they await for this. "The coming of the Lord" and "His day" are two quite different thoughts, often confounded by men.

The coming or presence (*παρουσία*) of the Lord is a much wider term, embracing the day as well as what is just before the day. But the part of His coming that is called "the day of the Lord" consists of the execution of His judgment on the earth and then of His reign. The first object is to gather home those He loves. Love would always secure the object of affection first.

The coming of the Lord then is bound up closely with the gathering of the saints; the day of the Lord with the execution of judgment on His enemies here below. Hence we find here, "let no man deceive you by any means." It is evident there might be a great deal of mistake on this subject; "for that day shall not come except there come *the* falling away (or apostasy) first." "*That day shall not come*" is an insertion of our translators, marked therefore by italics, though, I believe, substantially correct. The "day" will come after the apostasy, the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom.

Oh, how men deceive themselves, when they think that all is going on to progress and triumph!

There will be victory when Christ comes, not before. What is revealed is a very different and more humbling prospect. The distinct intimation is that ["that day shall not come"] except there come the falling away first, the apostasy. And what is the character of modern infidelity but a preparation of the way for the *apostasy*; men bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance; men who still carry on the dead forms while the spirit has fled? This abandonment of the truth of God will grow and extend, and men are getting ready for it too. They are destroying everywhere on earth the outward and public recognition of the truth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity in Europe. I mean that the governments of the world are gradually stripping off all connection with the Christian name. There are those who think this is a great boon. Though I have not the smallest interest or affinity for established religion, I cannot but think the act criminal and that this will turn out more serious than the reformers expect.

I believe it was a most serious evil when the Christians 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 connection with Christianity. It was a deep loss for the Christians when they sought the world's recognition; it will be an awful day for the world when it is so tired of the union as to throw off Christianity entirely, Consequently, that most slender tie which binds and attaches men to the reading of the Bible or going to church will be broken when it has no longer connection with the government. You may live to see the vast change which will take place. I grant that there is no reality, no divine life, there is no true honour paid to the Lord, in carrying on a mere outward profession; but people who go to church, as it is called, hear the word of God and an acknowledgement of the name of Christ. When this is no longer publicly recognised, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice, and go to shoot, fish, ride, or drink. They will amuse themselves in reading anything *but* the Bible. There will be the most rapid decay. Not so with the saints of God. The result will be, no doubt, that the real will become the more evident. They will rest only on the word of God; but as regards men of the world, the neglect of reverence for what is divine will bring about the apostasy. This is what is in prospect for the world!

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was also the first written by the apostle; the Second, from the nature of the case, was written shortly after. Thus, from the very beginning of Christianity — from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches such is the solemn declension of which they were warned. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it ere the end of this age come. But that day is not to be "except there come the falling away first." It is not merely a falling away here, and a falling away there, but *the* falling away, or *the* apostasy.

## THE MAN OF SIN

Further, "That man of sin (will) be revealed, the son of perdition." There was once a Man of righteousness — the Saviour; 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." I am aware that many people apply this to the Pope of Rome. I do not for a moment agree with them, though regarding that system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon. But I dare not say that the apostasy has arrived yet, and it is a sorrowful thing to use Scripture with a party aim, or for controversial objects; it is a sorrowful thing in the presence of growing evil, which pervades both Protestant and Catholic countries alike — a sorrowful thing to cast such a stone from one to the other. No, beloved friends, the apostasy is the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal, and then casting them off with shame.

The apostasy will be the result wherever Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been

preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue, whether of Catholics or Protestants, whether of Greeks or Copts or any others; such will be the result, not outside but within Christendom. It does not mean the end of the *Jews*, or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherever the name of the Lord has been professed. "The day of the Lord cannot be, except there come the falling away first and the man of sin be revealed." The climax is that lawless one who "exalteth himself." Jesus humbled Himself, and only exalted God. Here is a man, the man of sin pre-eminently, the personal adversary of the Lord Jesus. And, as the Lord said to the Jews, they would not have Him Who came in His Father's name; they will receive him who comes in his own name (John 5: 43). At the end of this age he will come, and accordingly he is found as Satan's winding-up, not merely of apostate Christianity, but of apostate Judaism also.

I have already shown the connection with Christendom, but now I will briefly touch on Judaism, for this personage "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing 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 that saw Pentecost; so far as the world could behold, it beheld that which belongs to heaven on the earth. Jerusalem will see the judgment of that which, long a counterfeit, will end in a manifestation of hell — the fruit of the amalgam of Christianity with Judaism. So the apostle reminds them, "Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time."

## THE WITH-HOLDING POWER

There is a withholding power. What is that power? I cannot doubt it is the Holy Ghost. It is not evil which so opposes evil, but good. That which effectually hinders the outbreak of the power of Satan is not the energy of mortal man. I am aware the ancients used to think it was the Roman empire. This being long gone led some to conceive that the papacy is meant by the beast, as well as the apostasy, the man of sin, etc. But I am not prepared to allow that the beast is come yet. The "mystery of iniquity" is working still. It was working then, and is working now; but even now it does not show itself in its most horrible colours.

The apostle says, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only there is one now who letteth (or restraineth), until he be taken out of the way." Thus you see the hindering power is to disappear. Further, it is both a principle and a person (being spoken of as neuter as well as masculine); it can therefore apply to none so well as the Spirit of God, Who still, for the sake of the children of God, and to sustain His testimony, continues to hinder the first manifestation of Satan's power. But then that is only for a time, it will not be for ever. "Only there is one who now letteth until he be taken out of the way." The Spirit of God will by and by cease to stand in the way of the working of the Evil One. "And then shall that lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the shining forth (or appearing) of His coming." The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this lawless being the one who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says St. John; when *the* antichrist comes, he will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus coming from heaven and publicly. "Then shall that lawless one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth." The critical addition of "Jesus" I put in, because it is certainly genuine and gives more definiteness to the thought.

## THE APPEARING AND THE COMING

Now mark the first verse of the chapter. The apostle does not say 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." Here, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, he speaks not merely of His coming but of the appearing — the epiphany or brightness — of His coming. If when the Lord comes to gather His saints He appears, why should not His appearing be brought in there? Is it not manifest that the coming of the Lord does not of necessity mean His appearing? How else the phrasing of verse 8? It was necessary, when His appearing was meant, 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 shining forth of it. For He might come without being seen beyond what He pleased; but here we have the manifestation of His advent. 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 before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

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 false personage, the man of sin, will set up to be both the Messiah and Jehovah of Israel, and the mass will be led away by the fatal delusion. The same unbelief which rejects the true will bow down to the false.

These are the dismal prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. A very different future fills the imagination of men generally. Why wonder at this? How can they truly prognosticate what is to be? No man can discern the future unless he believes the prophecies of God.

I am aware many will tell you how dangerous it is to predict. But the study of prophecy is calculated and meant to keep us from predicting. Those who study prophecy should be humble enough to be content with prophecy. If you despise the prophecies of God, you may set up to be a prophet; but, if so, you must always be a false one. It is only God Who knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it: we have the responsibility of believing. A man cannot believe these things without their leaving their impress upon his heart. If you have truth in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead, seeking to prove true to what you believe.

The Lord Jesus is coming; but He is going to appear also, not merely coming to receive His own, when His coming will be in the twinkling of an eye. That the world should see the change and translation of the saints is not at all necessary, for the Lord has many ways of taking His own to Himself without death. Suppose the Lord were to cause a tremendous earthquake to happen, would not the wise men of the world 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 world. This, at least, will be manifest to every eye. Hence we find that, whenever judgment is in question, manifestation characterises it. When the Lord Jesus called Saul of Tarsus, his companions felt the tokens of some extraordinary action going on, though they knew nothing about itself. There were not a few men in the throng going to Damascus, yet only one man saw the Lord Jesus; all the rest only heard an inarticulate sound. They did not hear the words of His mouth; 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 was this divulged for the good of the world?

Nothing, then, is easier than for the Lord to show things in a partial way on these occasions; but He will do them on a grand comprehensive scale when the judgment of the world comes, after taking on high His people previously.

Manifestation is always connected with the world's portion. The Lord, when He comes for the saints, will manifest Himself to them, of course; but that He will manifest Himself to the world is nowhere said in the Bible. There is a positive intimation that it will not be so at the end. "When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall we [be *not* caught up but] *appear* with Him in glory." Consequently, the world cannot have seen Christ when He came to take His people. The very same moment that the world sees Christ appearing in glory they will see the saints appearing in glory along with Him. If Christ could appear before the saints were caught up the Scriptures would be contradicted.

## BABYLON AND THE BEAST

I will refer to one Scripture more before I close; and it is a very solemn one. It is from Revelation 17. There are two great objects of judgment brought before us there. One is called the great harlot, the other is the beast. The first object is seen sitting upon many waters (vers. 1-6). She is a corrupt woman, seated also upon a most remarkably characterised beast, a beast with seven heads and ten horns. What is the meaning of these two symbols? You may easily gather it by comparing the 1st verse with the 9th and 10th verses of Rev. 21, which refer to "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

It is plain that the one is the counterpart of the other; that Babylon, the harlot, is Satan's sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife. As the one is the holy city, the bride of the Lamb, the other corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, and corrupts them. This explains why she is styled "harlot." She is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings. The church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb's wife, 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. "He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem"; the word "great" ought to be expunged, and the word "holy" transposed to take its place — "the holy city, Jerusalem" (ver. 10).

But still, the very fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the church glorified, gives the greatest possible help towards understanding what Babylon means. What is the religious body which, under the shelter of Christ's name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can one hesitate?

I grant you that much evil has been done by what is called established churches, the national body of this country, and the national body of that; but what is this coalition in comparison with the pretensions of her that claims all countries and tongues, kings as well as subjects? Can there be any question who and what she is? Has there ever been any but one?

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon; but as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, she is a persecuting power,\* the greatest of all persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. Have you not heard of an ecclesiastical body which thinks it her duty, for the love of God and the good of men's souls, to exterminate heretics? She is herself as innocent as Pilate! She kills none; she only hands them over to the civil power to be punished! Alas! there never was a Pagan power, there never was a Jewish frenzy, which so tortured the saints of God as Babylon has done. So clear is her identification that I do not require to point her out. Surely the truth must be evident when it is unnecessary to name who she is.

\* Mr. J. A. Froude has too much reason to say, "The so-called horrors of the French Revolution

were a mere bagatelle, a mere summer shower, by the side of the atrocities committed in the name of religion and with the sanction of the Catholic Church. The Jacobin Convention of 1793-4 may serve as a measure to show how mild are the most ferocious of mere human beings when compared to an exasperated priesthood. By the September massacre, by the guillotine, by the fusillade at Lyons, and by the drownings on the Loire, five thousand men and women, at the utmost, suffered a comparatively easy death. Multiply the five thousand by ten, and you do not reach the number of those who were murdered in France alone in the two months of August and September, 1572. Fifty thousand Flemings and Germans are said to have been hanged, burnt, or buried alive under Charles V. Add to this the long agony of the Netherlands in the revolt from Philip, the Thirty Years' War in Germany, the ever-recurring massacres of the Huguenots, and remember that the Catholic religion alone was at the bottom of all these horrors; that the crusades against the Huguenots especially were solemnly sanctioned by successive popes, and that no word of censure ever issued from the Vatican, except in the brief intervals when statesmen and soldiers grew weary of bloodshed, and looked for means to admit the heretics to grace."

Nor is this nearly 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 of importance. This chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. For the woman is here declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. This is unquestionable. Now there never was one that ruled as this city did. The better you know history the more you will feel that Rome only it can be. There was but one city. which ruled more and longer than any empire since the world began; and everybody in St. John's day would know where that city lay and what was its name.

It was not Athens — for Athens could never for any considerable time rule even Greece. It was not Jerusalem before nor Constantinople since. Some think that this chapter refers to the literal Babylon of Chaldea; but this was a city built on the plain of Shinar. How could such a city be truly said to be built on seven hills! The Chaldean capital had been a great city; it passed away, and only remained to occupy the curiosity of the learned men. Here was one then ruling over the kings of the earth. There was but one city that could be said so to reign in the days of John, and no one ever has so reigned since.

This city was to become the harlot, and so to exercise power over the Roman beast or empire, the beast of seven heads and of ten horns. But 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 cannot lift the veil. Not history explains 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; and the infidel historian chronicles the fact.

But you have another thing which history could not divine. If God's word is true and sure, the Roman beast is to revive. It is well known that its revival has been essayed. Charlemagne tried; Napoleon the First tried; Napoleon the Third would have liked well to have tried. Not that I have sympathy with those who pretend to point out the person. There were many that fixed on the last-named fallen potentate and a few cling to their notion still [1873]. They are premature: better leave guess-work to such as do not search into prophecy.

## **THE REVIVAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE**

Here is the word of God. Why should you predict? You had better not pretend to it; the word of

God has spoken already; be you content with its predictions. Now the word of God has said nothing of the sort it speaks of the beast that should ascend out of the bottomless pit, or abyss, and go into perdition. Why add to this? Why speculate? Let us only believe. Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. "And they that 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 yet is." The common reading "and yet is" (χαίπερ ἔστίν) is incorrect. "And shall be present" (χαὶ ἔσονται) is the true sense. Here, then, we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed under the worst influence before the age ends and the Lord returns in judgment.

Let us look back for a moment at the history of the world-empire, and compare it with the present and the future.

In the time of John the Roman empire ruled the known world. That empire had then but 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, the beast that is not. But it "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit." This will be a new trait in the world's history. The worst of powers is better than anarchy; the most grinding tyrannies are safer than no authority at all! So, it is evident that, 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 is not yet, because there is One Who withholds (2 Thess. 2); but when He withdraws the hindrance, the beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. St. John of course speaks symbolically of the Roman empire in its last Satanic uprising and state. 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 the plain fact that the ten horns, or kingdoms (supposing for the moment that the kingdoms of Western Europe comprised just ten) 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 very arrangement no one power has been allowed to get the upper hand.

Many have desired it; but the result of their desires, when action has followed before the time, is that such perish. But by and by it will be accomplished. Then the beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, save 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 balance of power will then be required no longer. The day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God has accomplished His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself. And then the world is allowed to have its little moment when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (See verses 12 and 13.)

The state here described is perfectly unexampled before or since the fall of the Roman empire. One knows the independence of even the least of the kingdoms. They do not like people to interfere, if they be ever so little. Several too join — some for and some against. Such is the way things have long gone on in the political world of the west.

Here the principle of national independence has disappeared. Separate or party action is all gone. The time is come for a vast change in the world. This will be the character of it: a great imperial

power, called the beast, not absorbing but wielding the separate powers of the west. The beast is a type of strength, no doubt, but without reference to God So it will be then at the close. The western imperial system will have thrown off all care for God or thought of Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the western nationalities of Europe. The separate kings will be flattered with the idea that they have each a separate existence and will. But they are only the sinews of the strong man who wields them all. What will they do then? "These shall make war with the Lamb."

What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, no less than from what men dream as the gradually coming future! On the other hand, the saints come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives. (Compare Rev. 19: 14). Being changed, they are for ever with the Lord, and they follow Him. 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 (Rev. 17: 14) styled "called, and chosen and faithful." Some have thought they must be angels. But they are not. For angels are never called "faithful." And, again, 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 again. But this is never true of an angel. The gospel is God's calling fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and by means 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 chosen and faithful."

## THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON BY THE BEAST

But there is more. What becomes of the woman?

We hear about her too in the 15th verse, and here discern vast religious influence. It is not a national church, but an idolatrous, persecuting, religious system claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends its influence over all the world. It is easily seen what, and what only, such a system can be. There is but one such in Christendom, though she has daughters. Further (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 turn furiously with the beast against her. Would it not be a very strange thing if the Pope turned against his own church or city? The Pope is not the beast, and has nothing directly to do with Babylon's destruction. It is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, it is the beast from the abyss which joins with the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the west against that ecclesiastical system.

\* In verse 16 observe that the true reading is not the ten horns "upon" the beast, but the "ten horns which thou sawest *and* the beast, these shall hate the whore . . . "

Babylon had long intoxicated man, persecuted 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 imposture. But there is nothing of Christ in her destroyers. It is Satan against Satan. The end of the proud world-church is come, and, soon after, of her destroyers. The beast and the ten horns, throughout the Roman empire, have risen up. The ten kingdoms of western Europe turn against the Roman harlot, and strip, eat, and burn her.

There are solemn premonitory signs even now. Let me mention only one fact noticed by both Romanists and Protestants. You are aware of the Ecumenical Council lately held in Rome (in 1869). Its distinctive character is remarkable, and emphatically indicative of the change that has taken place

even among the Western powers. For the first time the Pope could not ask one Catholic sovereign to sit in this council. It was composed simply and exclusively of priests. Not a single ambassador or representative of the crowned heads was there. There never was such a state of things before in mediaeval or modern Europe.

I grant you that infidelity lies under the change. It is overflowing even now everywhere, as by and by the beast will be steeped up to the eyes in blasphemy. He and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while, at the same time, they hate the harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the lies of Babylon, but no less a rejection of the truth. You see its spirit in our own country and day. Men take pleasure in spoiling the religious dignitaries and their earthly goods. This is going on in all lands; but the end of it will have a deeper dye.

Let me repeat that I do not mean that we are yet come to the beast or the ten horns of Rev. 17. I am only showing the tendency of the present times — the way in which the wind is blowing in the west. Men prepare to turn violently against what they had been so long enslaved to.

As the end approaches, the word of God asserts its majesty and power, as fresh as at the beginning; for we are verging towards the close of the profession of Christianity on the earth, when the Lord is leading His own to expect their removal to heaven to meet the Bridegroom. We have these admonitory symptoms that the world gets weary of false religion, and becomes ashamed of forms which are themselves superstitions. And no wonder, for there is scarcely an outward ordinance remaining, scarcely even a form, which has not been utterly perverted, as well as the truth itself ignored or denied by it.

W. K. [AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN 1873]