

TRIBULATION - NO!

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Destructive Critics

James Scott

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BY JAMES COOPER



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The Dispensations

SOME of our brethren seem to find peculiar satisfaction in either building the things which they once destroyed (Gal. 2:18), or in destroying the things they once built up. In no branch of Biblical exposition is this more in evidence than in what is known as dispensational teaching, or the details of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, we are asked to believe that the truth of various dispensations, recovered to us early in the last century, which has proved, along with the truth as to the Church, the basis of all sound evangelical teaching, was fanciful and unwarranted, and that the men who were foremost in this movement had unwittingly allowed themselves to be side-tracked into a system of doctrine that was wholly untenable. Strange to say, those who are most active in seeking to destroy the truth referred to, were, on their own confession, once staunch exponents of it, until in recent years they say they received fresh light, or—should we say?—a fresh revelation: and with it came the discovery that a mistake had been made! We may well question if such brethren ever really apprehended the truth in their souls; otherwise they would not so lightly give it up. To “buy the truth,

and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23), is a divine injunction, and from the standpoint of experience the value of a thing is just what it costs us. Too often it is come easy, go easy. We accept the tenets of a certain school, and find a measure of satisfaction in them until another comes along, and we are induced to change our *views*. This, in itself, implies no divine conviction, without which, there can be no divine certainty.

With the honored men whom God was pleased to use in the recovery of so much that had been lost during the dark ages of Popish superstition and corruption, and overlooked even by the Reformers, they only arrived at the truth after much exercise of heart before God, and then, like the Gospel itself, it came to them not in word only, but "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). Consequently it became part of the warp and woof of their spiritual being. They could say with the prophet, "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). Truth acquired in this way is not lightly given up.

Augustine has wisely said, "Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures harmonize." Those who neglect this injunction invariably land themselves in hopeless confusion, with a mix-up of law and grace. The word "dispensation" literally means "an administration," or "a stewardship." The former would suggest the

various ways in which God has dealt with men. With the nation of Israel it was a dispensation (age) of law, with blessing dependent upon their obedience—"This do and thou shalt live;" whereas, since the Cross, it has been a dispensation (age) of grace, with blessing dependent on repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13: 38, 39). "Stewardship," the latter implication of "dispensation," would more readily suggest something committed to man's responsibility, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly I have a reward, but if against my will a dispensation (stewardship) of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9: 16, 17), and the same apostle states elsewhere, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (chap. 4: 2).

Not only was the apostle a minister of the gospel (Col. 1: 23); he recognized that he had an equal responsibility to the Church—"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation (stewardship) of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfil (complete) the Word of God; even the mystery which has been hid from

ages, and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints" (vers. 24-26). That the "mystery" was of a dispensational character is evident, for it involved the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and the bringing in of something new, *viz.*, the making "in Himself of twain one new man" (Eph. 2:15). It was not merely that Gentiles would be blessed along with Jews, for the prophets bore witness to such a condition (Rom. 15:9-13), but that in this age of grace all such distinctions are set aside. Grace is enthroned, and if "grace reign" (Rom. 5:21) there can be no limitations to its operations, other than what men themselves have brought in. The purport of the apostle's ministry, as he himself declares, was not only to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," but "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God . . . to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavens might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:8-10). These truths, he informs us, he received by direct revelation from God (ver. 3).

The following from the pen of a well-known writer may with advantage be inserted here as it emphasizes what we have said as to the importance of dispensational teaching. "Now let us consider the advent in relation to the several

ages into which human history falls in the ongoing purpose of the redeeming God. That there are such ages, or dispensations, is too evident to be debated. 'Dispensation' is a Biblical word . . . and means literally the management of a household. The idea is reflected in our word *economy*, which originally meant 'administration.' Of such dispensations there are in the main three, and these three are separated from one another by the first and second advents . . . The advents divide time into *past*, *present*, and *future*. The *past* dispensation reaches to Christ's first coming; the *present* lies between the first and second comings; and the *future* reaches from the second coming onwards." (Dr. W. Graham Scroggie).

The Blessed Hope

Not only have the dispensations suffered at the hands of the critics, but the blessed hope itself has been so distorted as to be quite unrecognizable, and ceases to be a message of comfort to sorrowing saints. The *fact* of His coming is not in question: but we are asked to believe that when our Lord said, "I will come again, and will receive you unto Myself" (John 14:3), He did not mean what we thought He meant, for did He not know that a long period of nineteen centuries would intervene before He could make good His promise? Doubtless He did: yet knowing that, He could say, "Let

not your heart be troubled . . . I will come again." That there was a measure of elasticity in His promise is admitted, but if it had not a definite application to the early Christians, how were they to know when it would apply? And we may well ask, Where did this comfort for the sorrowing disciples come in, if the promise was not for their day? To relegate it to the dim and distant future is not only to rob it of its comfort but of its practical value as well. We are familiar with Martha's reply to the Lord when He said, "Thy brother shall rise again," but owing to the dullness of her apprehension that gracious message was robbed of all its comfort. She said, "I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Yet poor Martha was not alone in her dullness, for, with all charity be it said, some of our brethren seemingly are no further forward in their souls as to the promise of His coming than she was as to the resurrection. In order to comfort the sorrowing disciples He said definitely, "Let not your hearts be troubled . . . I will come again and receive you unto Myself," to which these brethren coolly reply, "We know that He will come again *at the end of the age!*" This is all the comfort this miserable theory has to offer the suffering household of faith.

Further, we are assured that two of the apostles were expecting death, consequently they could not be looking for His coming; that, in fact, the early return of the Lord could not

be the hope of the infant Church; yet one of these same apostles held up the young saints at Thessalonica as examples to all others, for their faith to God-ward was spread abroad, and their attitude towards the coming was one of earnest expectation, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1: 8-10). No doubt the apostle had instructed them as to the promise of His coming; but what would they have thought had he added, "Yes, but He did not mean what you think He meant." We can well imagine with what amazement they would have exclaimed, "Why, then, did He not say what He meant?" There is not the slightest hint that the apostles sought to disabuse their minds as to the imminence of His coming. They were indebted to the apostle Paul, not only for bringing the gospel to Thessalonica, but for all they knew of the Lord's coming; and it is unthinkable that he allowed them to adopt a waiting attitude and commended them for it, if he did not believe that coming to be imminent.

In the light of such clear testimony, it need not surprise us that some of the critics have been compelled to reconsider their position; only, unfortunately, to fall back on another less creditable to them. For while they are constrained to admit that the apostle did at the beginning encourage belief in the early return of our Lord, they say he was forced neverthe-

less, to abandon this view towards the end of his ministry. This, however, raised a still more serious question; for if we admit that he erred, in the least degree, in any of the things he taught, our confidence in him as an inspired writer is completely destroyed. Yea, more, if any of the apostolic writings are at fault, what confidence can we have in the authenticity of the Scriptures as a whole? And if the truth of the gospel was endangered at Antioch, when Peter allowed himself to be swayed by the sectarian prejudice which had crept in among certain of the disciples, what shall we say of this subtle Satanic suggestion that is creeping in amongst us?

The Imminence of His Coming

What seems to annoy our critical friends most is the doctrine of the imminence of His coming, for though our Lord gave that soul-comforting message to the seer of Patmos: "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 22:7), they assure us that He did not mean that He was coming soon; but that when He did come it would be suddenly; and in support of this assumption we are referred to Matt. 24:27: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." It seems hopeless to remind these brethren that the "blessed hope" is not the theme of the Olivet discourse, but the

coming of the Son of Man, as the Scripture quoted definitely bears out. Besides, the whole discourse is an answer to the questions addressed to Him by the disciples, "Tell us, when shall these things be?" referring to the destruction of the temple which He had just predicted. As is well-known, Matthew does not record our Lord's reply to this question, but leaves Luke to do it (ch. 21:20-24): while he himself concentrates on the remaining two questions, which, in fact, are really one: "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and (the) completion of the age?" As another has pointed out, the absence of the article in Greek brings the two words under one head, thus confirming our remark as to the two questions being practically one. Nor are we left in doubt as to what is meant by the "age," for according to Luke's account it coincides with the period of Gentile supremacy: "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). There was no question as to the correctness of their thoughts in connecting His coming with the destruction of the Roman power and the setting up of Messiah's Kingdom.

The Coming Kingdom

The first Gentile monarch was given to know this; for when God gave him a vision of what was to succeed him he saw that the whole sys-

tem of Gentile rule would end with the judgment of God, and be succeeded by another kingdom having its source and seat of government in the heavens. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation sure" (Dan. 2: 44, 45). The disciples were perfectly right therefore in connecting our Lord's coming with the deliverance of the nation, and the destruction of their oppressors; and the Lord confirms this in the following words: "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; *for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21: 28). If the disciples were right, our critical friends are equally wrong when they connect this coming with the hope of the Church. It denotes a slipshod method of handling the Word of God, which is greatly to be deplored. Why cannot they recognize that we have an infallible key to the solution of this, and many another, difficulty in the title our Lord assumes? It is surely not without significance

that in this remarkable discourse He invariably refers to Himself as the "Son of Man." It is true that He warns His disciples of false Christs, "For many shall come in My name saying, I am the Christ (Messiah); and shall deceive many" (ver. 5); but we have yet to learn that anyone will personify Him as Son of Man; unless, perchance it be the Beast, or Civil head of the Roman Empire, whom some wrongly connect with the Antichrist.

The First Occurrence

The diligent student recognizes the importance of the first and last occurrences of a word or phrase in Scripture, for they usually give the key to its significance in other instances where it occurs. The first occasion on which our Lord assumes this title was when a certain scribe, evidently under the impression that he saw a chance of a good thing, came, and said, "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest;" but he was speedily disillusioned, for the Lord, already conscious it was manifested that there was no room for Him in Israel, openly takes the place of rejection, saying, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matt. 8:19, 20). The contrast is evidently between the least and the greatest, showing that while the least of God's creatures had a resting-place, He,

the Creator, and Firstborn of all creation, had to wander a stranger in the world His own hands had made. The sad fact was now apparent that there was no place in Zion for Jehovah's Anointed: "He came unto His own things, and His own people received Him not" (John 1:11). Consequently when Peter confessed Him as "the Christ" (Messiah), "He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing;" and it is surely not without significance, that He then and there assumed the title "Son of Man," saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain" (Luke 9:20-23).

The Last Occurrence

When the angel Gabriel announced His birth, he said to Mary, "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32, 33), but if Israel reject Him as Son of David (Matt. 21:9), He openly takes the wider ground, and assumes the title Son of Man, according to Ps. 8, for it is as such that God will set Him over the works of His hands, and put all things under His feet. If such thoughts are suggested by the first occurrence of this title, what are we to learn from the last? It was when standing before the

high priest and his council, that Caiaphas adjured Him by the living God to say whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, and the Lord answered, "Thou hast said:" then follows a statement of tremendous importance, namely, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26: 63, 64). Not only is He the Man of Psalm 110, but it is as Son of Man that He is to sit at Jehovah's right hand in the day of His exaltation and glory. Moreover, He claims to be the One whom Daniel beheld in vision coming in the clouds of heaven and receiving from the Ancient of Days, "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him" (Dan. 7: 13, 14); but it is as Son of Man that He receives this universal and everlasting dominion.

Further Glories

What an unfolding of personal glories we have in the narrative in connection with Nathanael! "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write," said Philip; but when he mentioned Nazareth it seemed to raise a serious doubt in Nathanael's mind, for that was a name of evil omen. However, being an Israelite in whom was no guile, he accepted Philip's invitation to come and see for himself. Great must have been his amazement when the One of whom

Philip had spoken knew all about him, and had even seen him when he was sitting under his fig-tree. That was enough! This could be none other than the One of whom Moses and the prophets had spoken. Yet, strange to say, Nathanael did not confess Him either as "that prophet," or the Messiah. His faith bounded forward to that scene depicted by Isaiah, when, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off" (chap. 33: 17), and in anticipation of that day, he confessed Him as Son of God and King of Israel (John 1: 49). That, be it remembered, was long before Peter confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16: 16). Greater things were yet in store for this man with the simple child-like faith; he was to see heaven opened, and the angelic hosts in personal attendance upon Him—as *Son of Man*. Why as "Son of Man" and not as "Messiah?" Is it not because that in the day of His exaltation and glory, His sphere of administration will go far beyond that which was announced by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary?—"The Lord God will give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He will rule over the house of Jacob for ever" (Luke 1: 32, 33). As Messiah He will sit upon David's throne, with His sphere restricted to the house of Jacob; but as Son of Man His kingdom, as we have seen, will embrace "all peoples, nations, and languages." Yea, it will extend to

the utmost bounds of creation itself, for God is going to set Him over the works of His hands, and that implies a sphere extending far beyond the confines of this small planet of ours.

Not Incarnation

We must not connect this title of Son of Man with His incarnation, as if His coming into humanity constituted Him that. That title has nothing whatever to do with natural generation, for in no sense was He the child of man; and He is never said to be the child of God, although the Authorized Version falls into this error two or three times. He was the Seed of the woman, but not of the man, though legally the son of Joseph. He Himself declared when coming into the world, "A body hast Thou prepared Me" (Heb. 10: 5); but He who took the body prepared for Him, was the One who "came down from heaven" (John 3: 13). As Son of Man He came down from heaven, and as such He ever was in heaven; it was His proper sphere. To the disciples who murmured when He said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you," His answer was, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?" (John 6: 61, 62). To that faithful witness, Stephen, it was given, when facing his murderers, to look into the open heavens and see the Son of Man standing on

the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

To recapitulate:—We have seen that the Son of Man came down from heaven; that as Son of Man He ascended up to heaven; that as Son of Man He is seen in heaven; and as such He will come in the clouds of heaven. As Son of Man He will sit upon the throne of His glory, when He judges the living nations (Matt. 25:31); and as Son of Man He will sit at Jehovah's right hand in the kingdom; and as Son of Man God will set Him over the works of His hands. There is not a word about the Church in all this; in fact, it did not exist when our Lord delivered this memorable discourse. If we can find no mention of the Church in connection with the Son of Man, it is equally certain that we never find the Son of Man in connection with the Church. The first mention we get of the Church was when Peter confessed Him as "the Son of the living God;" and said of Him, "Upon this rock I will build My Church" (Matt. 16:16-18), but never a stone where He assumes the title of Son of Man. It is surely worthy of note that this title is never once found in the Church epistles, nor, in fact, in any of the epistles except that to the Hebrews, where it occurs once as a quotation from Psalm 8. We meet with it twice in the book of Revelation, but not even once in the seven epistles which John was commissioned to send to the seven churches.

What then are we to make of the repeated

occurrences of the title in the Olivet discourse? His disciples had asked Him as to the "sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age" (Matt. 24: 3), and in every instance His answer refers to His coming as Son of Man. The parable of the virgins may be taken as an exception, but as the last clause of chap. 25: 13 is admitted to be an interpolation, it really is not. With that correction, we are faced with the fact that He does not come to the "marriage" as Son of Man, but as the Bridegroom. Unquestionably that suggests a different relationship from what we have been considering; and from Revelation 19, when the nuptial day arrives, it is as the "Lamb" that He enters the married relationship; and, further, the marriage being consummated in heaven, shows us that the heavenly saints will form the Bride, and not Israel, as is falsely assumed by many.

Besides, the circumstances connected with these events are entirely different. As Son of Man His coming will be sudden and unexpected, like the lightning; hence they are exhorted to watch, "For in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. 24: 44). It will be heralded by extraordinary astronomical phenomena, when the "powers of the heavens shall be shaken." He will appear in the open heavens, where "every eye shall see Him," and "then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and 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" (ver. 30). Moreover, there will be a similarity in the circumstances attending His coming as Son of Man and those existing in Noah's time; for "as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (ver. 37). In the former the usual social festivities went on until Noah entered the ark; and they "*knew not* until the flood came, and took them all away" (ver. 39). This, however, is in marked contrast with what we have in the parable of the virgins; for not only is He presented in a different relationship, but His coming is neither sudden nor unexpected; nor does He come as a thief. On the contrary, He is definitely looked for; the virgins go forth to meet Him, and escort Him to the marriage; but for some unexpected and unexplained reason He failed to appear, and the only explanation given is, that He "*tarried.*" There is no such suggestion when it is the coming of the Son of Man; for it is definitely stated that, "He that shall come will come, *and will not tarry*" (Heb. 10:37). Doubtless this has a present application, though the strict interpretation would seem to look on to the future when, at the appointed time, He will appear for the deliverance of His earthly people. It is worthy of note that those *taken away* in Noah's day were taken away in judgment: while those in the ark were preserved for blessing. We have a parallel case to this in the parable of the

tares, where it is stated, "The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity" (Matt. 13: 41). Strange to say, one of the critics we have in mind quotes this scripture as bearing out the same truth as chap. 24: 31, where we have the Son of Man sending His angels to gather His elect from the four winds: both scriptures, he maintains, refer to the translation of the saints to heaven! Evidently this brother has failed to see that the tares represent the "sons of the wicked one," and that their destiny is the Lake of Fire. Whereas the elect of Matt. 24 are the scattered remnant of Israel, beloved of God for the fathers' sakes, to be brought back into divine favor under their Messiah when He returns as Son of Man. "He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jer. 31: 10).

On the night of His betrayal, in order to comfort the sorrowing disciples, He promised to come again for them. They evidently understood Him to mean an early return; and, as we have seen under the figure of the ten virgins, they trimmed their lamps in expectation of His coming, and even went forth to meet Him. If language means anything, we must assume — yea, assert — that the early Christians regarded His coming as imminent, and were waiting for Him (1 Thess. 1: 10); nor is there a single word from the Lord to indicate that they were mistaken, or that He did not mean what they thought He meant. The

only suggestion He makes is that He "tarried." This inferentially proves that the virgins (the early Christians) were right in expecting Him; for how otherwise could He speak of Himself as having tarried, if He was not expected, or rather, due to arrive? To quote the apostle Paul, in anticipation of his release (2 Tim. 4: 6), as evidence against all this, is to overlook the fact that he did not hesitate to include himself among the "we" of "we who are alive and remain;" and the "we" who shall be changed at His coming (1 Thess. 4: 17; 1 Cor. 15: 51). If, indeed, there was a change in his outlook towards the end of his earthly sojourn, as some maintain, may not this be accounted for on the ground that he, too, realized that his Lord had tarried?

Let us restate the position. Our Lord said He would come for us; and the evidence, as we have seen, pointed to an earthly return: but He did not come — Why? The explanation these critics offer is wholly unsatisfactory. It not only robs the Christian of his peculiar hope and comfort, and reduces him to the status of a Jew, who looks for blessing at the coming of the Son of Man, with all the horrors of the Great Tribulation in between! The fact that some of us refuse to subscribe to such a comfortless doctrine is attributed to our lack of spiritual intelligence!

When He comes as the Bridegroom it will

be to receive His Bride, the Church which He loved and for which He gave Himself, and which He has been preparing for the moment when He will present her to Himself "a Church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5: 25-27).

"His eye in that bright day,
Shall, with supreme delight,
His fair and glorious Bride survey,
Unblemished in His sight."

There is nothing answering to this in His reply to the question as to the sign of His coming. On the contrary, when He comes as Son of Man, it will be to receive earthly glory: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7: 13, 14).

A Regrettable Intrusion

We are deeply grieved to see the author of "Matthew the Publican" going out of his way to belittle the divine movement of the last century, by suggesting that neither the most cultured nor the lowest savage would surmise "such an interpretation as these modern men

of less than a hundred years' history read into" these scriptures. He is perfectly correct in his conclusion; but has he yet to learn that neither culture nor ignorance avail in the things of God? Spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned; so that the poor savage and the man of culture meet on the one common platform. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: *neither can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). It may interest him to hear, if he has never known, that it was these very interpretations, which neither culture nor ignorance could evolve, that were used of God to wake the sleeping virgins, and give a new life and character to the ministry of the most gifted and godly men throughout Christendom; besides giving fresh impetus to the work of the gospel in the mission field that lies so near to our aged brother's heart. Further, not only have some of the most gifted and highly-educated subscribed to these interpretations, which our friend so contemptuously discards, but thousands of assemblies have been formed by, and stand for, the truth which is called in question, and hundreds of missionaries in the foreign field are supported by them. It will be interesting to learn how many churches have been founded and missionaries maintained by the devotees of these comfortless doctrines.

The Great Tribulation

It cannot be gainsaid that a time of great tribulation is coming upon the earth, nor does any intelligent reader of the Bible question it. Our Lord not only endorses the fact, but gives us very definite details about it; even declaring that nothing like it has ever occurred before, nor will there ever be the like again (Matt. 24:21). It is when we come to consider the Christian's hope in relation to these impending events, that we get into trouble with our critical friends; for they dearly love the thought of the Church going through the Tribulation! If assumption and assertion were proof their case were won; but when they discard Christian charity and condescend to ridicule, and even to veiled sarcasm, they give their case away; for the Truth requires no such carnal methods for its propagation.

When one of these critics asks, "What are we that we should expect to escape tribulation, which has been the lot of God's people in all ages?" we might easily retort by asking, "What are we that we should expect to escape the lake of fire?" The answer to both questions is, that we are sinners saved by grace, and our Lord has definitely stated that such shall not come into judgment. It ought to be self-evident to these brethren that salvation is purely of grace, whether we look at it in relation to the lake of fire, or to the coming great Tribulation. Our Lord's promise to the

overcomer in Philadelphia was: "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10). The adherents of this comfortless theory would not only deprive us of all that this gracious message contains, but confidently assert that the Lord was not referring to the Tribulation at all, but to the setting up of the image in the Temple; which, they say, will be the special temptation at that time. Had these brethren not been in such haste for a conviction, they could not have failed to see the absurdity of their conclusions, for a moment's reflection would have shown them that these two events go together. It is the setting up of the image that begins the Tribulation; our Lord definitely states: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . . then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains . . . for then shall be (the) Great Tribulation" (Matt. 24:15). We need not, therefore, treat the contention of these brethren seriously, when they state that the Lord, in His promise to Philadelphia, was referring to the setting up of the image, and not to the Tribulation; for that is sheer assertion without proof. Notice, however, that the Lord promises exemption from *the hour*, not the temptation merely: and as that is a point of time, we cannot be saved from it unless we are taken out of time into eternity; and this is exactly what the promise

implies. Moreover, to be saved from the "hour" of the image is equivalent to being saved from the "hour" of the Tribulation, seeing that these two events run *pari passu*. To teach otherwise is to make a distinction without a difference.

We are indebted to another of our critical friends for the suggestion that the desire to escape from the Tribulation is pure selfishness on our part! Well, be it so; on the same system of reasoning, the desire to flee from the wrath to come must be equally selfish; not to speak of the desire to get to heaven, where we have absolutely no right to be apart from the sovereign grace of God. What of the apostle who said that he had "a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is very far better?" (Phil. 1: 23). Was not that selfishness? If so, then there must be such a thing as "sanctified selfishness," which we all might do well to emulate.

We have already seen that the Olivet discourse is the happy hunting-ground of the brethren in question; consequently they must needs find a place for the Church in it; otherwise their scheme of interpretation breaks down. Nor have they much difficulty about it; only assume that the elect of the Gospels means the Church, and it is done. Does not our Lord say, that, for the elect's sake the days of tribulation will be shortened?—which surely implies that they will be in it. Further, He says, that "after the tribulation," and after His

appearing, "He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His *elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24: 31). What could be more simple? Only *assume* that the elect of the Olivet discourse is the Church, and it becomes perfectly obvious that the Church goes through the Tribulation! Unfortunately for these brethren, an assumption is a very poor foundation upon which to build a doctrine. Doubtless the Church is composed of a chosen, or elect, people, but so is Israel. Even in their dispersion they are "beloved for the fathers' sakes;" how much more when God again takes them under His care, and seals a hundred and forty-four thousand for millennial blessing. Besides, it is never said that He will send angels to gather His Church, the saints of this dispensation; on the contrary, He assures us that He will come Himself. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself" (John 14: 3); and again, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven . . . and we . . . shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4: 16, 17). Perhaps someone will accuse us of omitting from our quotation the very portion that speaks of angelic intervention; for does not the apostle say that the Lord will come "with the voice of the archangel;" and seeing that there is only one angel so designated, does it not imply that Michael will assist in the gathering of the saints? Here, again, this theory is at fault, for the

apostle says nothing about the presence of the archangel, but that the Lord will come with the *voice* of the archangel; or as some have rendered it, "with archangelic voice." It is the character of the voice that is in question, not the ministry of angels.

It may be asked, Did not the apostle state definitely in his second letter to the Thessalonians that the angels would accompany the Lord at His appearing? Yes, but so far we have not been dealing with the appearing, but with the "blessed hope," that is, His coming *for* His saints, not His coming *with* His saints. If only it were seen that the one event precedes the Tribulation while the other follows it, such discussions would be quite unnecessary.

The alternative which these brethren offer us is, that the Church will indeed pass through the Great Tribulation and be caught up to meet the Lord when He is revealed from heaven with the angels of His might, and that she will return with Him when He comes back to earth. What a lot of confusion this miserable theory entails! For if the Church is caught up as the Lord is coming out of heaven with His angels; how can He send His angels to gather a people already caught up? If they are only caught up when He is "revealed from heaven," it surely follows that they do not enter the Father's house. Yet this was the gist of His promise—"In My Father's house are many abodes . . . I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14: 2, 3). To be with Christ in the Father's house, and afterwards in glory with Him (John 17: 22), is the alpha and omega of the blessed hope; but the theory we are considering robs us completely of the first portion of it; but not that only, for it is equally evident that we would miss the judgment-seat of Christ with its manifestation and rewards, and also the marriage of the Lamb. That these events take place in heaven seems beyond question, for the great multitude who shout Alleluia at the judgment of the Harlot, are equally jubilant over the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 1, 7). That the marriage precedes the manifestation is obvious; for it is after this that we see heaven opened, and the white horse rider coming forth in majesty, "to judge and make war" (ver. 11) with the armies of heaven following in His train.

Only accept this theory—then the promise of His coming and the Father's house are robbed of all their comfort; the midnight cry (Matt. 25: 6) becomes a false alarm: while His message about "coming quickly" must be received with mental reservation, for evidently He did not mean what we thought He meant. Consequently it is no longer a sanctifying hope: for it would be foolish to look for an event which did not belong to this "calling out" period, but must be relegated to the end of the age. *IF these brethren are correct* it follows

that Christ cannot come before we reach Revelation 19 and all the intervening prophecies have been fulfilled. Yea, more, we should be perfectly justified in fixing dates, seeing that very definite data is given bearing on the end time. The missing week of Daniel 9 has yet to run its course, but cannot even begin to function until the Jews return to Palestine, and the Roman empire is again in being; for it will be the signing of the seven years' covenant between these two powers that will set the prophetic clock in motion. It would appear, therefore, that it will be time enough to trim our lamps, and go forth to meet Him (Matt. 25:7), when the seventieth week of Daniel 9 is drawing to a close! It is during the last half of that week that the tribulation—so dear to the hearts of the critics—will “come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10): and through which, according to this theory, the Church must pass ere she can expect her Lord to come to take her to the Father's house, or bring her into the happy wedlock for which He, and she, have waited so long. Yet He promised to come quickly!

We have seen that the missing prophetic week will begin with the signing of the covenant, thus giving us definite data from which to reckon. In the midst of the week the enemy will cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and institute idolatry in its stead. This not only starts the Great Tribulation, but gives

us a new basis of divine reckoning. The three-and-a-half years, or forty-and-two months, are calculated from this; so also are the 1260 days during which the faithful witnesses will bear testimony in Jerusalem. Daniel, however, carries us a stage further, for he mentions 1290 days, still reckoning from the taking away of the daily sacrifice. The 1260 days definitely brings us to the end of the Great Tribulation, and we suggest that the 1290 days gives us the end of the persecuting Roman power. The remaining forty-five days, that is, the 1335 days in all, bring us to a point of definite blessing (Dan. 12: 13); and this we take to mean the coming of the Son of Man in power, and the destruction of the nations that will be gathered against Jerusalem.

If this is all that the Blessed Hope means to our critical friends, they seem to have lost their bearings badly. To ask us to believe that this is what the Lord was referring to when He said to His sorrowing disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled . . . I will come again," or that this is what the ten virgins had in view when they went forth to meet the Bridegroom, or that the infant Church at Thessalonica was actually waiting for, and with which they were asked to comfort their sorrowing brethren, not to speak of our Lord's thrice-repeated message from the heavens to His waiting people, "Behold, I come quickly," is to put a demand upon our credulity to which even flesh and blood is not equal, let alone an outrage upon sound exegesis.

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