

A

SKETCH OF PROPHECY.

INTRODUCTION.

THE believer, knowing his acceptance in Christ, is put into a position in which, and has the gift of the Holy Ghost by which, he may survey all God's future operations.

I. The purpose of God is to put all things under Christ in glory, and in this the church is associated with Him.

(1.) The right of Christ to inherit all things is founded upon three titles, namely, the Creator, the Son, and the Man of Psalm viii.

1. The taking of the inheritance will be at His coming; and as a kingdom. 2. The church, being raised then, reigns with Him.

(2.) Meanwhile, in this present time, the church is being quickened by the operation of the Spirit on the preached word.

1. The life so given issues in a resurrection apart from the wicked; statement of the first resurrection.

2. The hope and calling of the church is to wait for the coming of the Lord; the practical influence of this doctrine; the loss of it has been the church's ruin, considered in its relations here below: an arousing has partially taken place; neither the one nor the other unnoticed in the prophetic word.

(3.) Character of the Lord's return to the earth, and earthly blessings which follow.

II. The bearing of the coming of Christ upon the world at large.

(1.) The world is divided into three great classes, viz., the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church. With each of these God has had dealings, and they have all failed ; but God is faithful.

1. Sketch of the failure of the Jews, under the law ; but they have unconditional promises still remaining to them, and will be restored to their land : events in this restoration different from any of God's previous dealings with them.

2. The Gentile power, as such, is to end in rebellion against God ; its system will be destroyed by the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

3. The end of the professing church, as such, is apostacy ; and the judgment of God executed by Christ will also overtake it.

(2.) Subsequent blessing of the earth under the Messiah, Jerusalem being the metropolis.

Conclusion.

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"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation."—HEB. ix. 27, 28.

THESE two verses teach us two very important facts: first, that death is the natural portion for man, and after that the judgment; but, secondly, that to believers this death and judgment have been met by Christ, and consequently they expect with joy His second appearing; they look for Him; here is the distinction between the saints and the world. The reception through grace, or refusal, of the love of God creates the contrast, as far as man is concerned, and not any efforts of his own, for he has no power of his own to meet that which he is already in—viz.—death! But the believer finds that death and judgment have been met by Christ on his behalf; he consequently loves Him, in remembrance of His work. And to such Christ will appear a second time without sin: no doubt He was so personally the first time; but then He came into all the circumstances of sin—He was made sin for us. But, as regards believers, He has at His second coming nothing more to do with sin: it will be unto salvation, to put them into possession of the results of His first coming. Salvation will be the consummation of what we at present believe. Seeing Him at the right hand of God, we look for a completion of bliss at His second

appearing ; and, this belief being in the heart, the results are seen in the life. The church's position is that of resting on the effects of His first coming, and it looks for all its results in the second.

This is brought out in the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians. Believers (we are told, ver. 7) "have redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins ;" then follows the statement of the consequence of our present condition, as "accepted in the beloved." It is this—that we are admitted to the knowledge of the counsels and intentions of God ; and are told, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ" (ver. 10). In the meanwhile, until the glory come, we have been sealed by His Holy Spirit, "which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (ver. 13, 14). Thus, then, the church has redemption in Christ, and is expecting all things to be gathered together in Him ; meanwhile, it has the Holy Ghost.

I. The Lord Jesus is Himself the centre of all God's purposes, and I shall endeavour to show that whatever may regard the church, the Jews, or the Gentiles, is merely the unfolding of His glory ; but, more than this, we shall see that the church of God is brought out, not only as enjoying the present blessing of communion, but also as joint-heir with Christ of His coming inheritance. In looking at the glory of Christ, believers are looking at their own glory, as being "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). We have a type or figure of this in Eve. Eve was not a part of the creation, nor was she lord of it as Adam was ; but she was associated with him in all his portion of inheritance. And so we shall

find the church to be joined with Christ, when He takes His rightful inheritance.

(1.) As to the purpose of God in Christ, His title to inherit all things is made out in three ways from Scripture; while He Himself makes all of them good by redemption (John xii. 32).

First, He has created all things (Col. i. 16), and as He created them, so they are "for Him." "All things were created by him and for him." He is the great heir, and He must have possession of them all; "by him all things are to be reconciled" (Col. i. 20). The whole universe will, by-and-bye, be reduced into subjection under Him. The second ground of His title is found in Heb. i. 2. There it is said the Son is "appointed heir of all things." The third ground, which stands in the counsels of God is, that man is to be set over all things. This we learn from Psalm viii., which psalm the apostle Paul uses three times, showing some points of special importance at each, and always insisting that the Lord Jesus is the man there spoken of. He quotes it in Heb. ii. 6, &c.: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedest him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thine hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." St. Paul argues that it leaves "nothing that is not put under him." "But now," says he, "we see not yet all things Put under him;" "but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." The half of the prophecy has been accomplished, because the One who is to reign is crowned, and His being at the right hand of God is the pledge that it all will come to pass. We only see what

is already accomplished in Jesus. The putting of all things under Him is not yet come to pass; it is neither done nor doing. He has not yet "taken to himself his great power and reigned" (Rev. xi. 17); but He sits hid in God, so far as this fact is concerned, till the time comes when, according to Psalm cx. 1, God shall make His enemies for His footstool.*

Ps. viii. is again brought forward in Ephesians i. 22, and here in its connexion with the church's sharing His portion. Previously the apostle had been praying that they might know the same power, as in actual exercise towards them, which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead; and then he shows (ver. 22, 23) the church as being in very deed His body, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all," and thus necessarily the sharer with Him of His future glory. He will then be manifestly heir of all things, and head and bridegroom of the church. Psalm viii. is again quoted in 1 Cor. xv. There it is in connexion with a kingdom, and also with resurrection: 1 Cor. xv. 23—25, "Every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom† to God, even the Father; when he shall

* He says (Heb. ii. 5), "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come" (literally "the coming habitable world"). "The world to come" is not heaven, but this earth, which is to be subjected under the dominion of man, and that man—Christ.

† We learn that there is to be a kingdom in existence from the fact of its being delivered up at the end. Christ has not yet taken His kingdom, but at the end He is to deliver it up. It is plain the kingdom must begin when He comes, and be delivered up at a certain period not mentioned here.

have put down all rule and all authority and power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Then the Psalm in question is introduced, ver. 27, "For he hath put all things under his feet." Everything now in disorder is to be put under this man's feet, and when all is brought completely into subjection by Him, then the kingdom is to be delivered up.

If we refer to 2 Tim. iv. 1, we shall find the kingdom connected with His appearing. It is then set up. Further it is plain that Christ's appearing is not at the end (as is supposed), but at the beginning of the kingdom; for at the end of that period the kingdom is to be delivered up. Thus the apostle speaks: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom." This passage too clearly shows that the common opinion of a day—a twenty-four hours of judgment—is erroneous, because it is quoted here as lasting a certain time. His appearance is at the beginning of His kingdom, and then there will be a judgment on the living wicked of the nations. On some God's wrath will specially fall, for rejecting His gospel; but this judgment (greater or less in its exercise) will also run on* during the period of His kingdom; whilst at the final close of it, be the length what it may, the wicked dead will be judged.

2. And if His appearing be at the beginning of His kingdom, it is clear that the church must be raised, and with Him when He takes it; for she is to appear with Him. Christ, as we saw, is the first man

* See Isaiah lxxv. 12; lxxv. 20. Jer. xxxi. 29, 30. Zech. xiv. 17, 18, 19.

raised. He is the "first fruits of them that slept ;" "afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. xv. 23 ; 1 Thess. iv. 15—17) ; and then begins that kingdom, which at the end (that is, at the end of a defined period, not spoken of in this chapter)* He will deliver up to the One who gave it to Him, that is, to God, even the Father, "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 28).

(2.) Christ's title to inherit all things having been stated, and also the church's title to heirship with Him, it was nevertheless said, that this as yet is but in purpose ; for that it is neither done nor doing, but that Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and "expecting till his enemies be made his footstool" (Heb. x. 13). If the question be asked, What is doing ? the answer is, that during this waiting time, His joint-heirs are being gathered by the operation of the Spirit through the preached word. It may be well briefly to notice how the church is brought out into this blessed connexion with Him, now by faith, and hereafter in manifestation ;—it is by the quickening power of the second Adam (1 Cor. xv. 45—47). Through this quickening power we are children, sons of God, and brought into the likeness of our Head, as by our natural birth we are in the likeness of the first Adam ; so that we are heir of His glory, just as we are heirs of all the miseries into which we have been introduced by the fall of the first Adam. This is treated of by the apostle Paul in the way of comparison in the latter part of Rom. v. The life so given puts us in spirit where

* Rev. xx. defines the time of His kingdom as lasting a thousand years.

Jesus is: we are "risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. ii. 12). It is not a something to be sought for; but we have got the life, which connecting us with our Head, makes us enjoy holiness down here; and we are waiting for the glory, which shall make us actual sharers of what our Head Himself enjoys.

(1.) It is necessary to see that as this eternal life, which believers have at present in Christ, has nothing in common with the world around, so the issue of it will be in a resurrection of the body at a distinct time and from a different principle from that of the wicked—a first resurrection (Rev. xx. 5) in consequence of a life previously given. The saints are raised, because they are one with Him who is risen; they are raised as the result of union with the Lord Jesus; whereas the wicked are raised to be judged by Him, and not at the same time. In Romans viii. 11 we find the principle: it is because the Spirit of God already dwells in believers: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

There is no such thing in Scripture as a common resurrection. The prevailing opinion is, that at a certain day all men, whether good or bad, shall stand before God, and then receive their final doom; but Scripture does not speak in this way. It constantly distinguishes between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust. One passage indeed might, to a careless reader, seem to give a colour to such an opinion. In John vi. the Lord speaks of raising up some at the last day; but He speaks solely of "those whom the Father hath given him,"

those who "believed on him," those "who came to him drawn by the Father," and who "ate his flesh and drank his blood"—terms for believers. He is speaking here of a last day alone to the righteous—there is no allusion to the wicked. The Lord impresses the truth that, whatever blessing comes, it must be in connexion with resurrection. The last day must here have reference to something familiar to Jewish thoughts, as when the disciples (who were Jews by birth) asked Him, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?" (Matt. xxiv. 3.) In every other passage the Scriptures plainly distinguish the two resurrections. In Luke xiv. 14 it is said, "thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Again, Luke xx. 35, "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead." Here is a remarkable distinction—worthiness is attributed to those who obtain this resurrection—it is a distinct class. Again, 1 Cor. xv. 23, "Every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." Nothing can be plainer than this. Again, 1 Thess. iv., "the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds."* Again, Phil. iii. 11, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection [out] of the dead." Paul could not be anxious to attain to what the wicked had in common with him: indeed the word means rather "from among" the dead (see 1 Peter i. 3).

* This Scripture is not used as relying on the word *first*, which only means before the living are changed, but as showing that, raised or changed, they are dealt with apart from the wicked.

A passage in John v. 25—29 is often quoted as settling the question against a first resurrection: "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (literally judgment). But just before (ver. 25), the Lord has said, "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead (those dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1) shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." This hour has lasted through Christ's life, and eighteen hundred years since. It is the hour—or time of quickening of souls. There is a period during which souls are quickened, and a period when bodies are raised. The hour of v. 27—29 will be the time, at the beginning of which there will be to the righteous a resurrection of life; and at the end (be the length what it may), to the wicked, a resurrection of judgment. Christ will have no need to judge the children, to cause them to give Him honour, for having given us life (v. 25), we honour Him now; but as "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;" as, "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow" (Phil. ii. 10); so the wicked will be forced to honour Him in spite of themselves, and to them accordingly there will be a resurrection of judgment—a summons to judgment, because they have no part in Him; whilst to the righteous, their resurrection will be but the accomplishment, as to their bodies, of a life previously given. Nor will the period of the one be at the same time with that of the other. The raising of the church, or the resurrection of the righteous, will take place when Christ comes; but the raising of

the wicked dead, not until after, or at the close of Christ's reign. "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. xx. 5).

(2.) The hope, then, of the church is the coming of Christ; you cannot read the epistles of Paul without seeing that this was a grand truth to be kept as a present thing before the soul. This event has often been confounded with death. We are sometimes told that the coming of Christ is that which happens to every man at his death; but it is something quite different. You cannot apply the passages, which speak of it, to death; and for this reason, that it will be an event which shall find the living in ease and luxury. "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 30).

In the mind of the apostle this doctrine, and not death, was linked with every motive to duty, and to a holy walk; and with comfort in every kind of affliction.* For instance, as a motive to holiness (1 John iii. 2, 3), "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; and every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure." Again, as comfort in sorrow. The apostolic consolation, when saints were mourning over the loss of their brethren who had died, was, not that they were to go to the place where those who had departed were, but that God would bring those who had departed back again (see 1 Thess. iv. 13—18).

* Death is not the Bridegroom, and, though its sting be taken away, cannot be the object of our affections, though we may joy in that which is beyond it; nor is it the time of the accomplishment of our hopes, nor of Christ's and the church's glory.

As a motive to patience (James v. 7, 8)—“Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord.” “Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” Again, as comfort in persecution (2 Thes. i.), “To you who are troubled rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed.” The coming of one who was gone, who was the object of their affections and hopes, though now they saw Him not, was that which the Holy Ghost presented to animate their courage and comfort their hearts. This hope was to act on their consciences in a sanctifying way, by taking their affections out of the world, and giving them patience in the trials they were in, through faith. And lastly, I may ask, what was the inducement to a zealous preaching of the gospel by Paul, and to a careful tending of the flock?—a picture of which is represented to us in 1 Thess. ii. It was this, “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thess. ii. 19.)*

The putting off this blessed event brought in all kind of evil; yea, we may say the loss of it was the ruin of the church, considered in its earthly relations here below. For what is the sign of the evil servant? He says, “my Lord delayeth his coming” (Matt. xxiv. 48). It was this that brought him “to smite his fellow-servants,

* See also the following Scriptures:—1 Cor. i. 7; Col. iii. 4; 1 Thess. iii. 13, v. 2, 4, 23; 2 Thess. i. 7, ii. 1; 1 Tim. vi. 14; Titus ii. 13; 2 Peter i. 16, &c. These passages, when examined, will be found not alone to prove the doctrine, but to be knit up with the thoughts, hopes, affections, motives, and every element of daily life in the Christian—not to mention many texts in which the Lord Jesus presents it as characterizing the saint: “And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord” (Luke xii. 36).

and to eat and drink with the drunken" (ver. 49). The church has been unfaithful to her calling, but of this the word of God warns. In Matt. xxv., we have the parable of the ten virgins—they are introduced to us as taking their lamps, and going forth to meet the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom is not the Holy Ghost. We are converted "to wait for his Son from Heaven" (1 Thess. i. 9), and not for the Holy Ghost whom (with reverence be it spoken) we possess already (John xiv. 26, xv. 26, xvi. 13). "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (v. 5). We know that the Lord has tarried for eighteen hundred years, and the whole church has been slumbering and sleeping.

What is it that arouses them? What is it that puts them in their proper position of waiting? Why the midnight cry? (ver. 6)—"At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." This, I trust, has in some little measure gone forth of late years, bringing the church back again to its real hope. All had forgotten it, and all awoke when the midnight cry was made. The real difference between the wise and foolish virgins was this, that one class had oil in their lamps (oil being a type of the grace of the Holy Spirit, the hidden grace), and the others had not. It is not here individual watchfulness denoting a saint, which is set forth, for all together slept, and all together awoke; but it is the forgetfulness of the church, as a body, of its hope, and its consequent slothfulness.

(3.) With regard to the character or manner of the coming, we learn it from Acts i. 10, 11: "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up

into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Now this is quite another thing from Christ's judging at the end of all things; for then (Rev. xx. 11) will be the judgment of the great white throne, the heaven and the earth shall flee away from before His face, and no place shall be found for them. Whereas Christ is to come back as He went away. Further, this coming (as we learn from Acts iii. 19—22) is a time, not of the earth and heaven fleeing away, but of restitution of all things, viz., "that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." The prophets do not speak of things in heaven, but of the happiness and blessing that is to be on the earth; they speak of "the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14), and of the face of the covering being taken off all people, and of the day when death shall be swallowed up in victory (compare Isaiah xxv. 7, 8; and 1 Cor. xv. 54). But for these things "He shall send Jesus" (Acts iii. 20).

II. But it is time to turn to another part of this subject. If the church is taken away at the coming of the Lord Jesus, what bearing will this coming have upon the world at large; that is, upon Jews and Gentiles? We have seen that towards the church, viz., believers, its aspect is nothing but blessing. It will be the end of

their suffering state, and the beginning of their glorified one. But what will it be to the world? This brings me to a division of the subject :

(1.) There have been three great systems set under God in the world, which have all failed ; viz., the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (as to the testimony committed to it); and a short history of their failure, and of God's future intentions towards them, is needful. When God pronounced "Lo-Ammi" ("not-My-people") on the Jews, He delivered power into the hands of the Gentiles, in the person of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, and it has continued ever since. When the Jews and Gentiles (the fourth monarchy, or Roman empire, at that moment appearing in universal dominion) agreed in rejecting the Messiah, God brought in the church—a heavenly people—not to take to itself earthly dominion, but down here to be a witness to Christ as set at the right hand of God. Now the Scripture represents all these as failing—Jews, Gentiles, and Christendom as such.

1. With regard to the Jews (at present Lo-Ammi, or "not-My-people"), it is necessary to see that their failure arose from their disobedience to a law, which they had promised to observe, and which they consummated in the rejection of Messiah ; but they will be restored to the land of Canaan, owing to the free mercy of God, on account of His promises to Abraham ; notwithstanding their failure, for which they have been, and will yet have to be, punished. In Gen. xiii. 15, we find the land of Canaan given to Abraham and to his seed for ever ; and in Gen. xv. 13, 14, the prophetic announcement of the captivity in Egypt, and of the recovery thence, and the gift of the land is again made

to his seed by an unconditional covenant of God. See also Gen. xvii. 8. We know that the former part of this took place; that is, the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, and brought to Mount Sinai, where the law was given. God's dealings with them up to that point had been simply in grace. Then it was (Exodus xix. 8) that they put themselves, of their own will, under a law. "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." But they failed under this law, as the sin of the golden calf (Exodus xxxii.) witnessed. This, however, did not touch the promises to Abraham. The intercession of Moses (ver. 13) is grounded on these promises, and on the oath of God; and it was owing to these that they came into the land at all. So in all God's after dealings with them. Though He chastised them whilst in the land, owing to their broken engagements, and at length cast them out, yet the promises made to Abraham still remain certain to them. (See Lev. xxvi.; Mic. vii. 20.)

There are two great principles connected with their final restoration, which seem to distinguish it from all previous dealings, however gracious, with them. First, they will be planted in the land under the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31—40). Secondly, they will have the presence of the Messiah (Ezekiel xxxiv. 23—24; xxxvii. 21—28; xliii. 7; Jer. xxxiii. 14, 26). When Messiah first came, they rejected Him; but even this, while it filled up the measure of their guilt, did not touch the promises given without condition. Many of those in Isaiah, that in 2 Samuel vii., and those in Amos. ix. 11—15, remain still unaccomplished.

2. With regard to the Gentile power, it was not only to end in sin, but in open rebellion against God;

out in this the professing Christian world was to have a large and leading share.* It had, as was before stated, its origin in Nebuchadnezzar; it was afterwards continued in the Persian, Grecian, and Roman monarchies. The latter was in existence at the time of Christ, and, instigated by the Jews, used the power originally given by God, in putting to death His own Son (Acts iv. 25, 26, 27). This power will continue, until "the stone cut out of the mountain without hands shall break in pieces and consume these kingdoms," in their last form, viz., under the ten kings who give their power to the beast (Daniel ii. 40—44; Rev. xvii. 11—14).

And here I must stop to remark upon a great error which prevails, viz., that the little stone was the setting up of Christ's kingdom at the day of Pentecost, and it has been growing into a great mountain ever since; or, in other words, that the preaching of the gospel in the present dispensation is that which is to convert the world. Now let it be observed that the stone does

* Much care is needful to distinguish between the civil and ecclesiastical form of the (so-called) Christian world. Both will suffer under God's hand—the powers of the world, because they will deny God in the abstract, and give their kingdoms to the beast; and the so-called professing church for its departure from the truth of God. But while Scripture distinguishes the two, they are in fact one and the same. The difficulty arises from this, that the church of God, instead of keeping its heavenly conversation or citizenship (Phil. iii. 20), has leagued itself with the powers of the world, so that they are become one and the same thing to all appearance. Let it be borne in mind, then, that the powers of the world mentioned in this lecture are not heathen powers, but those bearing the name of Christ. A prayerful study of the middle portion of the book of Revelation, where the beast and the false prophet are treated of, must be resorted to by those who wish for clear views on this part of the subject, where they will see the issue of the combination.

not begin to grow, until it has broken in pieces the great image. After this it becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. It is not a diffusive principle which insinuates itself into the system of the image, and changes its moral character and condition; but its operation is destructive of the whole system of the image, which becomes as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, before the stone begins to grow into a mountain. The Scripture does not speak of the universal prevalence of Christianity while the image subsists: it says that the stone must destroy the whole being of their empires by the destruction of the last, and then become itself the centre of a new system. The little stone is really typical of Christ coming to judgment, and His kingdom will be established after this; when, indeed, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 9).

But again, in Rev. xvi., we are told, that three unclean spirits are to go forth, as the spirits of devils, working miracles, "unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Is this the gospel bringing the whole world under subjection to Christ? Whatever interpretation of this passage we may give as to details, it is manifestly the wide extended exercise of satan's corrupting and malignant influence to gather together the powers of this world, in the last times, to conflict with, and consequent judgment by, Almighty God. (Zeph. iii. 8, 9).

3. But what of the professing church? Scripture is not silent here; the end is failure and ruin, as everything has been that has ever been entrusted to man. First, there is a positive revelation in Matt. xiii. of tares

in the field where the Son of man had sowed. This was not common heathenism, nor unconverted sinners, as men; but evil entering into the place where good was sown. The question was asked whether they were to be rooted up? And the answer was, No. It is not the work of the present dispensation to root out, but to sow. We may preach the gospel, but the evil must go on where the good seed was sown, till the harvest of judgment. But secondly, the days of the Son of man (Luke xvii.) are likened to the days of Noah and Lot. "Even thus," is the portentous conclusion, "shall it be when the Son of man is revealed."

Again, so far from blessed days coming, Scripture reveals, that "in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Tim. iii. 1). And then follows, almost word for word, the same character of the professing church as is given of the heathen, as under the sentence of a reprobate mind. Compare 2 Tim. iii. 2—5, with Romans i. 28—32. Yes, the revealed end of the professing church is that of iniquity, like the heathen; at the same time a form of godliness, something, it may be, very beautiful to attract the eye, but rottenness and dead men's bones within.

Again, the mark of the close of the church is revealed in 1 John ii. 18: "Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time." This was the characteristic of the last time; not in coming and outflowing blessings, but, antichrists who sprang from the church, precursors of the antichrist (whom Christ is to destroy), and not of general blessing before the judgment.

Again, in 2 Thess. ii., we have evil traced through

its course, from the apostles' time to Christ's appearing, leaving no room for intervening universal blessing. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work (says Paul), only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way, and then shall that wicked (one) be revealed whom the Lord shall consume," &c. It had begun in the apostles' time, and would go on until Christ came.

But in Jude the declension and falling away is still more palpable. He gave "all diligence (v. 1) to write unto them of the common salvation"—that is, it was his wish to have enlarged on this common blessing, but he was hindered, and was obliged to exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. So far from there being an extension of good, he found the time already come to contend against evil; evil men having crept in unawares, ungodly men, "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, they specially denied the Lordship of Christ—first, morally, and then in open rebellion. Here is the character of antichrist: he denies the Father and the Son, he denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 John ii. 22), and he denies Jesus Christ come in the flesh (1 John iv. 3; 2 John 7).

But did Jude contemplate a bettering of such a state? No. His words are, "Enoch prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all," &c. (v. 14, 15.) These very men that had crept in, forced him to say these are the men that have been already prophesied about. He refers them, in verse 11, into three classes, a kind of triple character of the apostacy, showing also

the progress which the evil in man's nature makes: 1st. Cain, natural evil—hatred; 2nd. Balaam, ecclesiastical corruption—preaching for reward; 3rd. Core, independence against God—standing up against His supremacy—denying Christ in His Lordship and priesthood,* in which open rebellion, or gainsaying, they perish.

(2.) The judgment being thus shown, the inquiry may be made—How and through what agency is the earth, and especially the land of the Jews, hereafter † to be blessed, according to what has been previously insisted upon? The reply is, that the judgment is not absolute and universal; and though it will fall very heavily upon Jerusalem (Zech. xiii. 8, 9), and indeed upon all the nations (Isa. lxvi. 16; Jer. xxv. 31), yet “a remnant shall return” (Isa. i. 9; x. 21, 22; lxvi. 18, 19). The Jewish remnant who escape the great trouble of the latter day (Jer. xxx. 7), will be the seed or nucleus of the future nation; and their city, Jerusalem, the metropolis of the world. “Concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house . . . shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it; . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah ii. 2). When “her light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon her; Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising” (Isaiah lx. 1, 2, 3).

* The sin of Corah was his denying the order of priesthood appointed by God. God's order is now different; for all His children are priests (see 1 Peter ii. 5), and all have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (see Heb. x. 19).

† In the blessing of the earth, it is not meant to include those whose final doom has been previously sealed.

Or, as it is expressed in another passage, "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah xxvii. 6). After the judgment (greater or less in extent, according to greater or less light; Luke xii. 47, 48) on the living, we have abundant testimony from Scripture of the Gentiles being brought under the gracious yet truthful sway of the Lord Jesus; the centre of His actings being Jerusalem (see, among other passages, Zeph. iii. 8, 9; Ps. lxxi.; Zech. viii. 20—23; Rom. xi.).

This is not the same as the blessing of the church—it is in the heavenly places that we are blessed, having anticipated the day when Israel "shall look on him whom they have pierced" (Zech. xii. 10). We have our portion even now in "heavenly places" (Eph. i. 3); much more, then, at the time when He is manifested.

Nor need we be downcast by the evil around. Having oil in our lamps—the grace of the Spirit in our hearts, let the night be as dark as it may, believers will be able to say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Having redemption through the precious blood, and being quickened by the Spirit, let our affections be so sanctified as to desire nothing else. Let us separate ourselves from everything that He will judge at His coming, and so shall we not be ashamed.

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