

# GOD AND THE NATIONS

BY

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WITH FOREWORD BY

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JOHN RITCHIE LTD,  
PUBLISHERS OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE  
KILMARNOCK

*First Published* - 1942  
*Second Impression* - 1944  
*Third Impression* - 1945  
*Fourth Impression* - 1946

**MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

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## Foreword

WHILE God called out from the nations the people of Israel to be in a special way His own, the fact remains that He never ceased to be the God of the nations. This is affirmed in Romans iii. 29, and should secure the interest of every Christian for the theme of this book.

The subject has unfortunately been clouded for the ordinary reader by the translation of *goyim* in the Old Testament and *ta èthnē* in the New sometimes by "nations" and sometimes by "Gentiles." Various theories are based on this different way of dealing with the same word. For instance, it has been contended that the commission given by the risen Lord to His servants in Matt. xxviii. 19 can have no application to the present time, because no one can teach or baptize *nations* as such, though it is admitted that one can teach and baptize Gentiles! To such lengths will a simple misunderstanding lead people.

God is the God of the nations, not only in that He deals with them providentially and in judgment, as our author so clearly shows, but in that He acts on the consciences of heathen men. In Gen. xx. 6 we read how God restrained a Philistine king from sin. And in other ways God again and again showed Himself mindful of those upon whom His people looked with feelings akin to contempt.

The whole subject of the nations has come prominently into view in connection with the wars. The Christian, because he is part of a warring nation, suffers even as others. His home is destroyed by a bomb ; his means of livelihood are lost ; his loved ones are killed. The question of what contribution he should make to the success or well-being of the country where he dwells is an urgent one. We hope that one perplexed as to this will find guidance in these pages.

But apart from this matter, the study is one of absorbing interest, and we are sure that this book, calling us afresh to the teaching of the Scriptures, will enlighten the mind of every reader, and give him a new understanding of the ways of God in the various spheres in which He is pleased to act.

H. P. BARKER.



## *Author's Preface*

**I**NTERNATIONAL intrigue, the subversion and fall of nations, the outbreak of war, with the fall of other nations, until almost a dozen had gone down, coupled with the fear of what may yet happen, have, during the past years, compelled men and women to ask whether God concerns Himself with the nations. Even those who think little on religious matters feel that God and the affairs of nations are in some way connected. Most have enquired if it is so. Some, in answer, suggest that He leaves them to work out their own affairs and does not in any way intervene. Others say that He may have taken a direct hand in the Old Testament days of visions and miracles, but that now in the Christian age He does not act in this way.

Does God silently govern above earth's din and war, and human and Satanic evil? Is He working a purpose in our day? If so, what is His purpose and what are His ways? Such questions matter a great deal, for the fortunes of nations, the issues of war, and the rise and fall of kingdoms affect us all. We can no more avoid the woes and throes of nations than life itself, for life and its circumstances are bound up with the life and circumstances of the nations amongst which we dwell.

These questions, and a hundred other relevant ones, have arisen and require answers. But to where shall we turn for answers? If God Himself would speak, if He would explain, we should have certainty, and thus be enabled to think clearly in this confused world. But God has spoken, and His Word contains all things that pertain to life and godliness. Though He be a God who hideth Himself (Isa. xlv. 15), He has revealed a great deal concerning the nations and His ways with them. Above all, His purposes are made plain in the pages of revelation.

The encouragement of this directed the writer to the study of the subject, and ministry on it was given during the winter of 1940-41. Believers in many towns and cities received such help that responsible brethren urged that it be written. At first the

suggestion was not entertained because of consciousness of limited ability to carry it out, and lack of leisure in which to accomplish the task. But when the suggestion persisted from place to place, and was repeatedly voiced by different ones who knew nothing of the suggestions of others, the writer considered it an indication of the Lord which necessitated obedience. How much he owes to others for help in the execution of the work it would be impossible to assess. Nevertheless it is possible for him to express his gratitude for all the help received in the compilation and criticism of the ms.

It is now sent forth in the hope that it may be made as much blessing in its written form as it has been in an oral one.

CARDIFF, 1942.

H. LACEY.

[The quotations are from the Revised Version unless otherwise indicated.]

## *Preface to the Second Edition*

**T**HIS edition goes forth with deep gratitude to God that the first edition was so well received, and that this second one is both called for and possible of publication in these times.

It is the desire of the writer that it may help all who read to a deeper realisation of the greatness and goodness of "the only God" Who, though "invisible," is the "incorruptible" and "eternal King," and that it may help to a better understanding of His ways in both Providence and Redemption.

The Christian reader is asked to give attention to the chapter "The Church and Human Circumstances" and to the privilege and responsibility of the ministry explained therein. It is the portion of Christians to wait for God. They may not busy themselves in the efforts of men to construct a better world. Christ Jesus is their hope. It is theirs to keep the word of His patience and to allow their hearts to be directed of the Spirit into the love of God and the patience of Christ. Here indeed is the patience and faith of the saints. However, the writer is confident that, if this ministry be better and more fully discharged, many ills will be averted and temporal blessings procured for mankind, glory will be brought to God, and tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and gravity made possible to believers. Not to speak of the reward hereafter to those who will stir up themselves to so lay hold upon God.

Some changes occur in this edition. These consist of one or two recast paragraphs and many typographical improvements. Most of these are due to the suggestions of Mr. W. E. Vine, who very kindly went through the first edition. Thanks are due to Mr. Vine and to all who have helped by making valuable suggestions.



## *The Divine Warrant for the Study*

**T**HE warrant for the study of the ways of God with nations is found in the stately language of Jeremiah, chap. ix. vv. 23 and 24, which holds a prohibition and an encouragement: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

We live in a day of boasters; arrogancy and pride stalk abroad. "Men shall be boasters, proud, highminded," it is written. This kind of boasting and self-exaltation is surely unworthy. Yet man is such that he must boast, must glory in something, must seek admiration, and if this escape his attainment, how insignificant he becomes! The warning is that men should boast in neither their wisdom, might, nor riches (though these are permitted to them); they are taught to glory in the knowledge of the Lord and His ways in the earth.

Human wisdom is so imperfect, human might so feeble and human riches so fleeting, that it is folly to glory in such things. The short and narrow experience of men, their fractional knowledge, with their consequently limited ability to judge rightly, make human wisdom puerile before the wisdom of God, which sees all with perfect vision in light which makes everything transparent, and, having exhaustive knowledge and eternity's experience as well as that of time, therefore decides accurately and ever acts perfectly. The power of men, however great, when a fraction of creation's might is unleashed against it, becomes but a toy tossed in the tornado of the infinite. Riches, though massed mountain-high, are proverbial for their insecurity. The vast wealth of empires has passed and many a rich merchant become poor in a night.

The folly of boasting in these things is evident and, though we use them, the heart is instructed to turn from them to something else in which to boast and glory: to something that for its wisdom

will more than fill the mind, for its might will more than awe the soul, and for its riches will more than overwhelm the spirit. "Let him that glorieth, glory in this," is the advice and warrant, nay, more, the fiat of the throne. 'Let him glory in that he knoweth my eternal being and supremacy and my ways in the earth.' This knowledge of *Jehovah*-God, of His acts of lovingkindness, His works of judgment and ways of righteousness in the earth, is set before us for our understanding.

The 107th Psalm, which opens the last Book of Psalms, adds to the warrant for our study of the ways of God, by calling us to see how He regulates in turn the experiences of pilgrims, rebels, transgressors and sailors, and shows that in His government God brings them into distressing circumstances of need and trouble in which, with none to help, they are brought to their wits' end, able only to cry to the Lord. No way of deliverance is open to them, no eye to see, no hand to help. "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses" (v. 28). He leads the pilgrim by the right way and brings the afflicted out of their darkness; He brings the sick from the gates of death, and makes the storm a calm for the mariner. Reviewing these ways of God, the Psalmist repeatedly bursts forth, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" The masterly summing up of the ways of God in the last eleven verses ends with the words, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." So it is ours to observe these things, and to seek by the help of the Spirit to understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. Encouraged by this, let us then to the law and to the testimony, and apply ourselves to the Scriptures, which abound in evidence for our consideration and study.

As we search, questions will be answered, and we shall be surprised how much light is given on the ways of God with the nations, and how clearly He sets forth His principles and purposes. The Scriptures explain the origin of nations, and the apportioning of their lands, the secrets of the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, and even the sad matter of civilian warfare and the deep mysteries of the morale of peoples. Kings and royal families, nobles and society, the men, women and children of the people, are all spoken of in the oracles of God. So, turning to the Scriptures reverently

and in the fear of God, we look to Him for light on the things which interest and concern us all.

Having learned from the Scriptures the principles of God's ways, we shall be able to discern His hand in human affairs when we look abroad upon the earth with its kings and governments, states and nations, cities and villages, and if as well we know the purposes of God, our estimate of happenings around us will be more accurate; any tendency to question the ways of God will be turned to wonder; and our recognition of His wisdom will produce patience to wait His further working, and lift us in praise, as we perceive mercy and lovingkindness woven throughout all His doings with the nations of men.

## *Three Spheres of the Works of God*

It is essential for our present purpose to understand that the great works of God, so vast, diverse and intricate, belong to three distinct spheres: Creation, Providence, and Redemption. It seems that much of what is found in the Scriptures may, with a little consideration, be apportioned to one or other of these spheres. From Genesis to Revelation we are confronted with the ideas of these three domains: the *Material realm* created by God, Who has instituted, and Who governs, the ordinances of heaven and earth; the *realm of Providence* and moral government in which God, by means of circumstances, rules in an apparently indirect way, maintaining the great race of His creatures divided into nations, whose affairs He overrules in spite of sin and Satan; these two spheres constitute a platform for the greater sphere of *Redemption*, eternal in its accomplishments, the message of which is proclaimed in the Gospel.

The workings of the realm of Providence and moral government will interest us most in these pages. The subject has difficulties and problems with which the godly of all ages have wrestled. So it must be recognised that, even if they could all be explained, they could not be dealt with in the scope of any human work. However, the fact of difficulties should not deter us from the consideration of the available evidence.

The address of the Apostle Paul at Mars' Hill (Acts xvii. 22-31) is one of the portions that introduce these circles of Divine Government which fill the rest of Scripture, summing up simply and clearly the ideas of each.

The great statement, "The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing that he himself giveth to all life and breath and all things," speaks of God as the Creator and Lord of the *material realm* and introduces us to the first sphere.

The sphere of our special interest is outlined in the second state-

ment: "And he made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons and the bounds of their habitation." This introduces the *moral realm*, in which God is the Author of the nations, the Governor of their rise and fall, and the Lord of their destiny.

The *realm of redemption's work*, of which Christ is the centre, comes before us in the words of the third statement: "But now he commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." This is the realm of the Gospel, the spiritual, and third sphere of operation of the works of God.

God, who created and brought into existence these three spheres, governs them all, each one *according to its own principles*. We are familiar with the laws of the material sphere—gravity, momentum, centrifugal force, the rotation of day and night, the sequence of the seasons—and we accommodate ourselves to them habitually, taking them as a matter of course. The success of the farmer and the gardener depends upon their observing the laws of the seasons, and doing the right thing at the right time. The grim lessons of loss following disobedience to these laws, and the smile of harvest following compliance with them, teach what Nature demands. Trial and error, success and failure, compose the experience that instructs men how to behave and fit in with the requirements of this realm of material things.

The second sphere of Divine activities is no less a realm of principle: a sphere of different character, in which we find principles of different character. In the realm of creation our actions are connected with things and processes of things, but in the realm of providence they are concerned with people and groups of people: not with treatment of *things*, but treatment of *persons*. The laws of creation govern behaviour towards things; in like manner the laws of providence and moral government are intended to regulate behaviour, but it is behaviour towards persons.

It is a familiar law that hot things will burn. Most of us knowing this by painful experience instinctively withdraw from the danger. If we disregard this well-known law, we shall suffer from its operation and reap the consequences of pain and injury to ourselves. Such a

familiar instance of the working of Nature's law, known even to a child, serves to illustrate the working of moral laws in the sphere where our actions are with people rather than things. Wrong actions and unprincipled behaviour will react, though not as swiftly, in the circumstances of those who disregard moral laws. This is God's world, not man's, and whilst men are, up to a point, able to choose their actions, they are not able to choose the results of those actions. The man or the nation of men who thinks it possible to cheat a moral God in a moral universe is a moral imbecile. The operation of this sphere of divine government leaves man helpless to avoid its consequences. God may, however, by the introduction of principles of a higher order, defer, diminish, or, in some cases, appear to suspend those consequences. (See Appendix to this chapter.)

Not all the experiences of men are limited to dealing with things; nor do all the experiences of men end in dealing with people. There is a spiritual side to the experience of men, a phase of experience deeper, higher, more intense, more serious, and more far-reaching in its consequence. He is a wise man who learns how to behave in connection with things and processes of things, and a wiser man who learns how to behave morally with other individuals and companies of people. But he is a wiser man still who learns and observes the principles of the third realm, the realm of the Gospel, where the hidden movings of the heart—its thoughts, desires, motives—are weighed, and if found to spring from other than love to God, are declared *sin*. "For the law is spiritual," and demands that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." This goes a great deal farther than the manner of a person's action towards another person. It goes so far as to require that action towards another shall be the fruit of adoring love to God. No wonder, viewed in this light, that the words are recorded, "all have sinned." This law, so searching and condemning, will be found to be as unbending as is the power of gravity and as impossible to remove. Refusal to believe that gravity exists will not alter either its existence, its working, or its consequences, nor will refusal to believe alter the existence, working, or consequences of the laws that govern sin in this spiritual sense.

When we discover the principles that govern things, we adjust our behaviour in such a way that the laws bring to us their blessing rather than their curse. The farmer who has ploughed early will be as thankful for the biting frost and the purifying snow as he will for spring rains and summer sun. But should he plough in spring and sow in harvest, the law of winter will be a curse and the relentlessness of Nature reward him with empty granaries. The men of our day, as of every day, are not so foolish as thus to put themselves in conflict with things they cannot change. "His God doth instruct him aright and doth teach him," says Isaiah xxviii. 26, doth teach him discretion that recognises principle and submits to it, and in turn reaps its blessing and stores its good. So discretion in morals will also reap its blessing in circumstances, and, discretion, bowing to the laws that are spiritual, will issue in the wisdom that will submit to the condemnation, "all have sinned," and will embrace the principle that, If we confess our sins to God, he is faithful and just to remit sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The consequences of sin against God can be removed, not by an alteration of the laws and principles of this spiritual realm, but by the very working out of them. The sinless and Holy One has suffered on Calvary for sins, and because of this, those who own their guilt can be justified by faith in the Saviour and His sacrifice.

We have been introduced to the three spheres and seen outlined a little of the ideas of each, but the object of these pages is rather to show what the realm of providence and moral government implies in the circumstances of men and nations of men. It has been necessary to define these spheres and to say a little about the character of these circles of divine activity and human responsibility. The necessity to compare and contrast these spheres and their principles will recur as we proceed in later chapters to discover what is revealed of God's ways with Kings, Governments and nations, and observe the circumstances of rise and fall, prosperity and poverty, peace and war, from the origin of nations until the end of this age and the dawn of the Millennium, when the nations of the earth will be ruled in full blessing and perfect righteousness by the incomparable Christ of Calvary.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ON  
"THREE SPHERES OF THE WORKS OF GOD"

THE PROBLEMS OF MORAL GOVERNMENT

EACH sphere of divine government holds mysteries beyond the understanding of any human being. The questions that fill the concluding chapters of the Book of Job (xxxviii., xxxix., xl. and xli.) bring home to the mind a sense of how true this is in regard to the physical world, the realm of things that are seen.

But the consideration of God's moral government is fraught with even greater difficulties. There often appears to be failure to execute justice upon the wicked, and many evils seem to us to go unpunished. This problem has perplexed the godly in all ages: Job, Jeremiah, and the writers of Psalm xxxvii. and Psalm lxxiii. were at a loss to understand the prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous.

Jeremiah, who was so intimate with God that he could expostulate with Him, asked once, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper, wherefore are all they at ease that deal treacherously?" (Jer. xii. 1). At the time it appeared that the godly suffered and that the wicked prospered. But a few years told another story when the verses of Jer. xi. 22 and 23 were fulfilled in the experience of the men of Anathoth, the very ones of whom the prophet complained. "The year of their visitation" came, and they were swept away in the Chaldean invasion that left their land desolate, whilst Jeremiah, in spite of suffering because of service, was preserved in the goodness of God.

The man of the seventy-third Psalm evidently had an incorrect view of God's ways with the righteous and the wicked. Until he went into the sanctuary he exaggerated the apparent well-being of the wicked and seemed to take little account of the blessings of the godly. For a time he was obsessed with his own trials and by the fact that he did not then see the hand of God upon evil. But what he learned in the light of the sanctuary reassured him that there was no lapse in the execution of God's government. Eventually he confessed that the wicked do meet with retribution, however much it may appear otherwise, and that the godly do find good here in spite of all their trials, not to speak of the immeasurable blessing of

communion with God in their present experiences and of the joy of glory afterward.

The writer of the thirty-seventh Psalm had become assured that, however otherwise it sometimes appeared, the unrighteous were cut down, even though they were seen to be in great power spreading themselves like great trees in their native soil (v. 35).

Job, during his trial, had a good deal of fault to find with God, but the end vindicated the righteous government of God. Not only did he receive twice as much as he possessed before, but he emerged refined in character and enriched in the knowledge of God. Even his censorious friends had to come to him at God's direction so that Job might intercede for them (Job xlii. 7-10).

In view of the difficulties of these men it is hardly to be expected that we shall be without ours. But whenever we have difficulties in regard to any teaching of Scripture it is well to remember the following:

That the Scriptures present matters for faith rather than for reason;

That we are unwise to allow what we do not understand to prevent our acceptance of what may be understood;

That it is folly to reject a principle because in some cases we do not see its effect within days, months or years;

That it is by no means prudent to refuse fundamental rules because of seeming exceptions.

The reader is also referred to the later note on the problem of the sufferings of believers.

## *The Origin and Distribution of Nations*

WE shall discover the origin of nations by going back to the Book of Genesis, where we read: "And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, and of them was the whole earth overspread" (Gen. ix. 18-19). Chapter x. provides us with three tables of names of families which spring from these three branches of the human race. Twelve families spring from the line of Japheth, about whom four statements are made: "of these were the isles of the nations divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations" (v. 5).

The line of Ham develops into twenty-six families, and about these the same statements are made: "These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands and in their nations" (v. 20).

From the line of Shem spring twenty families, of whom the same is said: "After their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations" (v. 31).

It seems from this that each family mentioned has its own tongue, is given its own land and thus becomes a nation. "These are the families of the sons of Noah after their generations, in their nations, and of these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood" (v. 32).

In this interesting chapter we have the origin of the fifty-eight basic nations, to whose number God added later the nation of Israel miraculously developed from Abram (Gen. xii. 1-3) as well as those other nations developed later, such as the Moabites and the Ammonites from Lot (Gen. xix. 37-38), the Ishmaelites (Ps. lxxxiii. 6) from Ishmael (Gen. xxi. 18 and xxv. 12-18), and the Edomites (Gen. xxxvi. 43) from Esau (Gen. xxxvi. 1-43).

When Moses, the man with whom God spoke face to face, delivered his closing address to the nation of Israel, he confirmed the truth of the origin of nations by Divine division by his saying, "... the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance. . . . He separated the children of men, He set the bounds of the

peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. xxxii. 8).

The same truth is further confirmed by the words of God through the prophet Isaiah: "I appointed the ancient people" (Isa. xlv. 7). Thus "hath God made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth."

It is evidently the teaching of Scripture that racial distinctions and national barriers proceed from God, Who divides and departmentalises the human race, rather than communising it. The idea of one community of men, one family of human beings, is foreign to the Bible and contrary to the ways of God, either in providence or in redemption.

Since the second century after the Flood there have been nations, for during the days of Peleg was the earth divided; his genealogy is given in Genesis, chap. xi. vv. 10-16, and shows that he was born one hundred and one years after the Flood. This gives us, not only the approximate time of the division of the human family, but also the approximate date of the building of Babel, that symbol of human unity so signally confounded by Divine intervention.

Furthermore, as we view the earth, learning something of its geography, marking the features of different continents, observing the zones of climate, the flowers and fruits belonging to certain lands, haunts of beasts found in one part that are unknown in another, homes of birds in some lands totally unfamiliar elsewhere, we have no difficulty in admitting that each land has a character just all its own. Nor should there be any difficulty in going a little farther and admitting that it was so arranged by the hand of God. He made some lands mountainous, others not so; some continents with many lakes, some with few; some lands luxuriant, others less fertile. He is the author of the many characteristics that are peculiar to each land. Cold lands, temperate lands, torrid lands—all were arranged by the hand that spans the heavens and spreads the earth.

It is probable that earth was prepared thus with a view to separating the sons of Adam and moving the different families to as many different lands, that there each in its own inheritance might become a nation with its own individuality and live out its national experience before God.

The succession of terms, "after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, in their nations," repeated thrice in Genesis x., suggests that it was the giving of a different tongue and a separate land to a family, that, as the family grew, developed the people into a nation.

When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel (Deut. xxxii. 8). He determined the bounds of their habitation (Acts xvii. 26).

God thus apportioned the inheritance of the nations: He moved the Japhetic group of families to the northern parts of the earth, the group of families springing from Ham to the southern continents, the Semitic peoples to the central belt; and later Israel received the crown of the lands in the centre of all when God had developed that nation from Abraham.

Variety is always stamped upon the works of God, and it may fairly be said that God never repeats Himself. All grass is grass, but there are a number of kinds of grass, and even within one kind there are not two blades exactly alike.

All nature is evidence that God is the God of the individual. Monotony and uniformity do not mark His works.

Men are men wherever found, but every nation of men is different and, in fact, every man within a nation, though following the national type, varies from every other man of his nation.

The land where a nation dwells, the language the people speak, and the experiences of their history form national character and result in the people of one nation being different from the people of another nation.

People who live on broad fertile plains have a different character and outlook from people living amongst barren mountains or restricted valleys. The greatness and wealth of the fertile plain will mark the people who dwell there as the ruggedness of the mountains and restriction of the valleys have their effect on those who live amongst them.

Climate has its effect and compels habits that in turn form character. A language of richness and beauty will by its use maintain beauty of thought and richness of ideas and so contribute its measure of influence upon the people who speak it.

Lands created by God, climate ordained by His hand, languages decreed by Him and experience controlled by His hand develop different types and varieties of nations from the original families.

How wonderful are the ways of God! He first creates earth with its many regions, then from its dust makes man—the most wonderful of all His works—multiplies him to a race, afterwards dividing that race into many races, moving them each to its own appointed region with its particular character and climate, and there, speaking the languages that He has ordained, they fill the earth with their amazing variety.

From the natural point of view, it may seem desirable to unite mankind in federation, so working as one to accomplish human ambitions. But when men with complete faith in God follow the path of His will, federation is not necessary to human good. Individual dealing with God will itself produce a *fellowship* which is as superior to an arranged federation as a living human body is to a mechanical robot.

Of the coming Kingdom of God, where national barriers will still exist and where differences between higher and lower orders of the redeemed will be permanent, it is said that “they shall all know the Lord.” Though there will be variety amongst groups of men, and contrasting types, suited to different positions, some to rule and others to be ruled, yet there will be peace, but not the peace of uniformity or monotonous sameness, but of immeasurable diversity working in harmony, because every heart will be occupied with the same Lord and every will gladly surrendered to the same perfect control of love and wisdom.

The fact of different races and nations presents many problems to-day as it has done down the centuries. The problem of the Jewish race is a “burdensome stone” to the government of this and other nations. It has been suggested that the abolition of racial distinctions would solve the Jewish question. It has been argued, too, that wars arise because men are divided into nations. The suggestion is made that the fusion of nations into one commonwealth and the welding of races into one family would solve the problem of the Jew as well as the problem of war. If those things that separate, such as language, religion, customs, etc., were surmounted or removed, if men could become one, it has been thought

that Utopia would result.<sup>1</sup> We live in a day when attempts are being made to unify mankind, and that these are but the forerunners of greater and more ambitious schemes is clearly revealed in the Word of God. It becomes evident to any with a meagre knowledge of prophecy that some success will attend attempts to unify men religiously, commercially and politically, but it will be as anti-God in its object and prove as disastrous in its end as original Babel was.

The problem of the Jew and the bane of war will be discussed in later chapters, when we shall see that God has far different ways of removing these age-long obstacles and embarrassments of human society.

<sup>1</sup> Even unbelieving ethnologists and students of raciology believe that the fusion of races is a physical impossibility. In plant-life and animal experience it is natural for each to mate with its own kind and type, but where this natural sanctity is profaned and two different species joined, the "half-caste" generation produced is not permanent, being either sterile or reverting to the originals in a few generations.

This law of reversion to type, so soundly established in plants and animals, operates as well in the human family and accounts for the fact that no permanent new race has been produced by the fusion of two original races. This law, learned from the observation of history, is an outside evidence of the teaching of Scripture that God divided mankind into various races, each with its own characteristics, and that He keeps them so divided.

## *The Times of the Nations*

CHRISTIANS are familiar with that teaching of Scripture known as fore-ordination. Perhaps we had not expected to find such a principle working in regard to the nations. The remarkable verse that we have noticed before (Acts xvii. 26) contains three statements: God made the nations; God determined their times; and God appointed the bounds of their habitation. The second of these will interest us at this point—God determined the pre-appointed times—or, as it might be paraphrased, God determined the arranged-and-being-arranged times of their rise and fall. The rise and fall of nations had been decided by God in counsel long before the nations had existence upon earth. But just as the truth of Christian fore-ordination does not do away with human responsibility, so the truth of God's determination of the rise and fall of nations does not do away with national responsibility to God. Hence the peculiar tense of the word "appointed" or "arranged," is "appointed and being appointed," or "arranged and being arranged." What a comfort to the godly in any day to know that the rise and fall of kingdoms is governed by God! But lest any should take a fatalistic and irresponsible view, God carefully guards His truth by this double sense of the word. The rise and fall of kingdoms is determined by God, and yet, whether we understand how it works or not, they are, as well, determined by the political, religious and moral conduct of those kingdoms. A very clear instance of this appointing of times is found in the book of Jeremiah, forty-sixth chapter and seventeenth verse: "They did cry there, Pharaoh King of Egypt is but a noise, he hath passed the time appointed." Judah had made alliance with Egypt to obtain the help of that kingdom against the threatened invasion of Nebuchadnezzar from the north; but Pharaoh's horses and chariots were of no help to Judah because the time of the fall of Egypt was come, and all its vaunted strength was but a noise, crumbling to dust before the very monarch whom Judah feared.

Did we not see something like this in 1940, when it proved

that the millions of France and all their military power were but a noise? France, too, had passed the appointed time. And as with Egypt of old, surely there were antecedent political, religious and moral reasons. The fall of Judah and Egypt synchronised with God's delegation of power to Nebuchadnezzar, whom He made a king of kings and to whom He gave a kingdom, power, strength and glory. But when that same Nebuchadnezzar sinned against God in his pride, saying, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" God brought him down, and he was made "to . . . know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Dan. iv. 17).

Belshazzar, too, found that God had numbered his kingdom and finished it, for he was slain on the night of his greatest sin, and Darius the Median received the kingdom. As far back as 1900 B.C., the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis records a striking example of God's determining the rise and fall of kingdoms. God addresses Himself to Abram almost five hundred years before the occupation of Canaan by Israel, and says: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and they shall serve them and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge . . . but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." The fall of Egypt, who had enslaved Israel, synchronised with God's deliverance of Israel at the exodus, and the occupation of Canaan synchronised with the filled cup of Amorite iniquity. Egypt's behaviour had merited Divine judgment, and the Amorites' iniquity was so great that they must be removed from before the face of God, whereas the affliction of Israel called for deliverance to a God of pity Who delights in mercy even though he is a God of justice.

The prophets abound with so many instances of Divine sovereignty governing the rise and fall of kingdoms, that it would be impossible to quote a tithe of them. A list is presented in Jeremias xxv. where all the families of the north, the king of Babylon, Israel, Pharaoh, King of Egypt, the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, Edom, and Moab and the children of Ammon, all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles beyond

the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of the Medes, and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world which are upon the face of the earth, are mentioned as being under the hand of God, Who controls their rise and fall.

Even the days of the power of the mighty Anti-Christ who shall come are limited and the appointed time of his fall is already set down in heaven, and though with Satanic aid and the world at his feet he thinks "to change the appointed time," yet God has said: "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and there shall thy proud waves be stayed."

How this emphasises the greatness of God and His sovereign wisdom! No wonder the Apostle Paul, as he viewed the ways of God, burst forth: "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor, or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again, for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

What a comfort to the godly in these days to know that God is still GOD in all His sovereign power! We are commanded to "know therefore this day and consider it in our hearts that Jehovah is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath." How becoming, then, are the words: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength!"

## *The Government of Nations*

THE Scriptures teach that there are three distinct agencies operating in the government of nations. Human rulers with their various methods of government are well known; but this is not the only agency which directs the affairs of men. Two hidden agencies are at work. The Satanic system, composed of angels and demons, principalities and powers, headed by Satan himself, ceaselessly operates in innumerable ways to oppose the purposes of God, to seduce mankind, and frustrate human good. At the same time the great spiritual princes of God and His innumerable holy angels are sent forth to minister on account of those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. i. 14).

That human rule and the exercise of governmental authority are Divinely instituted is evident from the New Testament passage: "There is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1). It is further termed "the ordinance of God" and the persons who administer it are described as "the ministers of God."<sup>1</sup> The same teaching is presented in the Book of Daniel: "The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men."

The forms of human rule are portrayed in a vision given to Nebuchadnezzar and described in Daniel's second chapter. A metal Colossus in the figure of a man, with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay, was presented in vision to the king. In Divine mercy the interpretation was given through Daniel, who explained that the gold set forth the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, a rule of complete power and absolute authority vested in one man.

<sup>1</sup> The word used for ministers in Rom. xiii. 6 will, in comparison with other words translated servant or minister, repay consideration. It indicates service in an appointed office, and it will be seen from its use in the New Testament that a sense of sacredness is involved in its meaning. It occurs in the following passages only: Rom. xiii. 6, xv. 16; Phil. ii. 25; Heb. i. 7, viii. 2.

This rule would of course be perfect were it directed by a perfect being of infallible wisdom and infinite love. But though the form of rule was, as the gold suggests, richest and best, it failed because the person in whom it was vested was by no means equal to his privilege and responsibility. It was further explained that the succession of metals, which declined in value from the head to the feet, illustrated a succession of empires each with a different form of government. The silver breast and arms symbolised the empire which followed the Babylonian, and to which, as chapter five states (v. 28), the Kingdom was given. It is described as inferior; and as it was inferior in neither wealth, power, people nor territory, it is concluded that the sense in which the inferiority is to be understood is in regard to the character of its rule. A consideration of chapter six makes evident that this took the form of a limited monarchy, the laws of which were framed by the parliament of princes set up by Darius. Though they undoubtedly had the effect of limiting the power of the king to do evil, they also prevented Darius from acting justly toward the righteous Daniel. The next form of rule illustrated by the thighs of brass was the Grecian (see Dan. viii. 20 and 21), probably military in its character, whereas the iron presented the rule of a fourth world empire, which can only be Rome. That the rule of this power was so much stronger but so much less noble is well known. Finally, the clay of the feet illustrated the introduction of an altogether new element in rule. The clay was interpreted as the seed of men and, obviously, the seed of men in the rule. This indicates the voice of the masses, which limits the power of the iron of dominant rule, and results in the system presented by the toes, a federation of states, a league of nations. This league-of-nations-form of human rule is clearly the one which will immediately precede the advent of Christ whose coming as the stone (see Dan. ii. 34-35 and 41-45) will remove all these forms of rule and result in the kingdom of God, in which absolute authority will be vested in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Human rulers, whatever their character of rule, even though their power is delegated to them by God, usually follow their own plans to further their own ambitions. Even though at times they accomplish God's will, it is rarely intelligently so, nor is it because they desire to do so; in fact, they often act in contrast to His will,

when unknown to them Satan uses them for his fell purposes. In the fascinating twenty-eighth chapter of Ezekiel, there is a power behind a power, a king behind a king, a person more than human behind a person who is clearly human. In this mysterious chapter two monarchs of the rich merchant city of Tyre are portrayed. One is as distinctly human and earthly as the other is distinctly superhuman and belonging to another scene. What strikes the interested reader of the chapter is that the character of the higher Being is stamped upon the lower one. The abilities and gifts of the greater are in measure imparted to the lesser, and because of these the human king becomes as illustrious in his realm as the great spiritual king is in his realm. What is more striking still is that the sins and pride of the greater are also seen in the lesser. The same principle is presented to us at the end of the Book of God, for the Revelation pictures in the symbols of its thirteenth chapter an empire with its emperor crowned and reigning over many nations on earth, but behind this empire and its emperor is another empire and another emperor (portrayed in the previous chapter), none less than Satan and his angels, designated elsewhere principalities and powers (Eph. vi. 11-13). He really exercises the power, governs the governor and rules the ruler; he really wears the crown, and upon his heads are the diadems. The amazing successes of some rulers and the uncanny prosperity of evil are attributable to this power over the powers. But above all, and in spite of all, God sits sovereign, and by His wisdom, righteousness, and determination of purpose makes even what is violently opposed to Him to serve His purpose, and harnesses even the Devil's wildest and wickedest schemes to the chariot wheels of His unchangeable will as He goes on with His purpose in redemption.<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally God draws aside the veil which covers the unseen and we get a brief glimpse of the way in which heavenly beings have to do with the affairs of nations. Daniel x. 13, 20, 21, show that there were heavenly princes who, in the spiritual realm, stood for Israel, and make it clear that there were evil princes standing

<sup>1</sup> God's supremacy as He rules in Providence over human rulers is expressed in three eloquent words.

He giveth it to WHOMSOEVER he wills (Dan. iv. 25).

He turneth the king's heart WHITHERSOEVER he wills (Prov. xxxi. 1).

He overrules so that they do WHATSOEVER His hand and counsel have fore-ordained (Acts iv. 27 and 28).

in the same realm for Medo-Persia and Greece and who opposed the answer to Daniel's prayer for the good of the captive Israelites.

Another glimpse is granted us in Zechariah's eighth vision, in the form of a symbolic representation of the spirits of the heavens. These four chariots with their horses of different colours probably illustrate spiritual powers who operate upon mankind like the four winds of Daniel vii. 2, which in this vision are seen striving upon the sea producing the great states depicted there.

Evil agencies will not always be free to develop purposes of evil and hinder purposes of good; a day is promised when God will "punish the host of the high ones on high and the kings of the earth upon the earth" (Isa. xxiv. 21). Then Satan and his angels will be dethroned and bound (Rev. xii. 7-9 and xx. 1-4), leaving only the unfallen angels and agencies of good to serve man (not to rule him). For then Christ, and the new race of redeemed men, will enjoy the place that God designed for man to have (Heb. ii. 5-16). It is the purpose of God for man to reign, not to be reigned over; and although this has never been realised because of human sin and estrangement from God, it will be realised through the work of redemption. The redeemed, cleansed from their sin by a Saviour's blood and brought near to God, will, in communion with Him, delight in applying His will to earth.

At present innumerable myriads of holy angels are directed by the hand that never errs and their work apportioned under the eye that never sleeps. The following list demonstrates the existence of the host of holy angels and suggests some of their activities:

- Genesis xxviii. 12, and xxxii. 1 and 2.
- Psalms xxxiv. 7, xci. 11, and ciii. 20 and 21.
- Rev. xvi. 5, shows them in charge of departments of nature;
- Gen. xix. 13, as executors of justice upon Sodom;
- 2 Kings xix. 35, as executors of justice upon Sennacherib's army;
- 1 Kings xix. 7, they minister food to Elijah;
- 2 Kings vi. 13-16, they protect Elisha;
- 2 Sam. v. 24, "the marching of a military host" aids David against the Philistines;
- Acts xii. 5-10, they liberate Peter;
- Matt. xviii. 10, they care for children.

These ministering spirits immediately fly at the bidding of the throne to do a thousand things revealed and unrevealed in creation and providence, all of which constitute service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation (Heb. i. 14).

As the two great spiritual agencies operate, the rulers upon earth, like great trees, are swayed by the winds of heaven, sometimes this way, sometimes that, sometimes wise and righteous counsels prevailing, sometimes evil counsels; but God goes on with His purposes, which will eventually ripen in the Second Advent of Christ, when the world to come will not be in subjection to angels, but be controlled by men in the glory, to which those men have been brought through the Kinsman-Redeemer (Heb. ii. 14). Until that day, in spite of the chaos of earth, "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9).

## *The Fact of Divine Visitation*

THROUGHOUT the history of nations there have been times of disturbance, when peace has broken down and war has raged, when normal tranquillity and security have been thrust aside and their place taken by stress and strain, hazard and danger, times when men have left peaceful pursuits for the violence of war, and when their constructive energies have been diverted into channels of destruction to the inevitable accompaniment of famine and want. During these critical phases of human experience territories are violated, thrones upset, states broken up, cities wasted, homes wrecked, and the lives of men, women and children destroyed by the sword, famine and disease. Such calamitous days have defied every effort of men to avert them; when present, they involve nation after nation and affect even those who do their utmost to avoid becoming embroiled. Because of the intrusion of these times the history of man has proved to be a series of alternations between peace and war, between circumstances of quiet and days of evil.

It was during one of these abnormal phases, when a series of calamities befell a number of nations, that Jeremiah prophesied. Habakkuk and Zephaniah were contemporary with him. The nations of the Middle East were convulsed in the throes of that trouble caused by the rise of Nebuchadnezzar. War and destruction had accompanied his coming to power, nation after nation was affected, until hardly a people of that area remained immune from the tribulation.

The days of the Assyrian monarchs who preceded Nebuchadnezzar were as much marked by these convulsions as the rise of the Persian, Grecian and Roman powers in after times. Nor has the present era, the Christian age, escaped, for through its centuries, in more or less severity, these phases have continued to alternate with times of peace, some shorter, some longer, until this century, which during the course of its little more than forty years has known two of the most fearful examples.

All efforts to eliminate these experiences have failed and they

continue to recur in the history of nations. Autocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, Social Reform, Education, Religion have not been successful in their endeavours to prevent the outbreak of these nightmare-like times. Four thousand years or more of the history of nations have proved such times to be unavoidable, though some would not admit that they are still unavoidable. But the fact is that no efforts to avoid them have succeeded, even though greater efforts than ever have been made. In spite of the spread of education, the development of culture, and the multiplication of the amenities of life, these times have recurred with even greater intensity and shorter intervals of peace than in ancient days. Though a league of nations was formed, disarmament instituted, and the world filled with peace schemes, every endeavour of the leading powers of earth to avoid these days has resulted in their becoming involved in a convulsion which is rocking the whole world.

During the similar times of Jeremiah, to which reference has been made, it was asked, "Wherefore are these things come upon me?" (Jer. xiii. 22). To this reasonable question a number of answers are forthcoming—answers from the political world, from the social world, from the religious world. The philosophers, statesmen, religious leaders, merchants and the people all have their ideas. In the minds of not a few God is brought into the matter, and they put the same question in different manner: "Wherefore hath the Lord our God done all these things unto us?" (Jer. v. 19). Some think that these times are the result of processes—processes of moral government, a kind of reaping what has been sown; others feel that, however true this is, there is as well something more direct than process and more personal than the inevitable rebound of men's policies and actions.

Many chapters of the Scripture are filled with the subject, and it may be said that whole books are largely devoted to elucidate the mysteries of such convulsions. In these it is shown that process has a good deal to do with their outbreak; but it is rather the burden of the prophets to emphasise that they are the result of intervention, which makes processes culminate in crises.

The Scriptures abound with evidences of the element of retributive justice operating normally in physical and moral life. But it seems that, even though these processes work, there are times when the evils of nations mount up in the passing of years and when the

retribution of process accumulates and culminates in a storm which breaks upon whole nations. Such happenings were likened to a storm in Ezek. i. 3, and Jer. xxiii. 19.

In the conduct of the moral government of God there are processes and there are crises; there is the normal and there is the abnormal. We find, especially clearly in the Old Testament, that God overruled to bring evil circumstances upon groups of nations, circumstances not necessarily miraculously abnormal, but nevertheless abnormal, as were those which befell Judah and a dozen other nations in the days of Jeremiah and the group of prophets, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Daniel, who were his contemporaries.

To the direct question of the men and women of that day about the times in which they lived there is a direct answer; "This is thy lot, the portion measured unto thee from me, saith the LORD; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood" (Jer. xiii. 25).

In a way unaccustomed to the average man, and a way strange even to some professing Christians, the prophets attribute everything to the direct hand of God. Whatever part man might play or Satan might have, the matters with which the prophets deal are traced right up to the Throne, and attributed to the hand of God. This is presented in a remarkable way in a verse in Isaiah: "I make peace, and create evil" (xlv. 7). It would be difficult to find a verse that bears upon human circumstances more absolutely in its meaning than this one. For its simple words convey the fact that, whatever subordinate part man may play, peace comes firstly and essentially from the hand of God—"I make peace." In equally unmistakable clearness the statement concludes "and create evil."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As used in Isaiah xlv. 7, "I make peace and create evil."

Amos iii. 6, ". . . shall evil befall a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Strong says, "this word evil is derived from a primitive root which means, to spoil."

It is not the word used normally as a noun for iniquity; whilst it can be used and is used in this sense, it is rather an adjective describing a condition, than a noun naming an absolute quality (though it is used as a noun).

The English translators have found it necessary to translate it by such words as Affliction, Adversity, Harm, Grievous, Misery, Grief, Hurt, Calamities, Troubles, Distress, Sorrow, Wretchedness, as well as by the word "evil" occurring in the quotations.

The following references will demonstrate the meaning of the term, but are only a fraction of what might be quoted to prove that it is evil in the sense of circumstances that is in view, and not, as some say, evil in the absolute. God did not and could not create evil in the sense of its absolute principle, though he does

In the same absolute sense, whatever subordinate agencies operate, whatever part men play, calamitous times proceed from the hand of God. And more, calamitous times are said to be, not only allowed in a permissive way, but to be actually *created* and intentionally brought into existence, and, in a direct way, compelled among the affairs of men.<sup>1</sup>

Additional evidence of this solemn fact is found in the record of the occasion when Judah, in natural wisdom, had gone to Egypt for the military assistance of that strong power against the might of the Assyrian aggressor, and in so doing sought not the help of God. In irony the Lord says, "Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the evil-doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity" (Isa. xxxi. 1-2). In spite of all their efforts for help and protection, and all their endeavour to avoid the evil, God in His wisdom and sovereign power "will stretch out His hand and both he that helpeth shall stumble and he that is holpen shall fall."

There is scarcely one of the prophets who does not in the same way directly attribute these times of calamity and fearful upheaval to the hand of God. The most striking of these passages are selected, and will be found, upon further enquiry, to be supported by a host of others and to be backed by the spirit that breathes through the whole of the prophets.

Nine questions are found in Amos (iii. 3-8), all of which have an obviously negative answer. The first is, "Shall two walk together except they are agreed?"—Obviously, no. The seventh one, which bears most directly of them all upon this point of our

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bring evil circumstances upon those men who like Satan, and following him, take paths of lawlessness.

Jer. iv. 6—"evil from the north."

„ vi. 19—"evil upon this people."

„ xi. 11 and 23—"evil upon them."

„ xvii. 18—"the day of evil."

„ xviii. 8—"I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."

<sup>1</sup> It seems that the normal course of moral government, the abnormal times of visitation, and the miraculous interventions of judgment, all reveal that wrath of God to which reference is made in Rom. i. 17. Bengel, Kelly, and many others have taken the terms "tribulation and anguish" (Rom. ii. 9) to refer to the out-working of this wrath and indignation in the present, though obviously the climax of it is in the "day" of vv. 5 and 16.

subject, is really the climax of the argument of the prophet, an argument set out in this interrogative way, and thus more eminently suited than a statement to compel upon the human mind the obvious answer. Its words are: "Shall evil befall a city and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). In the same way as the other eight questions clearly require the answer No, so does this one. The truth conveyed therefore is inescapable: No! Evil cannot befall a city unless the Lord has acted. The force of these rhetorical questions seems therefore to require that all calamity is the direct result of divine action.

There may be a little nervousness in contemplating the absolute sovereignty of God, whether operating in creation, moral government, or redemption, lest we should attribute evil to Him or seem to make Him responsible for wrong. But we shall find in further meditations that whatever actions He takes are necessary and just, and form part of an ordered system of moral government. Though there are deep intricacies which none could hope to understand fully, much less to explain, yet revelations are made which we proceed to consider.

The ministry of Amos, which took place on the eve of calamities which befell at least eight nations, suggests the idea of a court. A significant expression recurs eight times, and in regard to each nation: "For three transgressions and for four I will not turn away the punishment" (Amos i. 3; i. 6; i. 9; i. 11; i. 13; ii. 1; ii. 4; ii. 6), or as it has been otherwise translated, "I will not revoke my sentence" (New Translation). It appears from this that the guilt of these nations had been weighed, and the continuous evil, suggested by the expression "for three transgressions," had called forth a sentence which awaited execution, but which might have been turned away had there been repentance. Instead, there was further sin, as is suggested by the term, "and for four." In view of this the waiting sentence must be executed for both the process and crisis of their guilt.

We find the same idea present in the ministry of the later group of prophets, who stood before God on the eve of, and during the course of, the critical days of the rise of Nebuchadnezzar and the downfall of Judah. Zephaniah describes the Lord as a Judge who sits in the midst of the affairs of earth, a Judge who will not do iniquity, but who will constantly bring His judgment to light (Zeph. iii. 5).

(For a fuller exposition of this important chapter see Process and Climax in the chapter on the "End of the Age.")

Of Belshazzar it is said that he had been weighed in the balances and found wanting, and that his kingdom had been numbered and brought to an end, being given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. v. 26-28). It is stated that the great Gentile monarch and his kingdom had been tried in a higher court than sits on earth and that, after investigation, their guilt had been proved. As the result of that he was deemed unworthy to wield power longer, and they to retain previous privileges. There at the direction of that higher court the king was deposed and the people brought under the power of Darius, who received the kingdom contemporaneously with Cyrus in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah xlv.

In ways peculiar to each, all the prophets reveal the sovereignty of God operating over the affairs of nations. It is noteworthy that the book of Daniel, which has just been quoted, does so in connection with the empires of "the Times of the Gentiles" (Luke xxi. 24). These particular times began with the subjugation of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar and continue their unbroken course through all the centuries in which Jews are subject to Gentile powers. That this will hold good until the dawn of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ is evident from all prophetic teaching. It seems that at the commencement of these times light is given on Heaven's rule of these times. Scattered through the chapters of Daniel are fragments of evidence<sup>1</sup> which, when collected and framed together, make a

<sup>1</sup> The following list gathers together some of these fragments of evidence:—

- Dan. ii. 37—"the God of heaven hath given the kingdom." . . .  
 ,, iv. 13 and 14—"a watcher and an holy one" . . . "cried, Hew down the tree."  
 ,, 17—"The sentence is by the decree of the watchers and the demand by the word of the holy ones."  
 ,, 24—"it is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king."  
 ,, 25—"the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will." So v. 18.  
 ,, 26—"the heavens do rule." So vv. 31-32.  
 ,, v. 26—"God hath numbered thy kingdom."  
 ,, 27—"thou art weighed."  
 ,, 28—"thy kingdom is divided and given."  
 ,, vii. 2—"the winds of heaven," symbolising its unseen power, cause the convulsion which produces the empires, symbolised by the beasts.

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case that demonstrates that the rise and fall of kingdoms in times of international convulsion is governed by God through the administration of the court of heaven and its angelic powers.

Jeremiah, one of the few of whom it is said that he was chosen before his birth, was appointed of God "a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. i. 5 and 10). Through him God revealed the same truth regarding the rise and fall of kingdoms, but with more detail. In his ministry it is shown that calamities befell a circle of nations because of God's controversy with them (Jer. xxv. 27-34). Visitation<sup>2</sup> is one of the prominent features of his prophecy. It is therefore not to be wondered at that he is the prophet of tears. So close was his intimacy with God that he used it over and over again to expostulate with Him regarding the sufferings of the days in which he lived. In return God condescended to reason with the sincere and pathetic figure. As the feelings of man were expressed, so the pent-up feelings of a righteous God were explained (vi. 10-15), together with the necessity of dealing in visitation with Israel and the other nations.<sup>3</sup> It becomes evident from his ministry that whilst God

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Dan. vii. 5—"they said thus" indicates that permission to destroy is granted from outside the empire.

- „ 6—"dominion was given."  
 „ 12—"their dominion was taken away."  
 „ 25—"they shall be given into his hand."  
 „ 14—"there was given him"—Christ—"a kingdom."

<sup>2</sup> The terms "visit" and "visitation" convey the idea of "watching over" and then, as a result, of "drawing near" whether for the purpose of blessing or of punishment. Luke xix. 44, referring to God's drawing near in the manifestation of Christ, is an instance of its use in the sense of blessing. Inversely 1 Peter ii. 12 shows its use in a sense of punishment. Throughout both Old and New Testaments both uses are found (compare Jer. v. 9 with xxix. 10), but in these pages it is used only in the latter sense.

<sup>3</sup> The following passages will serve as an introduction to the evidence which Jeremiah's ministry provides:—

- Chap. v. 7—"How can I pardon thee?"  
 9 and 29—Shall I not visit thee for these things. So chap. ix. 9.  
 „ vi. 15—at the time that I visit them.  
 „ xi. 23—The year of their visitation. So chap. xlviii. 44.  
 „ xiii. 25—This is the portion measured unto thee from me.  
 „ xv. 3—I appoint four punishments.  
 „ xvi. 5—I have taken away my peace.  
 9—I will cause to cease . . . mirth . . . gladness.  
 „ xvii. 3—I will give thy substance, etc., to spoil.  
 „ xxi. 14—I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings.  
 „ xxiii. 12—I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation.

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dealt with Israel He also dealt with all other nations. Though it may be that the great light of that nation required more severe measures than were used upon others (xxv. 29, 31 and 32).

It is often said that God is not now, in the Christian dispensation, dealing with the nations. Within certain limits of meaning this statement is correct. As far as His redemption purposes are concerned, God is not dealing with the nations as nations. He is dealing with a world of individuals in Gospel grace, calling out of the nations those who respond to the message, and incorporating them in the Church (this is more fully explained in the chapter on the purposes of God). But whilst it is true that as to His redemption purposes God is not dealing with the nations, it is true that as to His moral government God deals with the nations all the while. Though His spiritual objects change in different eras, His government of the universe remains the same, and all its ordinances are servants to whatever purpose He has in hand in any age. So with that moral government of nations and peoples; the rise and fall of kingdoms, the prosperity or adversity of nations, the woes and throes of war, or the tranquillity and calm of peace, all are governed by God now, and serve the purpose of the spread of the Gospel, the salvation of men and the completion of the Church.

Throughout the New Testament there is evidence that the moral government of God operates at present. We find that a new realm with a spiritual object is introduced upon the exaltation of Christ. But we find that it rather adds to the spheres which operated previously than displaces them. When fully thought out it will be seen that the conclusion that God has suspended His moral government is an impossible one; or that He has even replaced it completely by the introduction of a new realm, though, of course, the fact of a new realm, and the power of a new people can, and should, modify the happenings in the world (this is dealt with in the chapter on the Church and the circumstances of mankind).

The Church is the prominent subject of the New Testament; never-

Chap. xxiv. 10—I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence.

„ xxv. 9—I will send the families of the north and the king of Babylon,  
my servant, against the land.

„ xxxii. 42—Like as I have brought all this great evil.

Chap. v. 22-29 and chap. xxv. 29-33 will repay reading at length.

theless there is evidence of the working of moral government in regard to the Jewish nation, the ruling powers, the Roman world, and the people in general. Furthermore, evidence of the principles of moral government working in connection with churches and individual Christians is especially clear. It is to be observed that many of the instances relate to individuals rather than to nations; even so, that is not necessarily against the thesis of these pages. For the fact that at present this realm of government exists at all (unless there is clear evidence otherwise), requires that God in its operation still deals with states and nations.

That the Jewish nation is, in this age, under the hand of God is stated in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians. His wrath is come upon them and is manifest in the circumstances of the nation as a whole, because "they killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets," and obstructed the spread of the Gospel (1 Thess. ii. 15-16). They were warned of this in the words of the Lord (Luke xiii. 1-6). Some of the people, coming to Him, told the Lord of the calamities caused by the collapse of the tower of Siloam, and by Pilate's brutality. These were warned not to construe these happenings to mean that those who actually perished were the greater sinners, but they were instructed to observe them as tokens of like calamities which, on a greater scale, would fall upon the nation as a visitation, unless repentance was forthcoming.

The New Testament statement that, "there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1), conveys the same truth as the statements of Daniel that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will." Whatever else it may convey it seems to require the teaching that God now sets up and puts down kings. An example of the execution of this is found in Herod (Acts xii. 20-23). But the manner of its execution is in this case more miraculous than the usual operations of moral government.

That famine is one of the forms of Divine visitation is shown in a later chapter. It is impossible to see how so widespread a famine as that which fulfilled the prophecy of Agabus and affected the whole Roman world could have taken place without Divine decree. The nature and magnitude of it, as well as the fact that Divine warning was given so that provision for the saints could be made, requires that it was in the nature of visitation (Acts xi. 27-30).

When the second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written, they, with the unbelieving world, were passing through a tribulation which is described as a token of the righteous judgment of God (2 Thess. i. 5), evidently a token judgment that pointed to the apocalyptic judgments which will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus.

It seems that Peter, too, has present moral government in view when he spoke of a day of visitation (1 Peter ii. 12).

Moral government within the Church is the main subject of the fifth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians. It is the responsibility of the local Christian Churches to act in judgment in regard to those within the fellowship who offend in certain specified ways. Being gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus the Church is empowered to excommunicate such offenders and thus deliver them over into a realm of things wherein Satan's power can inflict circumstances of ill upon them. But whilst it is the responsibility of the Church so to act in regard to believers, it has no need to do so in regard to the world for the simple reason that God deals with them by means of other agencies, which operate under another economy. "Them that are without God judgeth" (1 Cor. v. 12-13).<sup>1</sup> Obviously, "them that are without" the Church and its sphere of rule, God will deal with in His ways of moral government.

Whilst Christians are inevitably affected by God's dealings with the nations in general (instanced in the Thessalonians who suffered in the midst of a chastened world, 2 Thess. i. 5), they stand also in a place of still greater responsibility to God. For their behaviour in the local assembly (1 Cor. iii. 16) and their failure to judge themselves may result in God's dealing with them individually, according to higher standards than those with which He deals with the world. Bodily weakness, sickness and physical death can come to Christians in the present as a judgment from God (1 Cor. xi. 30-32). And churches can be dealt with judicially by Christ.<sup>2</sup> In the light of

<sup>1</sup> It should be stated that some feel that there is a case for κρινεῖ = will judge, instead of κρινει = judgeth. The Revised Version and the New Translation favour the latter. From the use of the latter word and the context it seems that present moral government is in view.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. ii. 5—"I will remove thy lampstand."

„ 16—"I will fight against them."

„ 22—"I will kill her children with death and the churches shall know."

It seems because the burden has to be held in the present that the purpose is to deal with the sin in the present.

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this Peter argues that if judgment operates pre-eminently in the house of God it must also affect the ungodly.

These passages taken together make a case in irresistible proof of the working of Divine moral government in the present age. That this realm of government operates, that it has brought visitation upon the Jewish nation, the Roman Empire as a state, and the general peoples of that empire, and as well, in a separate sense, has dealt with Christians and Christian churches (if there is no evidence of suspension or modification), requires the conclusion that God now acts in the same way. Therefore it follows that the present abnormal convulsion, which has broken with irresistible force upon the nations of the world in a way so similar to those recorded in Scripture, is a manifestation of the moral government of God. There has been no abrogation of the words, "I create evil," nor does there seem to be any reason to suppose that the question of the Spirit through Amos, "shall evil befall a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" can be answered in any other than a negative way.

Whatever part Satan and his hosts may play, or, a man, men, or nations of men may have, the abnormal character and similar nature of these days seem to require that it is an over-ruling of Providence, and that it must be regarded as a visitation, which comes along the same principles as those of ancient days. But whilst we are compelled to this conclusion, we must beware of the error which Christ condemned, that of thinking that the individuals who suffer are the greatest sinners. Why certain individuals suffer must remain a mystery until the day. But the fact remains that whoever suffers (and few can escape some form of hardship if not suffering) it is the nations with whom God deals. In regard to which dealings manifold revelations are made in the ministry of the prophets, some of whom have already been consulted and as we proceed will need to be consulted again for their further information.

Having now established the fact of Divine action it is necessary to show from the Scriptures something of the way in which God acts. This the later chapters will do, each in its own way. The chapter on the forms of Divine visitation will show how these actions manifest themselves in human experience. The one on the

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Rev. iii. 8—The reward of faithfulness is assured by the moral government of God who, in the words of Christ, declares that an open door is set before the Philadelphians.

sins of the nations will show the reason and cause why God should so deal with men. The one on the principles of Divine visitation will suggest some of the laws which seem to govern these outbreaks. The chapter on the objects of Divine visitation suggests the ends that are intended in these colossal and unspeakably solemn convulsions which men, by their natural wisdom or strength, are helpless to avoid, but which, as we shall see, may be escaped by repentance toward God.

These visitations of abnormally evil circumstances, which make men cry out for pain, are to be contrasted with the great visitations of the end of the age. Then God will rise up to deal as never before with the nations of the world.

However severe the visitation of past or present it has never fully punished sin, nor completely restrained transgression, as Zephaniah confesses (iii. 7-8). Men have ever hastened to evil again when there has been respite. But the great day of the Lord that is to come will fully deal with all forms of evil. These recurring wars seem to be tokens in a day of grace of the rising tide of Divine wrath, the flood of which shall in the apocalyptic visitations of the day of vengeance sweep earth clean of its sinners and systems of evil.

## *God's Witness to the Nations*

GOD'S governmental dealings with men are just, and are proportioned to the measure of their responsibility which, in turn, varies according to the measure of knowledge they possess. So to continue our enquiry we must ascertain the amount of light available to the nations, and then, after having proved the fact of Divine visitation, we shall be able to appreciate its forms, principles and objects.

The nations have never been without the light of Divine witness, for each realm of God's government, in its measure, reveals the One who governs. Creation reveals His power; Providence shows His lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness; and Redemption makes manifest His heart of love. Man, in every state and every place, has at all times had Divine light, though the way in which it has been communicated, as well as the degree of light conveyed by each means, has varied. Yet from the earliest days of man before the inception of nations "God had His witnesses" (Acts xiv. 15-17), unfolding the truth until the coming of Him who is the truth. Steadily He gave more light until the true, perfect and ideal Light, which made known His grace and truth to His creatures, shone through the incarnation of the Son of God.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus, contained in the New Testament Epistles and the Revelation, and given by Him from the Throne, to which He ascended following His resurrection, completes all Revelation. Beyond this there is no advance, no new truth, no further light, though, of course, there should be advance in apprehension of what has been revealed and is written for our learning. Sufficient has been recorded by the perfect wisdom of God to meet every need of His creatures, and it is evident from the principle contained in 1 Cor. iv.-vi. that we are to be limited in our thinking to what is written.

The following means have been used by God to reveal Himself to men:

- 1 the witness of Creation
- 2 the traditional knowledge of God committed to Adam

- 3 the oracles of God given to Israel
- 4 the voice of circumstances governed in Providence
- 5 the incarnation of the Son of God
- 6 the New Testament Epistles and the Revelation

We shall briefly trace the development, use and abuse of the earlier revelations of God and outline the later revelations that find their climax in the Person of Christ.

The earlier revelations of creation, the traditional knowledge of God and the voice of Providence were made known to the nations from their origin and it is according to this that they are held responsible. The nations who in this age have heard the Gospel have added responsibility.

#### THE WITNESS OF CREATION

The universe is an abiding witness to the fact of God for "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. i. 20). The vast firmament of the heavens, with its innumerable rolling orbs, the deep oceans with their unfathomed depths and untold mysteries, the vast continents with all their flora and fauna, and not the least, man in all the mystery of his physical and moral being, combine to present to us an object lesson of the eternal power and Divine Being of the One who has made them all. No part of the realm of creation has yet been fully explored in spite of the great attempts of man, and it has to be confessed that man has no exhaustive knowledge of any part. Only infinite God could produce, maintain and operate with such precision this wonderful display of measureless power and inexpressible beauty in which there is never a repetition in any species or kind.

Man's failure, with all his knowledge, to comprehend the details of creation, and his failure, with all his inventive genius, to produce a blade of grass, demonstrate that creation sprang from the hand of a Divine Being whose works are inscrutable and inimitable.

The hypothesis of Evolution has been suggested to explain the origin of species, without a word about the mind that designed

them or the hand that governs them. Some have supposed that that which is too wonderful for mind to grasp, came into being without a mind, and that that which is unique and cannot be copied by human hand came into being without a hand. This illogical reasoning is not "science." The hypothesis is confessedly unproved and apologised for by the statement that although undemonstrable, it is the best theory yet brought forward to account for our existence and that of the universe around us. Evolution, therefore, is not science, for science is demonstrable fact; it is but a theory which masquerades as science, and so masquerading has become a servant of man's adversary to produce agnosticism and atheism. Why should men who would not insult one another by suggesting that they should believe that a watch came into existence without human mind and hands, dare to insult their fellows by suggesting that they should believe that all the world's grandeur exists and functions without the mind and power of a transcendently great and sublime Person?

All creation unites in one grand demonstration of His DIVINE BEING and endless power, and its witness has been used from earliest days to bring home to the soul of the creature the truth of—GOD.

## THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

### (a) *Its Features*

The traditional knowledge of God, so called because it was handed down from Adam to succeeding generations, was composed of three features (possibly four)<sup>1</sup> and reveals more of the

<sup>1</sup> It is said of the stars, "Let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Gen. i. 14). Some have felt that God used these in early ages as a form of witness to the nations. The use of the star to guide the wise men from the East to Christ is suggestive (Matt. ii. 2-10). But the subject is by no means clear. Even if they were used as a means of symbolically conveying truth, we who live in the full noonday sun of a completed revelation have no need to return to the details of the candle light of these signs.

It is significant that astrology has gripped most nations in much the same forms through many centuries, ever directing the heart to the worship of Satan and his host. Even Israel was given to the worship of the host of heaven (Acts vii. 42).

If the stars served a Divine purpose at any time it is clear that through astrology

One whose power is demonstrated in creation. This knowledge showed in greater measure His character and presented the principles of His ways with man. The features were:—

1. *The promise of a Deliverer* (Gen. iii. 15). In the terms of a sentence upon the serpent, God declared the coming of an Emancipator, a Saviour, who by crushing the serpent, at cost to Himself, would liberate man from the bondage into which his sin had brought him (for fulfilment of which see 1 John iii. 8).

2. *The principle of blood sacrifice*, as the means by which the sinning creature may approach to God. This was exemplified in Abel, Gen. iv. 3, continued through succeeding generations and was conspicuous in Noah, Gen. xx. 22. It is suggested by Adam's coats of skins, derived as they were from slain animals.

3. It seems by the language of Gen. iv. 16 that the presence of God was known in a definite locality out of which Cain went to the locality of Nod. Gen. iii. 24 states that God placed, or caused to dwell, the cherubim and the flame of a sword. It is most probable that the presence of God was known at the east of Eden in the same way as it was later known to dwell between the cherubim of the Mosaic Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple; the forms of these cherubim were probably the same as are described by Ezekiel in his first and tenth chapters.

### (b) *Its Use*

The promise of a coming Deliverer, given as it was at the time of the fall, shows the mercy of God to the creatures who had sinned against Him and gave them the great hope of salvation from sin and Satan.

The sacrifice, instituted of God and accepted by Him, showed the principle by which that salvation should be realised and makes it clear that God desired His creature to draw near to Him. The fact that it was a blood sacrifice, in which a life is forfeited in behalf of the offerer, reveals a righteousness that can only forgive when

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they have been used for a Satanic purpose from probably Nimrod's days until to-day.

It may be that that which at one time was of God became debased into the astrology of ancient and modern paganism. If so the responsibility of the nations is the greater and their guilt the more gross.

justice is satisfied; the Presence amidst the fire and cherubim demonstrated the holiness of God.

From earliest days this light, supplementing the witness of the universe, was handed down from generation to generation until the days of Noah, when it became the light of those nations that were developed from the three branches of his family.

The nations at their inception were in the light of this truth and each commenced its separate national experience with a knowledge of the true God. This fact is stated in the treatise on the Gospel written to the Romans. It declares, "that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse" (Rom. i. 19-20).

It is evident that the early Gentile nations who lived without the later revelation of the Scriptures possessed as well the faculty of conscience, the indicator that, accusing or excusing, bears witness to right and wrong (Rom. ii. 15). This inward voice of conscience, the outward witness of creation, and the communicated knowledge of God constituted the testimony of God to the nations and left them without excuse. Any darkness, spiritual, mental or moral, is the darkness of a perverted truth and rejected light.

### (c) *Its Abuse*

It is recorded of the nations of antiquity that, "knowing God they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things" (Rom. i. 21-23). In these verses is traced the perversion of the nations from the knowledge of the true God to idolatry.

Man is ever a materialist and is never satisfied to walk before an unseen God as did Moses who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Moses walked by faith, but naturally man loves to walk by sight. It is this propensity that has ever led the nations into idolatry and drawn them away from the true God.

There is reason to believe that, in the third generation after the Flood, the great Religio-Empirical system of Nimrod represented the teachings of the traditional knowledge (probably on the plea of perpetuating the verbal promises) by material forms, with the result that many of the nations, if not all, were soon bowing to those forms as idols. The Image of a Woman with a child in her arms was used to represent the promise of the coming Deliverer—the woman's seed (Gen. iii. 15). The altar of earth or unhewn stone, the simplicity of which gave the greater prominence to the sacrifice, was replaced by ornamented altars which were developed in beauty and ritual until the principle of life forfeited as an atonement was hidden in ceremony. The stars themselves became objects of worship and the forms of the cherubim, lion, ox, man and eagle, were represented by idols of similar form which were venerated and worshipped. In this way the channels by which truth was conveyed were worshipped as gods instead of God Himself. The ideas of the cherubim were perverted, the promise of a Deliverer and the principle of sacrifice degraded so that they worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator (Rom. i. 25).

Thus the truth of God was debased into the lie of idolatry, and the pure morals of life lived in the wholesome fear of a holy and loving God exchanged for the degradations of unmentionable immorality and evil. In perfect justice God gave up the nations of antiquity, who thus had refused to have God in their knowledge (Rom. i. 25), and at the same time caused the light of a new witness to shine in the midst of them, by taking up Abram and developing out of his line the unique nation of Israel. In this way God raised up for Himself a witness which confirmed all previous witness and became a light to the succeeding generations of the world.

It is remarkable that the original forms of idolatry exist in the world to-day and that many of their practices obtain even in Christendom, where they have been perpetuated by various branches of the original Chaldean priesthood instituted by Nimrod, which is represented to-day in every religion of the world as well as in certain social and commercial societies. See *The Two Babylons*, by R. Hislop, and *The Computation of 666*, Anonymous.

## THE ORACLES OF GOD TO ISRAEL

Wherein lies the superiority of the Jews? First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. Having developed the nation and delivered them from Egypt, God revealed Himself to them at Sinai and committed to them the Law. At that time the nation was brought into covenant with God and under the curriculum of the Tabernacle service. In this way all that was revealed previously in the traditional knowledge of God, which had become so perverted amongst other nations, was confirmed and set down in permanent written form, the ten commandments in tables of stone, and they and the ceremonial in our books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. To Israel belonged the line of prophets, and by them God continued to reveal His mind and heart and to make known His purposes for Israel and the other nations. Conspicuous amongst all was the ever-widening stream of promise of the coming Messiah and Deliverer and the ever-increasing revelations of the character and purposes of atoning sacrifice.

Jehovah made them His own filial race, gave them the glory of His presence in their Tabernacle and Temple, made with them the covenants of Abraham, Isaac, Levi, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas and David, instituted the legislation of the Holy Moral Code, and the ritual with its Divinely ordered symbolisms, and gave the promises of the "pleasant land." Last and greatest of all, out of them as concerning the flesh, Christ came (Rom. ix. 3-5).

All these things made the nation unique and were unanswerable witness to God and His truth, the light of which spread far and near amongst the nations and resulted in the proselytising of many like the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings x. 1-5), the Roman Centurion (Matt. viii. 5-12) and the Ethiopian (Acts viii. 27-31). The Lord Jesus described them as the "salt" who were to prevent moral putrefaction and the "light" to show the way of God (Matt. v. 13-16).

## THE VOICE OF PROVIDENCE

It will be seen in following pages that the Providences of God govern the circumstances of nations, causing hard times to follow evil practices and better conditions to be the fruit of righteousness.

These happenings are intended to be a voice to the nations and by means of these variations in circumstances God speaks more solemnly to men than by His words. These experiences operate upon conscience making men ask, almost in spite of themselves, what they have done to deserve calamity when it comes upon them. Later we shall see something more of the principles and objects of providence, so that it needs no more here than to say that Providence is one of God's witnesses to His creatures.

### THE CHRIST AND THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

In the Apocalypse the Lord Jesus is described as the Faithful Witness (Rev. i. 5), and John in his Gospel asserts that 'God whom no man hath seen at any time is declared by the Lord Jesus, the Only Begotten Son' (John i. 18). So perfectly does He express the Father and manifest the character of God, that when Philip said (John. xiv 8-9), "show us the Father," the Lord Jesus replied, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Though God's power may be known by creation, His principles and holiness by the traditional knowledge of God, the voice of Providence, and the Law of Israel, He Himself can only be known through a personal knowledge of the crucified and exalted Lord Jesus. This is the object of the incarnation, in which God was made known in human words and actions, and in which God dwelt with men in human form, expressing Himself in human experience. Of the Lord Jesus it was said, "and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matt. i. 23). In His life and death every attribute of God was displayed and every grace of His heart shown out. "He went about doing good" expresses His life, and "He died for our sins" explains His death.

After long ages of light (albeit incomplete and imperfect) the true and ideal Light shone forth expected, anticipated and pointed to, by each degree of earlier light. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." He is God's full revelation to man and God's final word to the world. When the preaching of the Gospel is spoken of, it is said to be the preaching of Jesus Christ (Rom. xvi. 25) and "the

word of the cross" (I Cor. i. 18), which, after His resurrection and ascension, was heralded far and near by Spirit-filled Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and other Christians, and which has been told out in all the succeeding centuries of this age. This message makes it possible for all who hear to come to a personal knowledge of the living Christ and Saviour and (through Him alone to) a personal knowledge of God. God's heart of love has reduced the terms of this blessing to the absolute minimum: for it is the nature of love to do all for its object. To believe the message and receive the gift is all that the individual needs to do. The word of inspiration is, "to as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John i. 12). Untold millions have received everlasting life and peace with God through the message, and many millions more blessed in environment and circumstances by the presence of Christians, which always results in moral and mental light.

#### THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

A staggering verse confronts us in the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians, so staggering that many regard it as hyperbolic. Its twenty-third verse speaks of the glad tidings which were "preached in all creation which is under heaven." There may be hesitancy on the part of some to take the statement at its face value and allow the sense that the Gospel spread through all creation within thirty years of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If this is the sense the Spirit of God would convey through the writer, then it follows that the darkness of heathenism is the darkness of a rejected gospel either rejected at its presentation, after its acceptance, or lost from view in the course of years.

The commission to the Apostles was "to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark xvi. 15), that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached unto all the nations" (Luke xxiv. 47; Matt. xxviii. 19).

If due weight be given the facts, it will suggest that Col. i. 23 is not as hyperbolic as it is sometimes thought to be. The miracle of Pentecost was a much greater one than most people realise. Acts, chapter two, describes the occasion and tells us that there were

dwelling at Jerusalem *devout* Jews from every nation under heaven. These heard the message of the Gospel and about three thousand of them were converted and took a public place of testimony, being added to the company of disciples. Many, if not most, were strangers and probably returned to their distant homes, as did the proselyte from Ethiopia on a later occasion, bearing the message to tell to others in the power of their new-found joy.

It seems that after describing the first years of this age the New Testament records largely the work of one man, Paul, saying little of the labours of the other apostles, evangelists, and untold thousands of Christians, all of whom were missionaries. It would surely require greater credulity to think that these were idle, than to suppose that they obeyed the words of the commission and went to the nations with the message of the Crucified. Fragments of history indicate hundreds of churches in North Africa during the second century and in Mongolia in later centuries, whilst from many other parts evidences of the spread of the Gospel present themselves.

In view of the above, it seems necessary to admit a wide sense to the words of Paul, and to consider the darkness of heathenism to be in many cases the darkness of a rejected Gospel.

The nations, whether at their origin, during their history in a past age, or their experience in the present age, have never been without light; and even when the light of higher truth has been perverted, the light of creation and the voice of Providence continue to bear their testimony. So that at all times men are without excuse; and God, the Judge of men, is righteous in His judgments, whether it be His judgments executed in present circumstances or His judgment of the great day that is coming, "when the secrets of men will be judged by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel" (Rom. ii. 16).

## *The Sins of Nations*

A GROUP of prophets, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, ministered during the fateful century which saw the end of Jewish monarchy and the beginning of the "Times of the Gentiles." During its years, through a great international convulsion, Judah's independence was lost, and the people were brought under the heel of the Chaldean despot. Daniel and Ezekiel, amongst others, were stripped of most of what they held dear, and carried away captive to the land of the successful aggressor. Jeremiah and others who were permitted to remain in the land suffered the miseries accompanying the servitude.

The calamities of that time, which had also reduced Tyre, humbled Egypt, and made vassals of all the surrounding nations, were likened to a whirlwind from the Lord (Jer. xxiii. 19). Three waves of its fury visited Judah: the first resulted in the Captivity in which Daniel and Ezekiel were carried away, the second reduced Judah to servitude, the third left Jerusalem, the Temple and the land desolate, and the people scattered.

Between the captivity and the servitude Ezekiel attained the age of accession to the priesthood. During his thirtieth year (which was the fifth of his captivity), the first of the visions which fitted him for his after ministry was revealed. This the opening chapter of his prophecy describes. From out of the north he saw a great whirlwind, cloud and fire; and out of the midst he discerned the forms of the sacred cherubim, and, accompanying them, great whirling wheels with rims full of eyes. At length his attention was directed upward toward the expanse, from which he heard a voice, to a throne, whereon sat a glorious Occupant in human form.

As he continued to look, his gaze was directed higher and higher, from being focussed only upon the storm, which symbolised the throes of the nations, until it took in the cherubim, which pictured the agencies of Heaven, that, under the direction of the voice of the Sovereign, caused and controlled the storm. In this way Heaven's control of earth's affairs was illustrated, and the great providences of

God were explained; beginning with the storm—at first glance seemingly uncontrollable, it concluded with a throne—the symbol of perfect control; opening with the dark cloud of forbidding judgment, it closed with the bow of mercy and faithfulness, the various colours of which, proceeding from the “Man in the Throne,” suggested the blended attributes of the Sovereign, which shine out in all His ways. Between, he had a glimpse of the Spirit-controlled cherubim, human in form, whose traits of character were suggested by the different heads; also he discerned the great whirling wheels of Divine government, and saw that at times they touched the earth, whereas at other times they were lifted up from the earth. Moreover, it was impressed upon him that all obeyed the voice, the hearing of which caused his attention to be drawn to the Throne, whereon he saw the One who uttered the commanding word sitting in the place of supreme control.

What comfort must have been ministered to the perplexed exile! How it must have steadied his spirit to realise afresh that God was on the Throne! Still his Rock! Though kingdom and nation, ruler and crown, had crumbled to dust, yet in the unruffled calm of the peace outside of circumstances, Monarch of uncreated heaven, and all created realms, He was still governing and working out His great purposes.

Nor was the vision of the sovereignty of God and the governments of Heaven the only one needed to fit him for his path of testimony and years of service. A further lesson was necessary—a vision of earth; but not a vision of earth from the aspect of earth, but a vision of earth from the aspect of Heaven. This came to him eighteen months later as he sat in his house amongst some of the elders of Judah (Ezek. viii. 1; xi. 25).

The glorious Occupant of the Throne was again manifested, and He, by the Spirit, transported the prophet “in the visions of God” to Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation which had suffered most of all the nations during those times of calamity (Ezek. viii. 1-4). There, from a position between heaven and earth, were revealed the sins which resulted in the storm of visitation that caused the fall of the state and the tribulation of the people.

Whereas the first vision began with the storm on earth, and concluded with an unveiling of the Lord in the Throne, the second began with the Lord, and concluded with an exposure

of the sins committed against Him. The direction of his gaze during the first vision was moved upward from the circumstances of earth until it was fixed upon the Throne of Heaven. Subsequently the prophet was raised to the sphere of the throne and directed to look down. Prior to these experiences his ideas were inevitably limited, because they were in measure earthbound. But as the result of them his perspective was adjusted to the throne, and his views of earth's happenings illuminated by the light of heaven. Had not the prophet been taken up in this way his position amongst the people would have perverted his perspective, and natural bias and affection would have distorted his vision.

In the light which makes everything naked and opened (Heb. iv. 13), secret sins were exposed, popular sins unmasked as serious crime, and religious practices supported by leaders revealed to be blasphemous and impure. And in these was revealed the reason why the Occupant of the Throne, through the cherubim and their discerning movements aroused a storm in the affairs of men and brought the whirlwind of Chaldean invasion out of the north.

Spiritual experience is similar in principle in every age and its progress passes through much the same stages of development. The lessons in understanding the ways of God's moral government to-day follow the same lines as they did in Ezekiel's day. We first become conscious of sad visitations—circumstances like storm, and wind and fire, in the affairs of the nations. Later it dawns upon us that the influence of another world is at work—the Spirit moves the cherubim and the wheels—and we realise that “the heavens do rule in the kingdoms of men” (Dan. iv. 26). Furthermore, it is seen that the wheels are full of eyes—and it is realised that the movements of Providence, so great and awful, operate with perfect vision and discrimination in obedience to the Throne. Finally, the fact that the Most High, acting through these agencies, “ruleth in the kingdoms of men” (Dan. iv. 25-32), grips the heart.

Having been led through the progress of this revelation to a knowledge of the sovereignty of God, we may, from this viewpoint, look down, as did the prophet, upon the affairs of earth. Only by this means shall we arrive at true values, and come to right ideas about the nations and the things which happen to them. Then things in which familiarity would prevent our seeing harm, things that popular opinion condones, things legalised by human laws, and even

things gloried in as right will take another form and adopt a darker hue.

No ecstatic vision may be ours, no mysterious revelation. The Word is open before us, complete, written for our learning and from it we may receive all that is necessary to our understanding of the ways of God's government, and the why of His doings. As the written word is perused it will be discovered that some of the sins which have resulted in visitation are political, others religious, whereas still others have a moral character. It will be in regard to these three groups that we shall consider something of what the Scriptures show concerning the sins of the nations. The lists that follow might be considerably lengthened, but space forbids little more than naming some of the more evident ones and quoting the passages that speak of them.

#### (a) POLITICAL SINS OF NATIONS

##### (1) *A Broken Covenant*

"Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? Shall he break the covenant and yet escape? . . . For he hath despised the oath by breaking the covenant; he shall not escape. As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, I will even bring it upon his own head" (Ezek. xvii. 15 and 18). (See also vv. 12 to 21.)

When Zedekiah broke the covenant with Nebuchadnezzar and despised the oath previously given, God spoke of it as sin, asking the question, "Shall he prosper that doeth such things?" answering it by the words, "he shall not escape," and explaining the significance of Zedekiah's unfaithfulness in politics as, "mine oath that he hath despised, and, my covenant that he hath broken. His trespass that he hath trespassed against me." The form of the language in the question, "Shall he prosper that doeth such things?" suggests that a general principle is in view and seems to indicate that political treachery is trespass against God.

##### (2) *An Unprovoked Quarrel*

"I therefore have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD, the Judge, be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon" (Judges xi. 27, R.V.).

This twenty-seventh verse of this chapter presents the crux of the passage, showing that Jehovah the JUDGE is judge of the motives of war. Unprovoked and unprincipled aggression resulted in the over-ruling of God which brought Ammon into defeat.

### (3) *Unprincipled Means for Expansion*

“Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (Amos i. 13, R.V.).

The prophet Amos, who explains the reason for the downfall of eight nations, tells us here that Ammon will suffer under the sentence of God for resorting to such means to enlarge their border. Instead of the enlargement they sought by evil means, captivity became the lot of the king and his princes.

### (4) *Perpetration of Atrocities*

“Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Damascus, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron” (Amos i. 3, R.V.).

Syria fell as a result of its merciless butchery of others. Its kings and nobles were broken and the people reduced to servitude.

### (5) *Merciless Warfare*

“Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Gaza, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole people, to deliver them up to Edom” (Amos i. 6, R.V.).

The Philistines did not spare a remnant of their foes, in punishment God directs that no remnant of them should be spared.

### (6) *Independence of God and Confidence in Themselves, and their Handling of Nature and its Supplies*

“And the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste; and they shall know that I am the LORD: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it” (Ezek. xxix. 9, R.V.). (See also Isa. xix. and Ezek. xxix.)

Egypt's fertile soil, watered from the river rather than directly by the rain, has been a snare to its people and will be again. For in

their blindness they say, "my river," and think themselves capable of control without recourse to God.

Such forgetfulness of Him and repudiation of His creatorial rights are followed by Divine interference with the river, resulting in failure of fisheries, crops and manufacture, eventually causing the disintegration of the state (see section on "Unemployment" in chapter on "The Forms of Divine Visitation" for fuller treatment of Isa. xix.).

(7) *Pride in National Security*

"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?" (Obad. i. 3, R.V.).

Edom's folly in trusting to natural advantages, favourable circumstances and fancied physical security is exposed by her fall under the visitation of God. "Unsinkable" ships have been sunk, "impregnable" fortresses have fallen: only in the fear of God is there safety for a nation.

(8) *Antagonism to Israel*

"I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 3, R.V.). See also Jer. ii. 3.

The principle that Antisemitism will be punished has not been abrogated. The parliament of princes set up by Darius deliberately framed a law against the godly Daniel and his kind only to reap themselves the very evil they intended should fall upon the noble Jew. The scheming Haman of Esther's day proved that antagonism to the Jewish people was a boomerang, for it returned with awful force upon his own head. Ancient and modern history unite in providing examples of the permanence of this principle.

(9) *Lack of Pity for a Fallen Nation:  
Rejoicing in its Fall and Joining in its Plunder*

"For violence done to thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever" (Obad. 10). See also 11-14.

Edom, believing itself secure, thought in its cruelty that it could plunder the fallen and go unpunished, but proved to its dismay that the Lord was Judge amongst the nations.

(10) *Malignant Joy at the Fall of another Nation*

“For thus saith the Lord GOD: Because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced with all the despite of thy soul against the land of Israel; therefore behold, I have stretched out mine hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut thee off from the peoples, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries; I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. xxv. 6-7, R.V.).

Instead of being awed by the judgment of God upon another nation, and fearing God whose hand had fallen so heavily, they gloated over the downfall of the smitten Israel. Surely they should have feared for their own sins, and have been silent before God, who had risen up to judge.

(11) *Pride in Craftsmanship and Merchandise*

“Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas: yet thou art man, and not God, though thou didst set thine heart as the heart of God: behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: by thy wisdom and by thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: by thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches” (Ezek. xxviii. 2-5, R.V.).

The cultivation of human genius and development of natural qualities for the self-aggrandisement of city and nation are followed by desolation rather than by glory, as the seventh verse of the same chapter indicates. “Therefore behold I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.”

(12) *Intrigue and Subversion of other Nations*

“Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts . . .” (Nahum iii. 4, R.V.).

Nineveh fell because of its lies and rapine and because through its witchcrafts and harlotry it sold other nations.

(13) *Failure to Acknowledge Divine Sovereignty*

“The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men” (Dan. iv. 17, R.V.).

Dan. iv. 32 and many other portions prove that kings are set up by God. The fact that “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. xiii. 1-2) puts a solemn responsibility upon every monarch of every land and every age. Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” (Exod. v. 2), and boasted that he knew not the Lord. But the Lord Whom he knew not taught him by circumstances that He, the Lord, was Sovereign. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Herod of the book of Acts, reaped visitations as the consequence of not giving God the glory.

## (b) RELIGIOUS SINS

(1) *Refusal to hear the Message of God*

“But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the hand of the former prophets: therefore came there great wrath from the LORD of hosts” (Zech. vii. 11 and 12, R.V.). See vv. 8-12.

The sin of refusing to hearken to the message, stopping their ears so that they should not hear, was the reason why great wrath came upon these people.

(2) *Corruption of Truth once held in Sincerity*

“Thus saith the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, and their lies have caused them to err, after the which their fathers did walk” (Amos ii. 4, R.V.).

The law and commandments of God had become perverted by human additions and modifications. The people drew near with their lips, but were far off in their hearts, until such perversion and insincerity demanded that just judgment should not be turned away.

(3) *False Teaching*

“A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer. v. 30-31, R.V.).

God asks the solemn question, “What will ye do in the end thereof?” speaking of it as an “appalling and horrible thing.” Religious corruption with the complicity of the people results in political decay.

(4) *Opposition to the Spread of the Gospel*

“Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved; to fill up their sins alway: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. ii. 16).

When the ideas of men dominated teaching rather than the revelation of God, and when ceremonial details occupied the mind at the expense of the weightier matters of judgment, mercy and faith, as they did in the days of the Pharisees, they became the forerunners of woe followed by centuries of God’s indignation.

(5) *Idolatry*

“For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

“And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice” (1 Kings xi. 5 and 9, R.V.). (See also vv. 4-10.)

Much of the Scriptures is devoted to the exposure of the folly of trusting idols and the sin of serving them. Man is still forbidden to make a graven image or any likeness of any form that is in the heaven, earth or sea, and still forbidden to bow to them or serve them.

Israel worshipped the calf that Aaron made, claiming it to be the material representation of God, Who delivered them from Egypt (Exod. xxxii. 4); but however plausible the profession of Aaron or the people, their sin involved “rebellion against God” (Ezek. xx. 13 and 17), “changing their glory” (Ps. cvi. 19-21), and “provoking God to jealousy by sacrificing to demons” (Deut. xxxii. 15-18).

Men are urged in the New Testament to flee from idolatry (1 Cor. x. 14) on the ground that what the idolaters sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons. It thus becomes evident that any offering or sacrifice to a material object, raised up in any name, even if it be the name of God or Christ, the saints or Mary, is a sacrifice to demons.<sup>1</sup>

(6) *Astrology—Witchcraft—Enchantments—Sorcery*

“Now therefore hear this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: but these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children and widowhood: is their full measure shall they come upon thee, despite of the multitude of thy sorceries, and the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me; thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee: and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly which thou knowest not. Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee” (Isa. xlvii. 8-13, R.V.). See also Micah v. 12 and Nahum iii. 4.

These sins, so attractive to many because of their mystery, their air of science, and their claims to unveil the unknown, were the direct cause of the fall of nations of old time. The spread of such things in our day is the forerunner of visitation.

<sup>1</sup> There is a great spiritual system of demons, principalities and powers, headed by the Devil, which is called “the world rulers of this darkness.” This system of spiritual wickedness uses man’s necessity to worship, by all kinds of artifices, to lead men into paths of religious activity which are rebellion against God. The success of this system in paganism is well known, but it is hardly less successful in Christendom’s worship, perverted from the simplicity which is toward Christ.

The course of this world is said to be in accord with the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. ii. 2). The Christian believer is delivered from this authority of darkness (Col. i. 13), and brought into the sphere of the rule of Christ, the Son of the Father’s love.

The following quotation shows that visitations that have come upon nations for idolatry, have come in that form which exposes the utter foolishness of confidence in any but the living God. “I will lay the carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols and I will scatter your bones round about your altars” (Ezek. vi. 5),

(7) *The Worship of Nature*

“For that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. i. 25).

When the human being or any other of God’s creatures is idealised, deified and served for its own sake (even if there is no image set up), it becomes idolatry in principle (sometimes leading to actual idolatry); thus, occupying the minds of the people with the creature, it displaces God and invites His displeasure.

(8) *Clairvoyance*

Ezekiel xiii. 17-23.

The women condemned and threatened in this chapter seem to be like the modern clairvoyant, whose charlatanism and enslavement of the people is exposed and punished.

(9) *Spirit Practices*

“There shall not be found with thee any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that useth divination, one that practiseth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer” (Deut. xviii. 10-11, R.V.). (See also vv. 9-14.)

“And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead?” (Isa. viii. 19, R.V.). (See vv. 9-21.)

Spiritism is stated to be the reason for the punishment of the nations of Canaan and the cause of the solemn commands to Israel to exterminate them. Seeking those that have familiar spirits, and through them, seeking unto the dead, is a precursor of hard times, hunger, fret, trouble, and anguish.

This list of religious sins may be expanded, but the main features have been presented in these references.

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publicly showing that idols are no refuge in a day of calamity, being, in fact, themselves the cause of the calamity.

The following passages may be consulted: Ezek. xx.; Jer. x. 1-16; Isa. xliv. 8-18 and xlvi. 5-9.

## (c) MORAL SINS

(1) *Unthankfulness to God for Creature Blessings*

“Because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, *neither gave thanks*; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened” (R.V.).

This apparently simple sin of ingratitude is placed as one of the first steps on the downward road that ends in heathenism.

(2) *Ease, Idleness and Indulgence*

“Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom; pride, fulness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good” (Ezek. xvi. 49-50).

These were the sins that led to the downfall of the cities of the plain. Pride, fulness of bread and prosperous ease, instead of humility, restrained appetite and diligent labour, resulted in the haughtiness of spirit that persists in sin until it becomes abomination that calls for the intervention of God.

(3) *The Vanity of Women*

“Moreover the LORD said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their anklets, and the cauls, and the crescents; the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers; the headtires, and the ankle chains and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the rings, and the nose jewels; the festival robes, and the mantles, and the shawls, and the satchels; the hand mirrors, and the fine linen, and the turbans, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet spices there shall be rottenness; and instead of a girdle a rope; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; branding instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war” (Isa. iii. 16-25, R.V.).

The extreme development of feminine attractiveness by overdress, much jewellery and scents, coupled with artificial gait, and much use of the mirror, is denounced and visited, whereas the priceless feminine adornment of a meek and quiet spirit is praised in 1 Peter iii. 4.

(4) *Lethargy and Indifference*

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remaineth in him and his scent is not changed” (Jer. xlviii. 11, R.V.).

Moab's life of ease with unchanged natural taste and absence of discipline becomes the reason why they should be disturbed by visitation.

(5) *Avarice, Greed and Inhuman Treatment of the Poor*

“Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes: that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go unto the maid, to profane my holy name; and they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of such as have been fined” (Amos ii. 6-8, R.V.).

This righteous sentence, that might have been turned away from the nation if they had repented, falls because of these sins.

(6) *Iniquity in Commerce and Unprincipled Trade*

Such sins are involved in the previously mentioned reasons for Israel's fall and contributed to the fall of Tyre, Nineveh and Babylon.

(7) *Immorality*

Amos ii. 7; 1 Thess. iv. 6; Col. iii. v; Eph. v. 6.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry” (Col. iii. 5, R.V.).

“Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph. v. 6, R.V.).

Lawlessness regarding marriage and sex sanctity, expressing itself in fornication, adultery and harlotry, is thus condemned.

The three preceding lists are made up of extracts from the actual experience of nations. Each fact is chosen by God for record in His Word. On every occasion it is evident that whether political,

religious or moral, the sins are regarded as personally committed against God Himself.

These sins which, according to Romans i. 28-32, are worthy of death are present in every nation; but it will be readily recognised that there is a great difference between the existence of these sins as an exception to the general behaviour of a nation, and their existence as the rule of behaviour. Sodom was not destroyed for the presence of these sins, but because of the predominance of them.

It is remarkable that in Daniel there are separate instances of the hand of God, upon a king, a government and a people. It has been observed already that this prophecy seems to suggest God's ways with empires during the centuries from the fall of Judah to their national restoration at the second advent of Christ. Nebuchadnezzar abused the power entrusted to him personally, by his failure to give God the glory. He deified himself and commanded worship of the image. This pride further expressed itself in the fateful words, "Is not this Babylon which I have built?" (Dan. iv. 30), with the result that God humbled him by removing his reason. But though He did so there is no evidence that the state or the people suffered. It seems that God dealt with him as an individual. The later instance of the parliament of princes which Darius set up shows the hand of God upon a government. The wicked princes suffered the solemn consequences of their own laws evilly devised against God and the godly, whereas Darius and his peoples were unaffected. The fall of Belshazzar involved the subjugation of the peoples of the empire to the foreign despot; for the kingdom as well as the king was found wanting when weighed in the balances.

These instances of the hand of God are suggestive and seem to present the ideas that if kings sin as kings God will visit them in that capacity, that if governments sin as governments they will be dealt with as such, that if king, parliament and people combine in iniquity they will be dealt with together. What is recorded of Syria in Amos i. 3-5 seems to support this idea. "I will send a fire into the house of Hazael"—the Syrian king (see 2 Kings viii. 7-15), "which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad"—the previous monarch. "I will break also the nobles of Damascus"—the leading society, "and him that holdeth the sceptre of the house of Edom"—the royal family, "and the people of Syria shall go into captivity"—the rank and file of the nation,

Some think that, whilst these passages of Scripture record that which God has done, they are in no way pointers to that which He does do, nor in any way suggest explanation of that which He is doing. Nevertheless we cannot help feeling that all of these passages contain principles—principles of an abiding moral government, the existence of which is attested by the New Testament, and without the regulation of which the race could scarcely continue.

## *The Forms of Divine Visitation*

It has been established that visitation manifests itself in the evil circumstances which are created by God for nations. These circumstances do not take the same form. Storms, droughts, earthquakes, insect plagues, the ravages of beasts, unemployment, hard times, oppression, war, famine and pestilence, suggest the various characters in which visitation is expressed. Each of these may come in different measure of severity. The milder judgment of withheld blessing contrasts with the scourge of war or the infliction of famine. The character of the visitation seems to be related to the sins for which it is sent, and the measure of its severity to be proportioned to the degree of guilt. This will come out more clearly in the chapter on the principles of Divine visitation.

Having considered some of the sins of nations we now turn to a leading passage which will focus the mind upon various forms of evil circumstances which from time to time have been the execution of Divine decree.

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out mine hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts; though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. Or if I bring a *sword* upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land, so that I cut off from it man and beast; though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beasts and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?” (Ezek. xiv. 12-21).

This passage mentions four forms of divine visitation: famine, evil beasts, sword and pestilence, which are applicable to any and every land; it argues that if God deals thus with other lands, He will also deal with Jerusalem in the same ways. These instruments which God uses as voices to nations are supplemented in the following list, which contains statements of other kinds of visitation. The relevant passages are quoted in each case, and in most cases examples are given.

(1) *Drought causing Barrenness and Famine*

“He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and watersprings into a thirsty ground: a fruitful land into a salt desert, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein” (Ps. cvii. 33-34). See Jer. iii. 3.

“In the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. I will utterly consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade, and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them” (Jer. viii. 12-13).

Elisha's words to the Shunammite (2 Kings viii. 1), “The LORD hath called for a famine,” is one of the many Old Testament instances of the working out of this. Its parallel in New Testament days is found in Acts xi. 28, where the prophet Agabus foretold the great dearth or famine that was to afflict the world of the Roman Empire in the days of Claudius Cæsar. It seems significant that, after promise of better conduct than some of his predecessors, Claudius Cæsar sank to a degradation worse than many of them.

(2) *Storms*

“Hast thou entered the treasuries of the snow, Or hast thou seen the treasuries of the hail, Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, Against the day of battle and war?” (Job xxxviii. 22 and 23).

“She shall be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire” (Isa. xxix. 6).

“And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him and upon his hordes, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstorms, fire, and brimstone” (Ezek. xxxviii. 22).

“He gave up their cattle also to the hail and their flocks to hot thunderbolts” (Ps. lxxviii. 48). See also Ps. xlvi. 7.

The story of Jonah furnishes an instance of tempest. The writer of Ps. lxxxiii. must have been familiar with this, as verse 15 shows,

“Thy tempest, Thy storm.” “Fire, hail, snow, vapour, and stormy wind fulfilling his Word” is the language of Ps. cxlviii. 8. How often the failure of an ostentatious military or naval scheme has been due to adverse weather. The storm that scattered the Armada, Russia’s snows and Napoleon, the rain at Waterloo, are all instances of the hand of Providence in recent centuries. The present century, too, furnishes instance after instance of the intervention of the same hand. The snows of the winter of 1939-40 held up military movements and resulted in the preservation of human life in Finland and France. The unusual calm of the days of Dunkirk made possible the deliverance of many whose lives had appeared forfeit. This unusual calm contrasts with the sudden violent storms of September 1940, when the invasion of Britain was threatened. Sudden changes in weather conditions unaccountable to meteorology have occurred frequently, sometimes with serious, sometimes with merciful consequences.

### (3) *Earthquakes*

In the days of Moses an earthquake was a new thing, a singular means of showing Divine displeasure in the engulfment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num. xvi. 29-30). What was new then was repeated in the days of Uzziah (Zech. xiv. 5). But it has become more frequent as this age has drawn to its evening stages, the close of which will be marked by frequency and intensification of these shakings (Matt. xxiv. 7; Rev. xi. 13; Heb. xii. 26).

### (4) *Insect Pests*

“That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten” (Joel i. 4, R.V.). (Deut. xxviii. 38 and 42; Amos iv. 9; Ps. lxxviii. 45 and 46.)

The powerlessness of man against insect scourges has made nations ancient and modern dread them. The nations of Canaan suffered in their bodies, and the Egyptians suffered in their crops. More than once Israel, too, found her fields stripped, and her olive-yards bare. Instances of modern pests and their ravages are too numerous to mention.

### (5) *Wild Beasts*

“If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts” (Ezek. xiv. 15).

The ravages of destructive beasts are better known in lands less developed and less populated than these islands, but ancient and modern days provide many instances of this operation of Providence. The beasts that should be subject to man and over which man should rule, become rebellious and antagonistic to men who are not subject to God, and who show their rebellion and antagonism by their sin against Him.

The Lord Jesus was with the wild beasts during the temptation (Mark i. 13) and rode an unbroken colt, but there was no insubjection or wildness with them then. The Blessed One who was perfectly subject to the will of God enjoyed the dominion over the beasts, that belonged to man before the Fall. When fallen man rebels against God he must not complain if God moves the beasts to rebel against him.

A marked instance is found, when, at Elisha's behest, the she-bears from the wood tare the hostile city lads, who, brought up in idolatry, railed on the faithful Elijah whom their parents and they had rejected, and who spurned Elisha the man of God, sent to be the “salvation of Jehovah” to them and the nation.

### (6) *Withholding Good Things*

“Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good from you” (Jer. v. 25).

When God created the earth, He selected Eden for man, spreading out its luxuriant garden, replete with everything to be desired. But man, having sinned, was driven out and denied the good things of Eden's blessings. In like manner, since the Fall, the good things of life are withheld because of sin. The sunshine of blessing is taken out of life and replaced by the cloud of difficulty. The full provision that blesses honest labour gives place to meagre return for the sweat of the face.

The spirit of the first fourteen verses of Deuteronomy xxviii. might be contrasted with the spirit of the remaining portion of the

chapter, in illustration of the fact that the good things given for obedience are withholden for disobedience, being replaced by a process of increasing sorrow.

As Solomon remarks, "to the sinner God giveth travail" (Eccles. ii. 26). "The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. xiii. 15).

### (7) *Plague and Pestilence*

"The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest in to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with consumption, and with fever, and with inflammation, and with fiery heat, and the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. . . . The LORD shall smite thee with the boil of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scurvy, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and with blindness, and with astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled alway, and there shall be none to save thee. . . . If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the LORD will make plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sickness, and of long continuance. And he will bring upon thee again all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed" (Deut. xxviii. 21 and 22, 27 and 29, 58-61).

Israel was threatened that she would be afflicted as other nations had been by the dread maladies here mentioned. It is an awful thing to think that the untold world of germs, microbes and bacilli may be used by God upon rebellious nations.

Historians of the Great War (1914-18) do not hesitate to say that the scourge of influenza played a major part in the fall of the Kaiser's Germany, removing, as it eventually did, twelve million souls from the earth in two years. It spread from Germany to lands afar, exceeding in its toll of mankind the ten million slain by the four years' conflict.

The destruction of Sennacherib's host is an instance of the rapid destruction caused by a lightning plague, 185,000 men being removed in a night. What a defence the God of heaven was to Hezekiah, but what an enemy to the Assyrians who had magnified themselves against God!

When the ark was amongst the Philistines, they were afflicted in their bodies by tumours, until the cry of the city went up to heaven. Egypt's magicians and people of ancient days experienced the grievousness of this form of Divine castigation, as will the ungodly of the last days, when the Apocalyptic vials are poured out (Rev. xvi. 2 and 11).

The Spirit of God in the words of Zechariah xiv. 12 takes our thoughts to these last days, when some form of consumption, working with almost lightning rapidity, will account for armies laying siege to Jerusalem.

The LORD Himself says that pestilences and plagues will be more frequent and severe in those days of multiplied iniquity, to which the human race draws near.

(8) *Unemployment—Resulting from Godless Statesmanship, and Divine Interference with Natural Supplies*

“Neither shall there be for Egypt any work, which head or tail, palm branch or rush, may do” (Isa. xix. 15).

A careful reading of this interesting chapter will show that the politicians of Egypt who did not recognise God, formulated their economic policy, reckoning on the constant flow of the Nile. It is well known that Egypt depends little on the direct rainfall of heaven, but the Nile, bearing the waters from the great inland lakes and watersheds, looms large in the calculations of the Egyptian, being deified in the place of God; it is overlooked that the river, wherever it rises and however it is fed, depends, even if indirectly, on the mercy of God who gives the rain.

The chapter, speaking of those that fish in the Nile, those that sow in the meadows of the Nile, those that work in combed flax, and those that weave cotton, presents to us fisheries, agriculture and manufacture, all of which are confounded by the diminished flow of the great river. The finger of God controls the elements (Ps. cxix. 91), and, acting upon the main artery of their system, disappoints the schemes of the proud self-sufficient politicians of the land, making the princes of Zoan foolish and deceiving the princes of Noph.

The collapse of their schemes and the failure of their economic policy results in total unemployment, which affects the spirit and

morale of the people, and results in the fall of the state, and the subjugation of the nation to the foreign despot, described as a cruel lord.

All their consulting with wizards, seeking unto idols, charmers and them that have familiar spirits, avails nothing, and brings no relief in the day of their visitation.

The principles revealed in this passage should have a special voice to the nations to-day, because, whatever measure of fulfilment this chapter may have had in the past, it has never been completely fulfilled throughout, and therefore awaits its exhaustive fulfilment and consummation at the end of this age, when "the transgressors have come to the full" (Dan. viii. 23, and xi. 42 and 43). A modern Egypt is its subject (see "Remnants" in the section on the "End of the Age"), the fall of which, under the oppression of the mighty Assyrian, will result in a remnant crying to God and being delivered at the coming of God's Christ and King, Who shall reign to the glory of God and the blessing of the redeemed (Isa. xix. 21).

#### (9) *Weak Morale—Indefiniteness and Fear*

"The fishers also shall lament, and all they that cast angle into the Nile shall mourn, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. Moreover, they that work in combed flax, and they that weave white cloth, shall be ashamed. . . . Neither shall there be for Egypt any work, which head or tail, palm branch or rush, may do" (Isa. xix. 8, 9, 15).

"The heart of Egypt shall melt" (v. 1), "The spirit of Egypt shall be made void" (v. 3), "Egypt, like women . . . shall tremble and fear" (v. 16), are terms that describe what would, in modern language, be called "morale." This chapter provides incontestable evidence that morale is controlled by God; "the God of the spirits of all flesh," who is as well able to affect the spirit of a nation as He is able to affect the bodies of its people. He can weaken the spirit of the proud, and righteously does so, when they vaunt their independence of Him and of the resource found in Him.

This weakened morale results in lack of cohesion in the state (v. 2), and the spirit of perverseness causes the leaders to err in their purposes.

(10) *Deprivation of Personal Freedom*

“For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour’s hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them” (Zech. xi. 6).

The days of Joseph provide a clear instance of this, when, through famine, the state gained power over and possession of lands, crops, cattle, men and women, until all became the goods and chattels of the ruler. It appears that it was so directed of God, for it was He who gave the visions of the fat kine and lean kine, and of the good ears and thin ears, giving to Joseph, too, the ability to interpret and the wisdom to apply the revelation contained in the king’s dream. Thus the people were delivered into the hand of the king and the state.

Surely if liberties and freedom are used in a sinful way it is righteous of God to restrain those liberties and curtail that freedom! The increasing power of the state is a mark of the end of the age, and an evidence of the approach of the day when Revelation xiii. 16 will be fulfilled internationally, and men will be unable to buy or sell without the badge of allegiance to the Empire and the evidence of homage to its Emperor.

What a responsibility the freedom of these islands puts upon both the Christian and the unbeliever! Will God continue to allow these privileges if they are continually abused?

*Overthrow of a City, such as Sodom, Nineveh, Pompeii, and St. Pierre*

The cities of the plain, where Lot vexed his righteous soul, and made his testimony fruitless by compromise, were destroyed in spite of the intercessions of the friend of God. Thus began a long line of instances, which embraces the wicked Nineveh, Pompeii and St. Pierre down to the cities of our time, and which finds its climax in the mightiest catastrophe of all; when the new Babylon, the coming dream city of man on the banks of Euphrates, will be engulfed in a day, bearing its load of pleasure-drunk and sin-intoxicated men and women into eternity, after which its smoking chasm will remain throughout the one thousand years of the reign of righteousness as a warning to the new generations born in that age.

(II) *War*

“Ho Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets, Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes all of them kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her Idols?”

“Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he hath said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: . . . Shall the axe boast against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if a rod should shake them that lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up him that is not wood.

“Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his (the Assyrians) fat ones leanness; and under his glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire” (Isa. x. 5-17).

“And the LORD raised up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king’s seed in Edom. . . . And God raised up another adversary unto him, Rezon the son of Eliada, which had fled from his lord, Hadadezer, king of Zobah” (1 Kings xi. 14 and 23).

“And the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and of the Arabians which are beside the Ethiopians” (2 Chron. xxi. 16).

“Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off from it man and beast” (Ezek. xiv. 17).

These Scriptures are but a fraction of the evidence found in the Word, showing that war is a divine visitation. The question is often asked, “Why does God *allow* this war?” It is not only true that God allows war, but these passages indicate that He *directs* war upon guilty nations. Sometimes (as though God were unjust) the question is asked, “Why doesn’t God stop the War?” Perhaps it is best answered by another question, “Why do not men stop their sins?” When Israel asked such questions as, “Wherefore are these things come upon me?” (Jer. xiii. 22), God, Who had anticipated the question, replies, “Because of the multitude of thy sins,” “Because thou hast forgotten me.” When they ask, “Wherefore hath the Lord done these things?” they are told that it is because they have forsaken God.

Who will dare to say that the nations of Europe have been guiltless? Who will be so bold as to declare that Britain is innocent of moral, religious and political sin? When the so-called Christian ministry becomes traitor to the Bible that should be its guide, destroying it by hostile criticism, when in the land of Bibles children are reared in almost total ignorance of the Bible, when de-Christianised Britain allows Buddhism, Mohammedanism and other oriental religions, and when Spiritism and Astrology are allowed to increase and even true Christians avoid the pilgrim way, the question becomes not "Why is there a war?" but "Why didn't it come before?" Not "Why are people killed?" but "Why so few comparatively?" When the sins of European nations are assessed and the consequences in the visitations of these sins counted, the *mercy* of God will become more conspicuous than the *justice* that brings upon men the sad happenings of these days.

In the historical books (Samuel, Kings and Chronicles), and in the prophets, instances abound of war coming as the result of religious and moral decline. The most striking is found in the experience of Solomon, Israel's most peaceable and richest monarch. When Solomon built up his long succession of sins to a height that demanded divine action, we read, "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon" (1 Kings xi. 14). The man of peace, after a reign of peace, had war brought upon him. The twenty-third verse of the same chapter and 1 Chron. v. 26 concur to emphasise that war is a Divine visitation.

The expressions occurring in Isa. x. about the Assyrian aggressor are plain and unequivocal. He is called, "the Rod of mine Anger." Again God says that "the staff in his hand is mine indignation," and "I will send him against an hypocritical nation."

This is more than war "allowed," it is war directed providentially as the direct expression of the wrath of God against the nation of Israel for their hypocrisy. So much profession which condemned their practices, demanded that they should be spoiled and become a prey, and required, too, that they should be trodden down by the Assyrian victor.

Though this monarch was providentially raised up of God and moved against Israel, it is evident by the words, "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so," that he did not do the will of God intelligently, nor did he intend to do God's will. His ambition was

only to destroy and cut off nations, thus gaining power and position in the earth. The arrogant ambition of this purpose and the pride of his heart God eventually punished. So, whilst the mills of God ground Israel, they also ground Israel's enemy in God's own time.

For the time the Assyrian was part of the powers that be that are ordained of God, in turn being deposed as God delegates authority in the earth and power over the nations to others.

In ancient days God used the Assyrian as His rod upon a number of nations and, having completed His work, He broke His rod.

May not God have formed a rod in the man of Germany to chastise in like manner the guilty peoples of Europe? Furthermore, may He not break His rod when He has finished His work?

The Scriptures teach that God puts the sword of justice into the hand of the magistrate, who is called a sacred minister of God for the purpose of putting down crime in his own realm (Rom. xiii. 1-7). In like manner it seems that God puts the sword into the hand of one monarch to chastise another and raises one nation to power to accomplish His visitation upon the sinning nation it subjugates.<sup>1</sup>

### (12) *Despotism Allowed*

“And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. xix. 4).

The only way to deal with Egypt was to put them under the dominance of the Assyrian, and to shut them up to his power, so that, all help of man being cut off, they should cry to God, Whom previously they had ignored, so that they should be delivered by His mercy.

A people's affliction, even though that affliction be a visitation, is a ground of appeal to the Lord, Whose ways embrace loving-kindness as well as judgment.

This was true of Israel in Egypt. Who knows how much its principle may be operative at present in the affairs of the nations of Europe? Their sins came up and cried for visitation. Visitation has come, over-taking nation after nation, bringing death and de-

<sup>1</sup> There is a difference to be observed between Gentile monarchs being moved providentially to castigate others and those occasions where Jewish leaders such as Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David and others, were directly commanded of God to execute judgment intelligently.

struction, pain and misery, removing liberties, resulting in oppression, denying the necessities of life, and causing disease. The cycle moves slowly, the cry of affliction rises. Not that the cry of sin has ceased, but, as the cry of the afflicted increases in volume and there is some repentance, He who delights in mercy will hear and spare. May the afflicted, in repentance, cry sincerely to Him, and may the godly, as they pray, remember that they have a ground of appeal on behalf of "all men" (1 Tim. ii. 1) not only for their salvation, but also for their circumstances.

(13) *Loss of National Position and Dispersal amongst other Nations*

"And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the LORD" (Jer. xlviii. 42).

"My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hosea ix. 17).

These quotations are so clear in themselves as not to require remark: Israel is the notable example. Many other nations that held power in ancient days have passed from the horizon of affairs, though some of them will reappear in power at the end of this age.

Loss of political status, limitation of national power and even loss of national position come as the consequences of political sin. Affliction of people, deprivation of the good things of life, infliction of evil things, follow religious and moral misbehaviour.

It is often said that the God of the Old Testament is quite different in character from the God of the New Testament. We have, however, seen already that as to His governmental ways and providential dealings He is the same. The view that God is all love, a tolerant, indulgent, accommodating Being is a mistaken one, having no resemblance to the God of the Bible. There are embraced to-day in the character of God all those features, completely unchanged, that are expressed in the works of creation, Old Testament times, and all the ways of Providence. God is a moral Being, a God of principle, unchanging, Who governs according to abiding principles of hatred of sin and punishment of wickedness.

Yet we shall find that "behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face," for all the while His moral government operates with a view to the accomplishment of purposes of redemption.

If this chapter were our last there might be a danger of such a partial view of God as the people of Melita had when they spoke of God only as Vengeance. So we proceed to our next chapter and consider the principles of the ways of God, observing not only the dark cloud but the bow of mercy and its variegated beauties. Though He takes vengeance He is no more only vengeance than He is only compassion. His perfect character is a harmonious blend and an exact balance of every feature. This was perfectly expressed in the Lord Jesus, who is God manifested in flesh. He was marked by firmness without hardness, gentleness without softness, love without sentiment, precision without mechanicalness, consideration without compromise, sympathy without indulgence, promptness without haste, burning zeal without ruthlessness, hatred of sin without hatred of the sinner, rebuke without vindictiveness, and a thousand more virtues without any of their corresponding vices, all of which blended virtues are the glory of the unchangeable God seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

## *The Principles of Divine Visitation*

THE Sweet Singer of Israel, reviewing the works of God, says, "He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the children of Israel" (Ps. ciii. 7). We have been considering some of the acts of God in the preceding chapter, the isolated actions and outward evidences of Him. Here we meditate more on His ways in the affairs of nations.

With those who see only His acts it has become common and almost popular to question God and to find fault with His dealings with men. Some dare to go as far as the Israelites did in the days of Ezekiel and say, "The way of the Lord is not equal" (Ezek. xviii. 29). But the Israelites' ideas of Him were perverted by the unequal character of their own ways. So, beholding His doings with astigmatic vision, they read their own evil into what they saw of God. Mistaking longsuffering for tolerance, warnings for threatenings, forgiveness for indulgence, judgment for antagonism, they arrived at a mistaken idea of God. Their God was a god of their imagination, a being altogether different from what God really is. They missed the fact that, without tolerating sin, He, in longsuffering, forbears the sinner, in the meantime warning so that the sinner may repent, and is ready to forgive when that repentance is real. If that longsuffering, warning, waiting, forgiveness, be unheeded, He must execute the sentence that might righteously have been inflicted at the first.

They blamed Him for being (in their view) an ogre, instead of praising Him for being beneficent and all-wise, as He really is. May He in some measure do for us as He did for Moses, make known to us His ways, granting us right thoughts of Himself from His Word. Our responsibility is to give the hearing ear and to be ready to adjust our thoughts to the facts of revelation.

As we proceed, we shall find more than a dozen easily discerned principles governing the acts of God with mankind.

### (1) *Necessity of Visitation*

The visitations of God are necessary to the existence and experience of the human race. Earth's cries for the hand of God are many. A few of these cries will come before us here, to demonstrate this

principle. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto ME." This was a cry to God for justice against Cain. The cry of Sodom coming up before God was the cry of sin. The voice of the affliction of Israel enslaved in Egypt became loud in the ears of God, Who is moved by the groans of the oppressed. In New Testament days, James tells of unpaid wages crying to God to the accompaniment of the voice of the deprived labourers.

It was necessary to the instruction of the succeeding generations for God to intervene by branding Cain, who thus was made to bear witness to God's displeasure and to become a warning against the sin of murder. Accompanying the branding and banishment of the unrepentant Cain was the giving of Seth as a comfort for the bereaved parents.

An awful exposure of Sodom results from the glimpse we get of its moral character when the angels sent in mercy would have been made the victims of unmentionable sin. Who will dare to suppose that it is good for the human race that such sinners should remain to pollute the moral atmosphere of man? It is necessary that they should be exterminated as the Canaanites were in after years. The cry of Sodom's sin must be answered for man's sake by the removal of the inhabitants of the plain.

The God of perfect courtesy and decorum chose Moses, brought up as a prince at the Egyptian court, refined by the years of patience "perfect work" in the obscure depths of the desert, and sent him with a reasonable request to Pharaoh, desiring no more than a few days' holiday (Exod. v. 1) for the enslaved people. When it is remembered that Joseph was the salvation of the land, the preserver of the very state that Pharaoh afterwards ruled, the grace of God to Pharaoh is magnified as God acts for the unrighteously oppressed people. But such a simple request refused, such courtesy churlishly turned aside, it is necessary that Pharaoh be taught that oppression can be no longer tolerated. The groan must cease. If Pharaoh will be so foolish as to obstruct the wheels of God's providence for Israel, He must not blame God because he is crushed by them as they roll onward in the path of justice. But though he is crushed, the very publicity of it (for the news spread far, see Josh. ii. 10) becomes a warning to other nations. Israel having been brought out became a moral salt among the nations by what they learned of God through His operations toward them.

Had not God swept away all humanity at the Flood, sparing only the family pure in its generation, the whole race would have lost its human character, becoming fully corrupted into something other than man. Had not God utterly destroyed the wicked inhabitants of Canaan by direct command of the sword of Joshua and Israel, they would soon have sunken to the level of beasts. For whilst it cannot be true that the beast evolves into the human, the human can sink to be indistinguishable from the beast, even becoming guilty of sins that beasts would not practise.

Just as salt is needed to arrest corruption, so Divine visitation is essential, acting as a righteous check upon sin, in mercy delivering the oppressed, and ensuring the continuance of orderly conditions of human life. These visitations operate as God reveals Himself in the course of human history, and as He brings into view His purposes of redemption and a new creation, until at last we come to the "New Heaven and the New Earth," wherein there will be neither sin nor groan, neither tears nor death, and the universe will thrill with the praise of God and the Lamb.

"The new creation's stainless joy  
Gleams through the present gloom;  
That world of bliss without alloy,  
The saints' eternal home."

### (2) *Investigation*

"The Lord came down to see" (Gen. xi. 5). "The cry of Sodom is great. I will go down and see" (Gen. xviii. 20). Such passages furnish evidence that God Himself carefully investigates the character, circumstances and degree of sin before visitation comes.

The words "I will not revoke the sentence" (Amos i. and ii. New Translation) indicate a court where evidence has been heard, decision arrived at, and sentence passed. In the Scriptures court scenes in Heaven are suggested from which, after careful investigation, apportioning the guilt, weighing the circumstances with all attendant causes and features, the visitation proceeds. Daniel's fourth chapter tells of watchers, Heaven's watchers of earth's behaviour, who meet in Heaven's court, where God sits greatly to be feared in the secret council of the Holy Ones (Ps. lxxxix. 7 Newberry's Margin and Darby). All those that are about Him have Him in reverence as He from the Throne, founded on justice and judgment, sends forth

lovingkindness and truth before His face, ruling the raging of the sea and directing heaven and earth (Ps. lxxxix. 5-14).

The court scenes of Daniel vii. and Revelation iv. and v. are well known to the Bible lover. They depict future scenes of investigation of earth's guilt on the one hand and Christ's worth on the other, and result in the destruction of earth's powers and in the sovereignty of the Lamb in the world where He was crucified. Reference to the following passages will provide further confirmation of this principle: "The judge of all the earth" (Gen. xviii. 25), "The Lord the Judge" (Judges xi. 27), "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Rev. ii. 23).

### (3) *Recompense*

. . . "for the LORD is a God of recompenses, he shall surely requite" (Jer. li. 56).

There is a sense in which men ask for, and, by their actions that speak louder than words, demand the recompense of Heaven.

The word recompense is frequent in Ezekiel. It occurs no less than nine times. Joel iii. 7 says, "I . . . will return your recompense upon your own head," Isaiah lix. 18, "According to their deeds accordingly he will repay," and Obadiah 15 "thy recompense shall return upon thine own head" (R.V.M.). Thus the prophets unite to use language which substantiates the statement of the New Testament: "receiving in themselves the recompense of their error which was fit" (Rom. i. 27).

We are warned not to allow ourselves to be deceived, for God is not mocked, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). The labour of sowing and the value of the seed is paid for in the harvest. If men labour to sow sin they will reap its wages. "According to their deeds accordingly He will repay." The character of their behaviour will be paid in the coin of Heaven; here and now in circumstances upon earth the ways of men will be recompensed upon their own heads (see Jer. iv. 18).

### (4) *Poetic Justice*

Much akin to our previous section comes this one, showing that there is a balance between the character of the sin and the character of the visitation. The Philistines spared no remnant of their enemies,

in return for which no remnant of them was spared (Amos i. 6-8). Israel's temple had been desolate of real worship to God; it was therefore made desolate in visitation (Micah vi. 13 and vii. 13). Famine, which allows so little to man, is often the result of man having given so little to God.

"As thou hast done, it shall be done to thee," says Obadiah 15. They had no pity for God's sanctuary, so God in turn withdraws His pity from them. Because they refuse to hear Him speaking through His prophets He refuses to hear them when they pray (Micah iii. 4; Jer. xi. 11 and 14). They rage against Him, only to find His rage against them (Isa. xxxvii. 28-29; Hosea vii. 16). It is truly said of God, "with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward" (Ps. xviii. 25-27). The following passages support this principle: Ps. lxii. 12; Jer. xvii. 10; 2 Chron. vi. 23; Ezek. xi. 21, xvi. 43, xxiii. 49; Obad. 14 and 15; Isa. i. 15; Ezek. xxiv. 14.

#### (5) *Process or Cycle*

As there is time of harvest, so there is time of visitation. The familiar cycle of the seasons illustrates the cycle of Providence. The result of sin is not seen immediately, but its actions are like seed sown, which appears to lie dormant awhile, yet grows relentlessly to its own kind of harvest at its own time. Actions and ways are like a boomerang coming back to us in circumstances of like character.

"Thy doom is come unto thee" (Ezek. vii. 7), "Thy doom is gone forth" (Ezek. vii. 10), are the words of Ezekiel to Israel. As he speaks he uses a significant expression (found only here in Holy Writ) which means the cycle or the turn, or, as Fuerst has put it, "the revolution of fortune, giving the idea of reciprocal motion, the going out of actions, the return of circumstances."

Many say that the sorrow that follows sin is simply the result of natural processes, but the questions come: Who designed the processes? Who made them natural? Who has sustained their working during these six thousand years of human history? That they are the revolution of a cycle, the working of a process, is true, but that God designed the cycle and operates the revolution of fortune governing the processes that He designed is also

true, and converging under His hand they produce a time of visitation.

It would seem that in the coming age, when the personal rule of Christ on earth will be known, the cycle of operation will be accelerated. The sins of those born in that age will then be visited immediately by death, and deficiency in worship by immediate famine (Zech. xiv. 17-19).

#### (6) *Partial Punishment*

It has been proved that God does punish sin here and now in life and circumstances. But that punishment of sin is by no means the complete payment of it. It is as true that God never fully punishes as it is true that He does punish (Ps. ciii. 9). Isaiah explains for us the reason for this when he says that "the spirit would fail before me, and the souls which I have made" (Isa. lvii. 16). If God were to rise up and meet every human sin and every iniquity of man with its full punishment, soon mankind would cease from off the face of the earth. None would be exempt; all merit punishment, for none are without failure and sin. Men would be worn away by the recurring pressure for each repeated sin. The existence of men and the ordered life of earth is therefore a monument to the mercy of God, Who, though He visits sin, does not yet finally punish it.

#### (7) *Discrimination*

The visitations of God operate neither blindly nor brutally. The wheels of His providential government are full of eyes. Discrimination and discernment mark all His ways. He can plague Egypt with darkness and at the same time give Israel light in their dwellings. He can rock the prison and reduce the jailor to terror, while Paul and Silas, unharmed, singing their praises to God, find that the earthquake breaks their stocks without harming them. The fires of heaven consume the cities of the plain, but not until Lot is removed to a place of safety. Belshazzar is slain on a fateful night, but the godly Daniel is not only preserved, but given a place in the new régime. Nebuchadnezzar sins as a king and suffers as a king, but his state, statesmen and peoples seem to be unaffected. The government of Darius, which made laws against the godly, are cast into the very den of lions that they intended for

Daniel, whilst Darius, Daniel, the state and people, innocent of these sins, escape. When a state sins as a state it appears that God deals with it in that capacity; and when the people sin as a people, they themselves reap the consequences in their personal circumstances. Guilty cities seem to be dealt with as cities, being visited as cities and sometimes being completely overthrown.

From Genesis to Revelation Scripture abounds in evidence of the discriminating character of the doings of God. When the apocalyptic judgments are in the earth and the trumpets sound, the third part of the earth will be peculiarly affected, the more severe judgments being concentrated upon the more guilty part, while the less guilty two-thirds will sustain lighter chastisement.

But someone will say, and rightly too, that this discrimination does not secure immunity for the godly, for they are affected by the visitations of God, being caused to suffer it would seem almost needlessly. Job, Daniel, Ezekiel and the Thessalonians are some examples. Here it is we who need discrimination and discernment. Daniel suffered in the visitation that fell on his guilty people, exiled from his land, deprived of the worship of Jehovah's temple, robbed of the privilege of marriage and family life, removed to the strange, ungodly court. In like manner, Ezekiel lost much in the same series of visitations. The second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians found them suffering tribulation because of the righteous judgment of God on the people of the area where they lived. Job, too, was stripped of all by the very means that God uses to punish the ungodly. His friends were convinced that he was a hypocrite exposed now and suffering for his previous secret sins. But there is a difference which will emphasise the discriminating character of the ways of God. When He allows the godly to suffer, it is not for the same reason nor with the same object as when He visits the ungodly. Job's friends, though evidently well instructed in the ways of God's government with the world, were ignorant of the fact that God causes the godly to suffer for the development of virtue rather than the punishment of evil. Already living on so high a plane of righteousness as to be a testimony in Heaven, Job was lifted to a higher plane of experience as he submitted to the hand of God. His friends insisted, in spite of everything, that the righteous man merited the punishment of God because of his sins. But when the cycle was

complete, the friends were directed to seek Job's intercession on their behalf. He who had sustained in patience so much trial, proved the blessing of the end of the Lord, and became a benediction to those very friends who had so mistaken him.

Though Daniel lost so much, he gained the more, being immeasurably enriched in spiritual power and in revelation of the mind of God and His purposes, so that he stands out as one of the greatest and most effective intercessors of all time. His writings are the key to all prophecy, his prayers affect nations of the past and the future; his godliness is a pattern, whether as the obscure exile or as the counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar's court, whether unrecognised by Belshazzar or called to interpret the writing, or amongst the new order of the Persian power. He ever stands out as the man of character and accomplishment, one of the nobles of God's Kingdom who will "stand in his lot at the end of the days." All these spiritual abilities and moral qualities were developed by his experiences during the visitation upon his nation and will be rewarded by a special place in the Kingdom of Christ, not to speak of the material things that accompanied his high station in the three successive courts.

When circumstances of trial came upon the surrounding people as a "token of the righteous judgment of God" (2 Thess. i. 5), the Thessalonian believers in their midst suffered too. Their tribulation was added to by the attitude of the world, who, under the visitation, vented their rancour in persecuting the Christians. Nevertheless the deep and costly experience enriched the people of God and served to fit them for the glory to which they were destined.

If God, as He visits nations to-day, has allowed the Christian reader to suffer, be assured that the compensations will outweigh the losses that might be his. Whenever His people pass through the fires they may learn the communion of the Son of God Who will walk with them, and they find that the flames consume only the things that hitherto bound them. (See Appendix on the subject of Believer's Sufferings.)

#### (8) *Revelational*

In an earlier section we observed the "poetic justice" of the consequences that human sin brings upon itself, and from this we learn something further. The congruity between the visitation and

the sin that occasions it brings out into the light the evil that is hidden in the soul. The fruit shows the character of the root, the harvest the nature of the seed. James says that sin, "when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Sin is the seed of death and the process of sin the process of death.

God made Israel's temple desolate, so revealing and making public what Israel were before, a ruin, desolate of spiritual value to God. The barrenness and waste of famine expose the condition of man as barren and waste before God because of the sins that deserve the famine. The antagonism of war but shows the antagonism of the heart of man toward God. The visitations of God are a mirror of the souls of men and circumstances of national experience a portrait of the people as viewed from Heaven.

#### (9) *Waiting*

How often does the Scripture emphasise that God is slow to anger! Because of His great longsuffering, He resorts to visitation only when there is no other remedy. This is shown in the case of Sodom, Jerusalem, Nineveh, Babylon, and many other cities.

The phrase of Amos i. and ii. already referred to indicates this. The language is not, "I will punish," but "I will not turn away the sentence." Even after investigation resulting in righteous sentence, God waits before the execution of that sentence. He does not haste to punish the sinner. Indeed, the only time there is suggestion of haste with God is in the picture of the father who runs to the repentant son to bathe his head with the kisses of forgiveness.

Space for repentance is always allowed by the longsuffering One.

#### (10) *Warning*

"The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 7). How full of warning was the ministry of the prophets in their day! God, Who waits before the execution of His sentence, even goes the length of warning, that those deserving of wrath may be the objects of mercy.

Warning was a distinct feature of the preaching of the Lord Jesus. He warned of the wrath of God in human circumstances on earth (Luke xiii. 3 and 5) as clearly as He warned of the wrath of God

“where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched” (Mark ix. 48).

All the messengers of the Gospel used warning with their message (Acts xvii. 31). God’s visitations never take advantage of men; they come unheralded only after warnings have been unheeded.

It is true that some of the plagues of Egypt fell without warning. The third one of each of the three sets of three was unheralded because the warnings accompanying the previous ones were unheeded.

### (II) *Repentance*

The generosity and grace of God’s character is seen in the fact that when men repent of their sins, He repents of the chastisement due to them and about to fall.

This is so plainly said in Jeremiah xviii. 7-11, that there is hardly need to turn elsewhere. The words are:

“At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now, therefore, go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.”

We are familiar with the operation of the first part of this regarding the city of Nineveh, the destruction of which was averted by the repentance of its people. The principle working in the inverse order operated regarding Israel, who have, because of sin, forfeited purposed blessing so many times (see Isa. xxx. 15 and 18). The passage is not limited to Israel or to any other nation, but applies to all nations. Its principle operates in two directions. Turning from evil will avert national disaster, but turning to evil will equally result in a change of the purpose of good. He who withholds purposed evil when the people repent, turning from sin, will withhold purposed good if the people turn to evil, rejecting His word.

This principle emphasises national responsibility, embracing the whole constitution, statesmen and legislators, the rank and file. The passing of laws to permit sins in war time will result in greater

difficulties. The call to repentance and prayer will be followed by alleviation of distress. Whereas if, upon some alleviation and respite, there is ingratitude, forgetfulness and turning to further sin, we may expect the process of alleviation to cease and further troubles befall the nation.

(12) *Mercy*

The well-known words of classic English express a great principle:

“The quality of mercy is not strain’d,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed,  
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown;  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings,  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,  
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,  
It is an attribute to God himself ;” (Merchant of Venice, iv. 1)

Mercy is exalted above the force of temporal power, the awe and majesty of kings. This mighty quality, filling the Bible as it does, is prominent in all the movings of Providence. God rarely acts without mercy. A whole Psalm (cxxxvi.) is dedicated to show how it is interwoven with the acts of God. Provision of food (v. 25), deliverance from enemies (v. 24), even the removal of Pharaoh (v. 15), Sihon (v. 19), and Og (v. 20) and the creation of heaven and earth are connected with the outflow of His abiding mercy.

James, conveying in a sentence the superiority of mercy, says, “mercy glorieth against judgment” (James ii. 13), showing that it operates on a higher plane than judgment. The judgment of God operates on the plane of justice, but God delights to be generous, acting on the higher plane of mercy and lovingkindness. How much better that Nineveh be spared than judged! How much better that those 120,000 children were spared! The judgment of God overthrowing the wicked city would have been just; but how magnificent the preservation of the city upon their repentance!

The prophet’s strong legalism prevented his rising to the heights of the magnificence of mercy, and caused him to be disappointed

when Nineveh was not overthrown. Misguided, he reproached God for His highest quality when he said, "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." But David's delighting heart sang, as thrilled in spirit he beheld the ways of God: "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. cxlv. 8 and 9).

Even in the just visitation of this awful war, when men on the battlefield and on the sea, women and children in their homes, have been overtaken by violent death, the mercy of God is to be seen. And not only seen! Careful investigation will show it to be much more prominent than a passing glance might suggest. The miraculous preservations of life number more than the deaths. In fact the number of those killed by bombing is comparatively small in regard to the thousands of tons of explosives used. It has been said that there have been as few deaths as only one to every twelve tons of bombs dropped. Surely we should have expected more. Is not this the mercy of God? If it is not the mercy of God, it is incumbent upon the objector to give a better reason for the small proportion.

It would require a large library to set forth the many instances of Divine mercy in one day of these hostilities, let alone during the course of the years. Why nine months of war without bombing? Why five days of calm at Dunkirk? Why was the only pier not destroyed though aimed at thousands of times? A school playground full of children was sprayed with machine-gun bullets, but not a child was hurt. A land-mine exploded in a barracks full of marines, and not a man was hurt. Scores of such things could be quoted from the writer's experience alone, to say nothing of the much wider experience of some. For none of these miracles can one find a satisfactory reason except in the exercise of that superb quality, The MERCY of God.

### (13) *Progress of Intensity*

In the courts of justice it is usual for a first offender to receive lenient treatment. Upon persistence in the particular breach of law he is more firmly dealt with; still further lawlessness is usually followed by the full extent of justice.

This process can be seen at work in the ways of God with nations. Two classic passages may be called to bear their witness that God increases the severity of chastisement when there is persistence in sin. The passages are Leviticus xxvi. 14 to end and Amos iv. 6-13. The first sets forth what God said He would do to Israel if they refused to repent at His milder methods. The second, which we consider here, shows God reviewing a course of visitation which has grown in intensity because it has failed to produce repentance. In the end He warns them to prepare for severest judgment.

First of all plentiful provision of food is reduced to want of bread. "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (Amos iv. 6). Then the rain is withheld and water becomes scarce. "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (v. 8). The crops are smitten, gardens, vineyards, oliveyards are affected. "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (v. 9). Eventually pestilences come, followed by the sword, filling the land with the slain. But still the word is, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (v. 10). Finally, in the overthrow of their cities God miraculously saves some as firebrands plucked from the burning, but all with the same result. The lament is repeated for the fifth time. "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Now they are warned to meet God: to receive still severer judgment. So it is ever: if the lighter strokes are unheeded, heavier will fall; if heavier ones are resisted and man tries conclusions with God by resistance to His measures, it will but draw out still severer circumstances of judgment.

The advice God gives is surely fitting in any day. "Seek not Bethel, nor Gilgal, nor Beersheba, but seek ye ME." Seek not places, however historically religious, but seek the living Person, the Creator of all things, Who can make life dawn out of the darkness of death and Who strengthens the spoiled against the strong. "Seek good," is His advice, "that ye may live in His world" (Amos v. 4-14).

Israel and Judah passed through increasing degrees of visitation for their hardness of heart (2 Kings xvii. 1-24; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-21). Many other nations, too, are spoken of who come under this process because of lack of the wisdom that results in repentance, humility, and confession.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that such increasing suffering

of nations is needless if men will repent. God has no pleasure therein. The other principles discussed prove that His delight is in mercy and forgiveness (Ps. cxxx. 4).

(14) *Hire*

“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, caused his army to serve a great service against Tyre: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, from Tyre, for his service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompence for which he served, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God” (Ezek. xxix. 18-20).

It has been shown in a previous chapter that God providentially moves one monarch against another, executing his censure and carrying out his purpose. Nebuchadnezzar was used to chastise a number of nations in his day. Conspicuous amongst them was Tyre, the proud city of craftsmanship and merchandise. Long had the pride of Tyre called for humbling. Its kings had changed since the Hiram, who was a lover of David (1 Kings v. 1) and its people were different from what they were when they produced Hiram, the artisan (1 Kings vii. 13 and 14), who laboured in the work of the temple in Solomon's day. Their cultivation of human genius, resulting in superior craftsmanship and commercial success, had made them think that their position amongst the nations was secure. Safe in their city, which they believed impregnable, and forgetting God, their thoughts of themselves had become so exaggerated that their pride amounted to deification of Tyrians.

It was a real service to man and to God to humble the proud and complacent inhabitants of Tyre. God does not hesitate to say this, going even further and paying Nebuchadnezzar hire for doing so.

Just about the time of the fall of Tyre, after its long and costly siege, Egypt merited chastisement for its behaviour. So Egypt, with its riches, was handed over to Nebuchadnezzar as his wages and the wages of his army for the signal service of humbling Tyre; the latter had yielded no spoil because of its complete destruction.

God is no man's debtor. If monarchs, even unconsciously, carry out the governmental purposes of God they will be paid for their service, as also in due course they will be paid for their sins.

The "Rod of Europe" seems to have been paid in spoil for his service upon not a few guilty nations. But as surely as this is true will he in due course be paid for his sins.

(15) *Balance of Account*

The more we read the Scriptures and consider the ways of God with nations, the clearer does it become that the rise and fall of kingdoms is governed by moral and spiritual principles.

The political conduct of the state, the religious and moral behaviour of a people, and the condition of the godly in their midst, are the things that really decide the fortunes of the state and the fate of its people.

If we could fully assess, as God does with perfect knowledge, the moral condition and behaviour of nations we might be able to estimate the issues of conflict. But though we cannot do this there may be pointers, indications of how things will go in times of stress. A state which has multiplied political sin may be expected to suffer more than its opponent state, which, though not innocent, may be less guilty in this respect. A state that has been guilty of constitutional action against Christian truths will surely be dealt with more severely than another state that has not been thus guilty. A state that has passionately hated the Jews, unscrupulously and violently persecuting them, will surely stand in a different position from a state that has been a refuge for the persecuted and a harbour for the stranger.

The government that tears up treaty after treaty, riding roughshod over the obstacle of fidelity, will stand lower in moral account than one which honours its covenants.

When the leaders of a state constitutionally recognise God as the God of the governmental realm, and other leaders of other states as publicly deny Him, it may prove suggestive of the fortunes of these states.

If spiritual and moral matters weigh so much, surely the greatest benediction the believer can convey to the nation amongst which he lives, is his spiritual and moral influence. This influence is always strongest when he is farthest in heart from the world and its fever, and when he is nearest the Lord in the path of genuine Christian obedience.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ON THE  
"PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE VISITATION"

THE SUFFERINGS OF BELIEVERS

IN regard to the mystery of the sufferings of believers much help is to be derived from Peter, both from his mistaken idea of suffering and from the later words of a ripened experience. In the early stages of his spiritual life, suffering was an enigma to him; he was appalled at the idea of his beloved Master's becoming subject to it, and in his natural zeal attempted to dissuade Him from the very "hour" for which He had come into the world. This drew forth the sharp rebuke which exposed the origin of the words so expressive of human sentiment (Mark viii. 31-38). But it is a very different Peter who years afterwards wrote the Epistles, for in the first of them the Lord is presented as an example of suffering, in the path of which the believer is to follow His steps (1 Peter ii. 21-24).

It is to be expected that Peter will instruct his readers further in this great subject concerning which he now has so radically different an outlook. Nor does he disappoint this expectation, for he treats widely of suffering, outlining the spheres in which it may be encountered, suggesting various forms of it, and explaining the results it secures in those that are subjected to it.

He shows that the believer may suffer in the world at the hand of an employer, the state or the unconverted of the world. The overbearing master may unjustly cause grief to the believer, who is encouraged to bear it patiently (1 Peter ii. 18-21). The believer's right living may even be the cause of the worldling's hatred (1 Peter ii. 11 and 12), and result in vilification.

The murderer, thief, evil-doer and meddler obviously suffer at the hand of the magistrate for their evil behaviour (Rom. xiii. 4). But by no means infrequently, suffering has been imposed by the "powers that be" upon the people of God for their distinctively Christian behaviour.

It may also be inferred that in the home a saved partner may suffer because of an unconverted one and because of an inconsiderate converted partner (1 Peter iii. 1-7).

The Church, too, may become a sphere of suffering because of unwilling, mercenary, or overbearing shepherds, whose way may cause great anxiety to younger believers and, in fact, to all the flock (see 1 Peter v. 1-9).

Not only does Peter take for granted that suffering will occur in these several circles, but he explains something of the various causes of suffering. He declares that the converted reap what they sow (1 Peter iii. 10-12). Having been called to "inherit a blessing," believers may, as the result of evil, find the face of the Lord against them, and thus reap punitive suffering. The Corinthians are an example of this (1 Cor. xi. 30).

But even so, there is no encouragement to interpret a brother's misfortune as punitive, for equally unmistakably it is declared that suffering can arise from totally different causes.

It is evident that righteousness and well-doing in a maladjusted world may bring about suffering for the believers as it did for their Lord, of whom it was declared by heaven, earth and hell that He was without fault (1 Peter iii. 13-17).

Purely Christian behaviour, such as the love of enemies and the doing of good to those that hate (so impossible to the unconverted), has often been mistaken for weakness, and sometimes for worse—for treachery. Instances abound in the long centuries of the Church's history, when states have demanded that Christians should do that which the principles of their high-calling prohibit. Having chosen to "obey God rather than men," they have suffered inconvenience, persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom as "Christians" and "in the will of God." They have been reproached for the very Name of the Christ they have sought to emulate, and in the behalf of God whom they obeyed (1 Peter iv. 14-19).

Ananias of Damascus was instructed to go to the newly converted Saul of Tarsus, and it was explained to the remonstrating disciple, hesitant to embark on this mission, that Saul was a chosen vessel who would yet be shown many things he would be called upon to suffer for the sake of the Name of the Lord. Because of his pioneer mission and offensive into the spiritual arena of the conflict of service, he encountered suffering (Acts ix. 11-16). He could say, "Satan hindered," "lest Satan get an advantage," and he could speak of being more than a minister of Christ by virtue of the excess of suffering that his service entailed (see 2 Cor. xi. 23-28).

Job was brought into a protracted experience of varied and deepening trial, not because of sin or service, but because of the value of his testimony, which, rising to Heaven, was maligned by Satan, who insinuated that Job feared God and avoided evil only because it paid him to do so. The testimony of the righteous man could only be preserved in its power by allowing the benefits of his godliness to be removed. "But in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness," "nor did he sin with his lips" (Job i. 22 and ii. 10). Thus Satan was silenced and is not mentioned again in the ensuing record, but where Satan finished God began, and refined the character of His servant, eventually repaying him with interest for all that he had lost through the calumny of the adversary.

But the inevitable suffering of the Christian life (1 Peter iv. 1 and 12), whether experienced in the world, the home, or in the Church, because of evil actions, righteous ways, Christian conduct, service, or the Devil's malevolence and vindictiveness, will, whatever forms it takes, always yield the same blessed result in the character of believers; it will refine the faith, adjust the character, establish, strengthen and settle the people of God.

"Now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter i. 6-7).

"And the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter v. 10-11).

In the light of the foregoing there is hardly need to expose the evil of the supposition that all the misfortunes of believers are punitive.

## *The Objects of Divine Visitation*

### I. TO MAKE MEN CONSCIOUS OF THEIR OWN FLEETING EXISTENCE AND GOD'S ETERNAL BEING

THE visitations of God though punitive are at the same time educative. One of their objects is to teach men by the lessons of solemn circumstances what might have been learned by easier means: the teachable mind of the humble will learn by happier means the things that the proud and worldly-wise must be made to know by force of visitation. The wonders of nature and the revelations of the Bible teach that God is God, the Sovereign and Eternal Lord. When this is owned, the Gospel can follow, the message that makes known His love, revealed in the gift of His Son. But days come when men refuse to hear the Gospel, deny the claims of God, and even His very existence. God has designed that in such days His Providence shall operate in a way which will cause these men to recognise Him; and the Maker of men knows well how to teach men His existence and power, even though it be by painful lessons.

The veracity of Bible teachings regarding God and about sin must be realised by men in spite of the deceptions of earth and all its Babel doctrines and darkness. It must be brought home to men that God is, and Who He is, and that sin against Him is a serious matter. Atheists, infidels, materialists, the indifferent and profligate, have been brought into circumstances in which they have been compelled to own God and confess His existence, often coming into straits that compel them to cry to Him for aid.

During an intense bombing raid on a large city, a little group of the Lord's people was crying to God all night for the people of the city. The next day provided many instances of the Lord's preserving mercy upon the just and the unjust. Notable amongst them was the case of a hardened unbeliever of an atheistic turn, who spontaneously owned, "Somebody was looking after us last night, anyway." He was made conscious of God by the circumstances of danger and brought to own the hand of God that had preserved him.

This illustrates what has taken place in the lives of men of every age in times of danger and need. Portrayed in the 107th Psalm are four classes of people brought by Providence into four kinds of need; the traveller (vv. 4-6), the rebel (vv. 11-13), the foolish (vv. 17-19) and the mariner (vv. 23-28), who, at an end of themselves and natural resources, cry in their extremity unto God, Who hears them and brings deliverance to each. Observing this, the Psalmist bursts forth with the words, "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31). The people of each type, in separate circumstances of difficulty, learned the same lesson of dependence on God for existence and for the means to sustain it.

Mr. Winston Churchill in his book, *My Early Days*, confesses to a phase of violent anti-religious feelings, when he turned to reason and philosophy; but he says quite plainly that the hour of danger exposed these things as fair weather friends, publicly owning that he was made to cry to God. He also says that, when he escaped from Pretoria, he found himself in circumstances out of which only the help of God could extricate him. Filled with the dread of being recaptured and dragged back to Pretoria, in his extremity he cried to God. He recounts that circumstances turned out so unexpectedly for his deliverance that he could attribute them to no other than the hand of God. In the same way, many who have become indifferent and antagonistic have been made to acknowledge God through the circumstances into which He has brought them.

But such acknowledgment of God, even though it may be intended to lead to it, does not involve conversion. It is something far greater to be brought into relationship with Him as Father and thus to know Him personally, than to recognise Him only as Creator and Lord of providence.

The operations of Providence are designed to make men acknowledge God and recognise that they depend upon Him. In this way His lower governmental realm serves the higher Gospel realm in the same way as the material realm serves them both.

Whereas God is the Creator and Preserver of all (1 Tim. iv.) and Controller of the providences which affect all, He is the Father of only those who have received the Lord Jesus. And it pertains to the

Gospel alone to bring men to redemption, as the result of which they become the children of God.

The mariners of the Psalm just mentioned cried to God as His creatures and proved His deliverance in their circumstances. Whether anything more resulted is to be questioned. There seems to be no evidence in the Psalm that they were brought to know God personally. They acknowledged His existence and power and cried because of their extremity. But nothing is said to the effect that they were conscious of spiritual need; no mention is made that it was met; not even a suggestion that they were exercised about it.

Though through these experiences people have been brought to acknowledge God, they may or may not result in salvation. A nation can acknowledge God by having a day of prayer without its being involved that those who support it are converted because they do so. Even so, instances can be multiplied to show that Providence does bring men, women and children to the Gospel, through which they are saved.

Evacuation has taken thousands of children from the cities to places where many of them, for the first time, have heard the Gospel. Not a few have been converted, and some have in turn been used to bring their parents to the Lord.

Many unconverted and heedless young men, uprooted from the comfort of familiar social circles, in the strangeness of life in the services, faced with nearer or more remote danger, have been sobered, and have lent an ear to the Word of God.

Thousands facing death have, as the dying thief, turned to the Lord in repentance. Thousands more in the lingering trials of concentration camps have found the Saviour.

Many having lost homes have, through Christ, found an eternal Home.

Nevertheless, men like Pharaoh may acknowledge God because of visitation without coming to know Him as Father. They comply (because they are forced to) with the requirements of the realm of providence, but fall short of compliance with the Gospel invitation into the realm of redemption and grace.

Furthermore, the fact that the truth of God has been brought home to them in life will, if they are not saved as the result, leave them without excuse, and add to their condemnation in the coming

day, when at the Great White Throne God is vindicated, and the dead, small and great, are judged (Rev. xx. 11-15).

The great monarch of Egypt, who said, "Who is Jehovah that I should hearken unto his voice? I know not Jehovah,"<sup>1</sup> perished eventually, though he was made to know by visitation at least five things about the character and Being of God. "In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD" (Exod. vii. 17), so the river was turned to blood, and he was made to know that God was LORD above the Nile god and the gods of Egypt.

The fixed time for the removal of the scourge of frogs that idolatry was powerless to prevent, showed the supremacy of the LORD: "that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God" (Exod. viii. 10).

The sign of redemption preserving the Israelites from the swarms of flies infesting Egypt not only taught Pharaoh and his people that Israel's God was supreme in Heaven, but was, "to the end that ye may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth" (Exod. viii. 22).

The boils coming upon the magicians, who wielded the power of idolatry, demonstrated a superior power. The further plagues, as they came upon Pharaoh himself, his servants and his people, showed

<sup>1</sup> The word LORD is the translation of the grand title JEHOVAH, the meaning and implication of which will repay consideration. It is said to be composed of the verb "to be" in the past, present and future tenses, and implies, "He that ever was," "Who always is," "Who ever is to come," the eternal, unchanging Being Who ever is all that He was and Who always will be what He is. His name is "I AM that I AM."

A human being exists for so short a time upon earth, that if he tried to describe himself in similar language, the terms would be, "I am what I was not," for a short while before he did not exist. The language of man describing himself needs as well to be, "I am what I shall not be," for in so short a while, "Time like an ever rolling stream bears all its sons away." But the Divine Being is described as "I AM," the One who exists, Independent, Unchanging, Permanent. So the triune God is described by the title "JEHOVAH," the ETERNAL. Whether we think of the Son, Who said, "before Abraham was I AM," or the Spirit, Who is called the Eternal Spirit, by Whom the words of the Son take shape in creation, or the Father Who is indisputably eternal, the title JEHOVAH is a fitting description of the Godhead Which is one in substance but three in person. Thus Jehovah Elohim draws from no source, for He is Himself the Source of all, the Beginning, Cause, Creator, and Sustainer of every other form of being, on Whom all depend and from Whom all draw the means of existence.

Our being is limited and dependent; but when men, forgetting God, behave as though they were independent, God brings circumstances that demonstrate the weakness of the creature.

that no power in Egypt could hold back the visitations of the Lord. Together these happenings were designed that "thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth" (Exod. ix. 14).

The thunders and hail that came at God's command, ceasing instantaneously at the same command, demonstrated God's Proprietorship of earth, being controlled so that Pharaoh might know that the earth is the LORD'S (Exod. ix. 28).

Thus the object of the visitation was secured, and Pharaoh was made to know, and was taught through them, the existence of God, the supremacy of God, the knowledge of God's power in the very land of his own power, the supremacy of God's power in the earth, above and in spite of any and every other power known on earth, finally learning to his further cost that the land he had prized as his own was only leased, the freehold ever being in the hand of the Creator.

In the same way as Pharaoh, many people who had rarely, if ever, bent their knees in prayer, during nights of bombing, have been made to own God, some crying to Him in their fear and need.

These mighty governmental interpositions of God are designed to make men aware of Him.<sup>1</sup> As the cherished things of life totter and fall, men fear and are brought face to face with absolute reality, and as the tawdry treasures to which they have clung vanish in the flames, men, stripped of all they hold dear, cry to God. But though this is true, it is often true, too, that like Pharaoh, when there is respite, they turn back to the same follies and sins rather than give heed in the quietness of the respite to the gentler voice of God in the Gospel that would lead them to the blessings of eternal life.

<sup>1</sup> The Book of the prophet Ezekiel will demonstrate that one of the objects of God in visitations is to make men know that he is LORD. No less than sixty-four times, before the end of his thirty-ninth chapter the words occur, "and they shall know that I am the LORD." The following quotation is an example:

"Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence and blood in her streets; and the wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezek. xxviii. 22 and 23).

Exodus, Ezekiel, the prophets, the Psalms, and all the ways of God, show it to be imperative that men be made to know that God is eternal and independent, whilst they are small dependent creatures of time.

## 2. TO TEACH THE FRUITLESSNESS OF SIN (JER. II. 19).

God also moves in the circumstances of men with the object of making them conscious that sin is of no profit. By evil circumstances following sin and better circumstances issuing from righteousness, on a sort of profit and loss basis, men are made to know the folly of sin and the wisdom of righteousness. There is still a blessing following righteousness. But to the sinner there will be travail (Eccles. ii. 26), ill-gotten gain always dissipates itself; the treacherous will always reap treachery; the ruthless be overtaken by ruthlessness; they who take the sword in aggression find it comes back upon them; the covetous, worshipping wealth and amassing it, find it a curse. Chaining themselves body and soul to the wheels of business, men find themselves slaves in their whirl. The woman founder of an evil cult that taught there was no such thing as disease, died of a loathsome malady. So the mills of God grind, exposing the folly of individuals, nations and states, offering education and instruction to the sons of men, while the cry of wisdom sounds amidst it all, calling men to turn from evil.

## 3. TO CORRECT AND ADJUST LIFE

God's ways of bringing home to men the reality of His existence and power, and of making men realise that sin does not pay, prove at the same time preservative and educative. This further object becomes evident to us in the words of Elihu, "that he may withdraw man from his purpose" (Job xxxiii. 17). Life sometimes becomes inflated but visitation pricks the bubble and brings men back to the basic facts of their existence, thus preserving proper institutions. This is to be seen in the present war, which has so dreadfully exposed the failures of the much-vaunted western civilisation, in which the cream of the world's brains is devoted to the destruction of men in fearful ways. The much-lauded aeroplane is the curse of the century, being turned to evil ends. The speed of the machine, propelled by the internal combustion engine, has made the Blitzkrieg possible, with its awful trail of havoc. Man professes to go on improving, but the professed improvements of

his system are exposed in the days of visitation, when their fruit becomes ripe.

Other things which have been affected by the present war are significant.

The beaches, crowded with the almost nude, were stages of the unbecoming, and on them were acted orgies of immodesty. For the most part these have been closed.

Leisure and idleness were prominent, and the hours of both were used for self-indulgent ends. This has been replaced by enforced work.

Food of almost endless variety was easily obtainable in large quantities. The luxuries of thirty years ago had come to be regarded as the necessities of the few years before the war. This inflated standard of living which tempted over-indulgence and waste has been replaced by the more frugal fare of rationing.

Overdress and pride of appearance had made man's "rag screen" (as Carlyle called it) his religion. Austerity allows neither men nor women to bestow as much upon it.

The motor car had been used in the mad pursuit of pleasure, the desecration of Sunday, and innumerable other evils. Lack of petrol has drastically affected this.

The land was neglected and the important work of tilling the ground largely despised. War has oiled the wheels of cultivation and raised agriculture to its more appropriate place.

A little thought will reveal many more things in which changes are significant. All this seems in measure to carry out the idea expressed in the words of Jer. xxx. 11: "I will correct thee with judgment." So the corrective circumstances come into the history of men and nations, to withdraw from folly to the saner existence of following the principles of God and living in His fear.

The objects of the governmental ways of God are thus threefold: to make men know that God is the Lord; to show the folly and result of human sin and to prove corrective and preservative by bringing things back, in a measure, toward right standards and proper principles of existence.

The ways of God produce these ends for a time; yet it is true, as Zephaniah states, "that though he bringeth his judgment to light . . . the unjust knoweth no shame" (Zeph. iii. 5). "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction, howsoever

I punished them; but they rose early and corrupted all their doings" (Zeph. iii. 7). Days of visitation do produce effects, but there is a sense in which their waves fall back in defeat; yet we shall see in later chapters that the tide of God's Government wins ultimately.

## *The Temporal Blessings of God*

ISAIAH speaks of "well" for the righteous and of "woe" for the wicked, as he addresses them both in the following words: "Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves! Say ye of the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. iii. 9-11).

We have already seen that circumstances are the fruit of men's doings and that men, by behaviour which culminates in visitation, can reward themselves evil. In the opposite way others eat the better fruit of better doings. The circumstances that follow in the wake of each are as much in contrast as the behaviour of the two kinds of people. So the temporal blessings of God upon those that recognise Him stand out in contrast to His visitations for the evil of others.

Whenever it can be consistent with His principles God will allow His temporal blessings. In lovingkindness He gives fertility and full harvest rather than drought, barrenness and famine; congenial behaviour of the elements instead of adverse storms; freedom from pests that devour the crops produced by the earth. He blesses and gives health and length of days to men instead of sickness, plague and untimely death, wholesome occupation and work rather than languishing idleness enforced by visitation; confidence and quiet security in place of fret and fear of evil; freedom from oppression, despotism and vassalage to the state; raised national status rather than depravity; elevation rather than decline, and increase than diminution. Righteous rule, just judgment, prosperity and peace also are blessings which proceed from Him and are the result of the hand of God. No amount of human ingenuity or of effort can produce them artificially in the experience of men; they come only as the result of the working of Divine principles and are withdrawn by the same principles. The laws that govern these circumstances are as relentless as gravity, though more complex to understand.

All these mercies, enumerated in contrast to the evils of visitation, are the issue of moral laws; the result of Divine principles.

Disregarding these principles, the world may unite itself to effect peace and apply its ingenuity to bring about prosperity, but the peace and prosperity, visualised and sought, will prove a mirage, eluding its seekers. "There is no peace for the wicked" (Isa. xlviii. 22), nor lasting prosperity for the ungodly, however great their efforts or ingenuity be in the pursuit of the good they desire.

The good things of God that are enjoyed in the circumstances of men and nations come from the hand of God alone, and are consequent upon moral conditions.

If these good things were unwisely allowed and indiscriminately scattered they would result in ultimate ill. A sharp knife is useful and can be a blessing, but it forms no part of an infant's possessions, for the simple reason that the infant has not the ability to use it rightly. So the mercies of peace and prosperity are denied men when they lack the conditions that are required and the fitness that is demanded. The possession and right use of the things most valued in life follow fitness and worth. When these conditions are fulfilled by the individual or the nation the mercies of God will be enjoyed.

In the Christian dispensation long life and well-being in good circumstances are promised to the obedient child in the words of Eph. vi. 2 and 3, "Honour thy father and thy mother that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest be long lived on the earth." (1 Tim. iv. 8 and 10; Tit. iii. 8; Luke xviii. 29 and 30 may be referred to in this connection.)

This is in keeping with the key phrase, "that it may be well with thee," found in the Old Testament more times than can be easily recounted, promising good, well-being and long life to those wise enough to submit to the ways of God. Most of the passages which speak of the temporal blessings of God relate to the nation of Israel, but whilst that is true, it is also true that these and many other Scriptures contain principles that apply in general. It holds good without respect to persons or time that "it shall be well with them that fear God" (Eccles. viii. 12). Cornelius is an example, though he needed to be saved. His good moral life was rewarded by the good circumstances which he enjoyed. In

the same way, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. xiv. 34), and "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. xi. 11).

Israel were promised, upon their doing what was upright and good (Deut. vi. 3 and 18), the execution of civil justice (Deut. xix. 13) and religious honesty (Deut. iv. 40), that "it should be well with them," that the nation should increase in numbers and prosperity in the midst of a congenial land full of the riches of nature. Immunity from envy and attack was to be their portion as they diligently walked in the fear of God. "I will enlarge thy borders, neither shall any man desire thy land" (Exod. xxxiv. 24), were the words that contain the principle and promise that hold good for any nation at any time.

God's desire to grant temporal blessing, as well as the principles upon which those blessings come, are expressed in the words, "O that there was such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever" (Deut. v. 29).

The idea of our chapter is summed up in the verses (Jer. xxii. 13-19), that contrast the experiences of Josiah and Eliakim, or Jehoiakim (as Pharaoh Necho renamed him, 2 Kings xxiii. 34). Josiah, the godly father, had reigned over Judah in God-fearing equity for thirty-one years, but his son, Jehoiakim, was ignominiously dismissed from power after eleven years. The godly father from his youth had put down superstition and immorality, removed idolatry, publicly owned God and obeyed His laws, in faithfulness doing justice and judgment and deciding the cause of the poor and needy. His covetous son, oblivious to the principle that "the prince that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days" (Prov. xxviii. 16), thought security was assured by self-seeking, possession and force. Both father and son reaped the two kinds of fruit from their respective doings. Of Josiah it is said that "it was well with him." But the woes of God were pronounced upon the selfish, avaricious Jehoiakim and were fulfilled in the visitations followed; his reign was reduced to comparatively few years, and death, ignominious and unmourned, became the sad end of the evil king. The contrast is sharp and distinct. Josiah was honoured and blessed in fulfilment of the abiding principle, "them that honour me I will honour,

and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (I Sam. ii. 30).

The temporal blessings of God will flow and be enjoyed in the circumstances of this life until men, taking them for granted, become unthankful, and in their unthankfulness undervalue the principles by which these blessings come, forgetting and even despising the God who gives them. Therefore He righteously "withholds the good things" (Jer. v. 25), replacing them by the sad circumstances of visitation. In turn, the evil circumstances have their salutary effect, chastening and, in measure, humbling men; the purposes of God are fulfilled, and in mercy He restores temporal blessing after the clouds of visitation.

Whether we consider the visitations of God or His temporal blessings, the fact of a nation's responsibility to God is emphasised. It is impossible to evade or side-track the cycle of His laws. Sin will bring sorrow, the fear of God will bring benefit. If plans are made and policies formed without regard to God's principles, whatever be the power or cleverness, or whatever the seeming success for the moment, those plans will miscarry and the structures raised will come crashing to the ground.

As in further chapters we look at the prophecies of Christ concerning the end of this age, it will become clear that the greater efforts of men to secure peace and prosperity for themselves apart from Bible principle, will be but the forerunners of greater sorrows and more violent calamities. But as men are bowed before God in sincerity and turn to the Word of God in childlike spirit, renouncing their headiness and worldly wisdom, they will learn the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom and reap the good of such wisdom.

## *The Purposes of God*

THE system of moral government does not express all that is in the mind of God: In fact it is only a system to maintain a measure of order during the time in which greater purposes are being carried out. Moral government affects circumstances which are outward and passing. But God has purposes which operate within, the accomplishments of which are eternal and abiding.

### ONE COMPREHENSIVE PURPOSE, THE GOAL OF THE AGES

All these purposes of God concentrate on one transcending purpose, the establishment of the perfect Kingdom of the New Heavens and the New Earth. This purpose, completed, is portrayed in the last vision of the Bible, which depicts the nations in a state of ordered blessing and joy, God dwelling with them and reigning over them from the midst of the Golden City. The Throne of God and the Lamb constitutes that city a sanctuary, from whence the river of blessing flows, and, through its broad highway, the glory and praise of the nations is brought to God. The glory of God shines from the Lamb, and, mirrored and diffused by the city and its gem-studded, transparent walls, becomes the light of the new earth in which the nations walk. Those with washed robes partake of the fruitful Tree of Life and, in the energy derived therefrom, His servants serve Him and, seeing His face, reflect His character throughout the ages of ages.

All the governments of God from the foundation of the world contribute to this end. Creation, by bringing into existence and controlling the universe, provides a platform upon which Providence arranges the relationships and controls the experiences of mankind. Redemption, working in the midst of all, accomplishes the spiritual work of God in individual hearts, and produces those who form part of the various orders of people who will enjoy the blessings of the new heavens and the new earth. All the ages, like the work days of God's first creation, work toward the final rest of God. Each

succeeding age, like the days of the old creation, accomplishes a purpose, and yields a piece of different character, for the new creation, the masterpiece of God, in which all the families in heaven and earth will be to His glory through Christ Jesus (Eph. iii. 15 and 21).

### THE SUBSIDIARY PURPOSES

Though, in the words of the vision, it is said that the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the *temple* of the city, the whole scene is described as the "Tabernacle (the tent) of God with men." In the ordinary use of language a tabernacle or tent indicates something less permanent than a temple. But that this less permanent idea is not conveyed is evident from the plain statement that it continues for ever and ever. The choice of the word "tabernacle" is deliberate, and used to convey the association of ideas between Israel's ancient Tabernacle and the new heavens and the new earth. Israel's Tabernacle, situated in the midst of the Priesthood, the Levites and the Tribes, was the dwelling place of God and the throne of the Theocracy, and is a picture of the completed purposes of God, the Tabernacle of God with men, the eternal Theocracy of the new heavens and the new earth.

When this purpose is realised God will dwell in the midst of several circles of the redeemed, from the farthest circumference of which men will draw near to God, each according to his privilege and capacity, bringing to Him their Glory and Honour, and going forth with His benediction.

The three kinds of people around Israel's symbolic tabernacle illustrate the three classes of the redeemed: the Church corresponds to the priesthood, which encamped immediately around the dwelling place of God. The Jews are illustrated by the Levites who formed a second circle, and the nations are represented by the tribes which encamped outside of and around these in a third circle. Within each circle of the redeemed there will, no doubt, be different ranks and positions such as are suggested by the heads of families, elders and princes.

A consideration of the companies of the redeemed enumerated in a later chapter will prove suggestive to the thoughtful reader.

The short passage, set out below, speaks of three groups of the redeemed in the order in which they are formed.

“First God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts xv. 14). *THE CHURCH.*

“After these things I will return and build the tabernacle of David which is fallen down and I will build again the ruins thereof and I will set it up” (Acts xv. 16). *ISRAEL.*

“That the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called saith the Lord who doeth all these things” (Acts xv. 17). *THE  
GENTILE  
NATIONS.*

The expression, “after these things,” indicates that the restoration of the royal house of David and the development of national purposes for the Jews await the completion of the work commenced at Pentecost, and described as, “God visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.” Other Scriptures describe it as the “Church,” and show it to be the purpose of God peculiar to the present age, which concludes at the coming of Christ. Then, the purpose for Israel will materialise and the purposes for the nations take shape.

It is impossible for the nations to enjoy their blessing until Israel is restored and it is equally impossible for Israel to be restored until the Church is complete.

In the chapter on the Destiny of Nations it is shown that, consequent upon the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, the nations will occupy their own lands and rejoice in the Eden blessings of the reign of Christ and, reflecting His glory in their various types, be absorbed in His obedience and pleasure. Here we need only show a little of God’s purpose for Israel and then devote our attention to the present purpose of God.

## ISRAEL

### (1) *The Divine Purpose for them*

The purpose of God for Israel is described in the words of God to their leader soon after their exodus from Egypt: “Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation” (Exod. xix. 5-6) a royal and sacred position,

and a holy character was to make them a jewel amongst jewel (Mal. iii. 17), and thus fitted they were intended to stand as priest between God and the other nations and to be the channel of His blessing to them.

### (2) *Their History and Failure*

The inspired history of this nation is one of tremendous privileges and of awful failure. Even as God was speaking to Moses in the mount, the people were bowing to the Egyptian idol in the plain. Through sin and unfaithfulness the wonderful covenant was broken and that which was designed for their blessing became their curse. Called to be a nation of priests they became a nation of merchants: brought out from Egypt's slavery to separation and sanctification, they became involved in the sins of the other nations and lost their distinctive character and position. The purpose of God was missed, being based as it was upon a covenant of law, under which the blessing depended on the obedience of the people; but what failed under Law will be realised under Grace; for the New Covenant, which is instituted through the mediatorship of Christ and based upon His sacrifice, will, in a coming day, cause the full glory and blessings of the original purpose to be enjoyed under the Melchisedec Priesthood.

### (3) *Their Rejection and Blindness*

Israel's great sin of the rejection of Christ was followed by their rejection of the Gospel and by concerted attempts to frustrate its purposes of blessing to others (1 Thess. ii. 14-16). For this reason God (as Rom. xi. shows) has set them aside during this age. Six things are said which describe their present position in the purposes of God:

1. They stumbled . . . . Verse 11.
2. Their fall . . . . „ 12.
3. Their casting away . . . „ 15.
4. They are broken off . . . „ 17.
5. They are under severity . . . „ 22.
6. They are subject to blindness . . . „ 25.

Thus has God suspended their special privileges, and under His providential judgments scattered them, until He has completed the

work of taking out of the nations the unique company of which we go on to speak. At present the Jewish nation is under the severity of God, their branches are broken off from the trunk of His blessings, and a judicial blindness has settled upon the hearts of the people once so favoured of God.

The problem of the Jew is a burdensome stone to the nations (Zech. xii. 3) and will not be solved until God in His own time returns to bless them; they are like the keystone of a pyramid, which fits nowhere but at the top, and until they are the head of the nations through Sovereign Grace they will be the problem of the nations.

#### (4) *Their Future Salvation and Glory*

The restoration of Israel is predicted in terms as distinct and clear as those used to describe their present alienation from the ways of God. Five things are said of their future and will be true of them when the "fulness of the Gentiles is come in" (Rom. xi. 25):

- |                            |   |   |   |           |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1. Their fulness           | . | . | . | Verse 12. |
| 2. Their receiving again   | . | . | „ | 15.       |
| 3. Their grafting in again | . | . | „ | 23.       |
| 4. They will be saved      | . | . | „ | 26.       |
| 5. They will be cleansed   | . | . | „ | 27.       |

Then their destiny will be realised and the following description be true of them:—

"And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the priests of the LORD: men shall call you the ministers of our God: ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. lxi. 4-6).

"Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah; for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isa. lxii. 3-4).

#### (5) THE PRESENT PURPOSE

It is not the purpose of God to convert the world, nor to bring about, in this age, the material Kingdom of God upon earth; that

belongs to the coming age, which cannot begin without the personal return of the rejected Lord Jesus. God, in reciprocal righteousness, has rejected the present constitution of the world, because of the world's rejection of Christ (John xii. 31-32), but in mercy He allows it to continue on sufferance during this age, whilst He acts in grace through the Gospel, and builds the *Ekklesia* of individuals who receive its message, with a view to instituting a new world.

Since the rejection and crucifixion of Christ, there is no word in the Scriptures to support the idea of a material Kingdom of God upon earth in the present age. Had it been God's purpose to set up a kingdom of material blessings the nineteen centuries of the present age would proclaim its failure, and the present century, with its awful wars and barbarism, would declare the inability of God to carry out that purpose. The ever-recurring outbreaks of evil expose the folly of thinking it is God's object to establish the Kingdom in this age.

The purpose of each succeeding age differs as much as did the work of each day of creation; to suppose that God was endeavouring to make man on the fifth day, when the sea monsters were the result, would be the greatest folly, and what is more, an insult to God; it is no less a folly and not less an insult, to suppose that God is, at present, endeavouring to do the work of the next age, that of setting up a Kingdom of peace and blessing. The present purpose is not to bless a world of nations as nations with the blessings of redemption, which will involve setting up permanently the glorious Kingdom in their midst. Neither is it the purpose of the present age to bless the Jew as a nation, nor yet to realise the glory that has been promised to him.

Although Providence, on the principles that we have seen from the Scriptures, controls the circumstances of Jewish and Gentile nations, according to their behaviour, it is only to make their ordered existence possible for a time during which Redemption carries out the work of forming a unique company. Having completed this spiritual work and removed this company from earth, God will, in the short term of the end of the age, swiftly and irresistibly act to re-instate the Jew, deal exhaustively with sin amongst the nations and bring in the kingdom.

This company of people which through the Gospel is being

formed in this age, and for the completion of which all other purposes wait (see Rom. viii. 19), is described in the following list:—

A people for His Name,	Acts xv. 14.
A company given to Christ out of the world,	John xvii. 6, 11, 14, 16.
A body of which Christ is Head,	Eph. i. 22-23. 1 Cor. xii. 12-13.
A sacred building,	Eph. ii. 20-23.
A brotherhood in the midst of the world,	1 Peter ii. 17 and v. 9.
A family fellowship of light, life and love,	1 John i. 3-5.
A bridal company espoused to Christ Himself,	Eph. v. 31-32; 2 Cor. xi. 2.

Each of these terms forbids the idea of a present set of social or material conditions for the nations and supports the concept of a distinct body of unique character. It will be observed that the above list has been taken from the words of Christ, the early apostolic council, and the teachings of Peter, Paul and John, and thus presents the idea of the New Testament *in toto*.

This company was designated the "Ekklesia" by the Lord Jesus and was first spoken of in the second part of the Gospel by Matthew (xvi. 18). In this Gospel there is an important change in character noticeable, as the reader passes from chap. xii. to xiii.; prior to the end of chap. xii. there are no parables, but after it Christ rarely taught without one; the record begins with the genealogy from the royal line and continues by presenting Christ as the King, showing that He was born a King and worshipped as such. We find Him preaching the principles of His kingdom and performing the ten public miracles which establish His credentials as the divine Messiah and heaven-sent King. But after His rejection by the leaders of the people (ix. 34 and xii. 14) His mode of public address was changed and the parable form of teaching adopted (see chap. xiii.). By this new mode of teaching a phase of the Kingdom "in mystery" or "in secret" was outlined, in contrast to an outward and apparent form of the Kingdom in glory. Later He explained that during this secret phase, which takes place prior to the realisation of the Kingdom in its unveiled glory at the second Advent of Christ (Matt. xxiv. 30-31), He would build His Ekklesia (Matt. xvi. 18).

The term "Ekklesia," the title of this company, will repay consideration, especially as it cannot adequately be translated by any word in current English. It occurs no less than 115 times in the New Testament and in our A.V. is translated "Church" 112 times and "assembly" 3 times—it means to "summon forth" or "call out of" and is formed from two words, one of which means "out of" and the other "to call." For a people to bear this title involves first the idea of their being called, then, of their response to that call, and finally, of a new relationship with one another, which results in the formation of a company distinct from previous associations.

This calling out and calling together is the work of the present age; God is now using the message of "Christ, and Him crucified," to summon forth individuals, who, upon conversion, are incorporated into this unique company. It is clearly taught that God will not bid creation cease its groan through the setting up of His kingdom of blessing and peace, until after this company is completed and glorified in heaven (Rom. viii. 19-21).

There will be no radical changes in earth, nor in the constitution of the world, until this company is completed; Providence will continue to operate, and the mercies of God will be known in circumstances, but only in a way which is tributary to the Gospel of His grace that proclaims salvation in Christ Jesus for the individual.

God's first world-wide intervention that will fundamentally change all the affairs of this earth will be the removal of His completed Church; then, the Lord Jesus Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole Church will be translated to His presence, where she will realise the glory for which she was destined from before the foundation of the world. This great event, commencing the Parousia of Christ, will set on foot the happenings of the end of the age with its intensified and accelerated visitations, and lead up to the manifestation of the Lord Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, with the consequent dawn of the long awaited Kingdom of blessing and peace for the nations.

Until then, those who have already entered the Kingdom of God by faith in Christ, and who await the time when God will realise His purposes, have a ministry to execute on behalf of a groaning

creation, as the result of which the lot of men may be eased, and the purposes of God hastened. This ministry is the subject of a later chapter, which aims to show the high dignity to which the Christian is called, and the great measure in which, without actual intervention, that ministry may be effective in human blessing.

## *The Kingdom of God*

WE read of the Kingdom of God many times in the New Testament, and although the expression in its exact form is not present in the Old Testament, the idea permeates the whole of those Scriptures. Obadiah in his closing verse looks forward to a day when the Kingdom shall be the Lord's, and Daniel foretells a time when the God of Heaven, who now rules providentially setting up and putting down kings (Dan. iv. 1-17, 25-26), will set up an actual Kingdom upon earth, the constitution of which will be perfect and therefore everlasting and the people of which, not being removed by death and replaced by new generations as people are now, will remain unchanged in its abiding blessing (Dan. ii. 44). From days as far back as Enoch it has been the hope of every true believer that God would expunge evil from earth, and Himself take the reins and directly administer earth's affairs.

In this subject, as in all other matters of revelation, there is a progress of doctrine throughout the pages of Holy Writ. At the close of the Book of Revelation the doctrine of the Kingdom of God finds its full development in the vision of the New Heaven and New Earth, in which the Tabernacle of God with men will become real by means of the Holy City. When this Kingdom of heaven and earth is realised, no sorrow, pain, defilement, or death shall mar the scene, and men, perfected, will under the blessed control of God and the Lamb, know the constant refreshing of the river of life and the perpetual sustenance of the tree of life. In virtue of this fulness of the Spirit and enjoyment of Christ, sacred service to God will occupy their happy days, the sunshine of which will never be dimmed by the shades of night.

The simplest reader discerns the fact of the Kingdom and a child can enjoy the prospect of the above vision, though no rapt seer, privileged apostle, or student can unravel all the meaning of each stage of the development of the teaching regarding the formation and end of the purpose. But though it is true in this study, as in all other studies, that if anyone thinks he knoweth anything, he knoweth

nothing as he ought to know it (1 Cor. viii. 2), yet there are things revealed so clearly that a child can grasp them.

We shall be helped to form balanced and proportioned ideas by observing some of the corrections made by the Lord Jesus. He was often at issue with the Pharisees on points of doctrine and what He thus taught them at these times is recorded to teach us. Probably consequent upon His preaching about the kingdom, there was an occasion when they demanded of Him when the kingdom of God should come. It is evident that their ideas of the kingdom were limited to a set of conditions and circumstances—a material kingdom. The Lord's answer emphasised the antithesis to this, and the idea He expressed was at the extreme other end of the swing of the pendulum. He said, "The kingdom cometh not with outward show, for behold the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 20 and 21). Their thoughts were obviously not in opposition to the teaching of the Old Testament, for it was from there that they derived them. But what the Lord wished to correct was this, that the kingdom of God does not consist only in a set of conditions and a material environment and constitution by which the world is prepared for man, but that it consists also in a set of conditions within man, by means of which the man as an individual is prepared for that world. Therefore the first great development in teaching, as we come to the Gospels, is this, that men as individuals need to be as much prepared within themselves as the world needs to be prepared around them. The blight of sin and the effects of the fall are seen around us in creation and circumstances, but they are also to be seen in every individual, reaching to and polluting the very springs of his being.

The Pharisees were not alone in their limited idea of a material kingdom, for, according to Mark xi. 10, the multitude who hailed Jesus on His entry into Jerusalem thought only of the kingdom of David, and the minds of Apostles according to Acts i. 6 were dominated by the expectation of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The expanded and larger view of the kingdom developed in the New Testament embraces all that was expected in the way of a literal material Jewish kingdom upon earth but contains spiritual, moral and heavenly features as well.

The thoughtful Nicodemus, not easily swayed like the multitude, nor refusing to be moved like many of the other Pharisees, came to Jesus by night, evidently with a number of questions.

In the presence of the Lord his words failed, and the pause after the unfinished oration was used to go right to the heart of the man and to show Nicodemus, who was well instructed in the Old Testament revelations of a material kingdom, an angle of truth of which he had up till then been altogether ignorant. The words to the great teacher of Israel were, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." A new kind of birth is required to fit the individual man himself, as apart from this not only would he not be in the kingdom, but would be unable even to visualise it. Throughout John's twenty-one chapters almost a hundred times the word "world" is used and used in a sense which describes an order of things here on earth in contrast to that order of things out of which the Lord Jesus descended to earth. John the Baptist spoke of Christ as He that cometh from above; and in this way the Lord Jesus uses the term to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born from above." Even to visualise, much more to enter, a man needs to pass through the experience of this new and heavenly birth. In the further words of the Lord this idea of a birth to fit the individual for the kingdom is expanded, and the Lord Jesus speaks of being "born of water and of the Spirit," of a new genesis produced out of the element of cleansing, and spiritual in its character: a new genesis obviously in contrast to anything material or of the senses; not new works but a new man to do them, not a change in doing, but a change in the man. What a bombshell this was to the learned and pious theologian of that day might be discerned by his words, "How can these things be?" containing as they do a note of helplessness and despair! Thus the man who had read of the kingdom, lived for the kingdom and preached about the kingdom, came to realise that it was a spiritual thing as well as material, and that he would need a power outside of himself to bring him to this spiritual birth before he could visualise its character or enter into its blessing. It was brought home to him that this birth does not take place "of blood," that is human lineage; "nor of the will of the flesh," the effort of nature; "nor of the will of man," it being a thing of superhuman origin—"but of God." For only He can translate men into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. i. 13).

So in our thoughts of the Kingdom of God, whilst seeing that the prospect of a material order of blessing is real, we see also that

those who will enjoy it will be those who have been fitted for it by a new spiritual birth; being born of God, they will become children of God, and will in that sense be fitted for the Kingdom of God.

It is interesting and most instructive to note that the Lord Jesus said nothing to Nicodemus about faith nor about Himself until after the question that indicated his extremity; but when, being brought to an end of himself, he said, "How can these things be?" the Lord began to tell him of the Son of Man being lifted up, so that those who believe in Him might have everlasting life.

In this way the Lord, His Apostles, and all the line of faithful witnesses teach that the first need of man is not of the preparation of the kingdom for him, but of the preparation, in this individual and spiritual way of *man himself* for the kingdom.

As we proceed further in the New Testament it becomes clear that two other kinds of fitness are required for the Kingdom of God: fitness of character and fitness of body. A list of negatives is found in 1 Cor. vi. 9 and 10, and Gal. v. 21, which excludes from all hope of the kingdom the moral classes described in these verses, and which emphasises the necessity of moral suitability. It is obvious that life can only follow birth, and that the new life can only follow the new birth, and we have just reason to doubt that a spiritual birth has taken place, unless it has been followed by the evidence of the expression of spiritual life.

The experience of moral preparation for the kingdom is dual: in the world those who are born of God will find that it is through much tribulation that they are to enter the kingdom (Acts xiv. 22), whilst in their souls it is a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv. 17). The very tribulations that the believer must pass through, be they small or large, will but serve the purpose of preparation for that kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, therefore, is first spiritual and obtains now in the individual; it is then moral, and is produced here and now in the experience of the path of obedience and tribulation; finally it is material, and into its real blessings the prepared will be brought, to enjoy eternally the realm which will be prepared for them.

One more strong negative requires to be considered to give us balanced views and will serve to show that the kingdom in its fulness cannot dawn without the personal return of the Lord Jesus. It is stated

in 1 Cor. xv. 50 that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God and that therefore a changed body is required for that scene of blessing. When this has taken place the redeemed will thus have been prepared, spirit, soul and body to inherit that kingdom. The first possible occasion at which bodies of believers will be changed will be when the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God (1 Thess. iv. 16 and 17). This great event, as we have seen, will inaugurate the Parousia and the end of the age, which, leading up to the appearing, will result in the kingdom in all its material blessings.

The Lord Jesus, when before Pontius Pilate, witnessed a good confession (according to 1 Tim. vi. 13), in the light of which Timothy himself is charged to flee the things of present material gain (vv. 5-10), and to follow the things of moral good (vv. 11 and 12). A consideration of all that is recorded of what took place before Pilate will make it evident to the attentive reader that Christ's good confession was made in the words of John xviii. 36, "My kingdom is not of this world." The Kingdom of God is therefore not something produced by the world, not out of the world, nor is it something that the world is developed into, but is in contrast to, and of an entirely different order from, anything that belongs to present systems. Obtaining now in the individual heart, it can be realised in the world only at the Advent of Christ Himself. So the believer is encouraged to wait for the kingdom, pray for the kingdom, and preach for the kingdom, but never to endeavour to set up the kingdom.

There are two expressions which are an apparent paradox, but which yield a closing point for our instruction. Daniel speaks very plainly of a kingdom *under* the whole heaven (Dan. vii. 27), whereas Paul differentiates, speaking of "his kingdom, *the heavenly one*" (2 Tim. iv. 18). That there is a commonwealth existing in the Heavens is stated in Phil. iii. 20, and it seems that it is to this that Paul refers in his last written Epistle. That there will be a commonwealth on the earth is equally evident, and to this Daniel refers when he interprets the vision of the Son of Man. The Old Testament saw only the earthly one. The New Testament supports this view, but shows as well a great polity in the heavens which will direct the affairs of the nations upon the earth. Thus the later revelations make it clear that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of heaven and

earth with the various orders of redeemed, all born again, all fitted in character and body to fill those places in the various ranks and services of a universal administration of holiness and peace. These orders of the redeemed will have been saved out of different generations and ages to form part of the different companies enumerated elsewhere and to fill different positions in the glad day when the sovereignty of the world is in the hands of our Lord and of His Christ.

## *The Church and Human Circumstances*

### THE INADEQUACY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

THE line of demarcation between the world and the Church was more distinct in the first century than to-day. Then the Church and the Empire were separate. But now many organisations which claim to be Christian, feeling a responsibility to deal with social problems, have become interested in, and in some cases associated with, politics, in the hope of eliminating war and other social evils. At the same time the outward lives of many people have been affected by Christian principles without any inward change of heart toward God. These, approving of righteousness and the finer graces of Christian behaviour, emulate what little they can of them, and endeavour to apply their imperfectly conceived ideas of Christianity to politics and government, having as their object the introduction of a moral and social order of righteousness and peace. But all this leaves the real need untouched. If the so-called Christian organisations and the idealists of the world combined in the application of Christian ethics to the world and its governments, and, as a result, succeeded in eliminating social evils and moral ills, the greatest need of man would still remain. The outside of the cup and of the platter thus cleansed, would leave the inherent sin of human nature as existent as ever (as with the Pharisees of old, see Matt. xxiii. 25-28). Hence, if it were possible, by these means, to remodel the world socially and morally, it would amount only to healing the outbreaks on the skin, and would leave the disease in the system untouched. Furthermore, though it might make the world more pleasant, it would make it more deceiving, for its very improvements would better conceal the real need, that of the heart before God, and thus, by concealing the vital need, it would contribute to the work of the adversary rather than to the work of God. The success of these efforts would make life a greater mirage, superficially ordered and outwardly apparently healthy, but men, inwardly unchanged and not "born again," would still be estranged from God.

After all, the very evils of the world are a blessing, for the existence of these evils emphasises that to which most close their eyes—that things are not right, and that this is so because men are not right in heart with God. It is easy to see the social advantages which would result from universal application of the ethics of Christ. Nevertheless, the application of these principles to the world, without individual reception of Christ as personal Saviour and Lord, amounts to seeking the blessings before the Blessor, the kingdom conditions before the King, and salvation's results before the reception of the Saviour. When the facts of these efforts are brought out into the light and considered, they reveal the efforts to be, not only misguided, but (albeit well-meaning by those who make them) a refined and cunningly camouflaged rejection of Christ Himself.

The fall of man through sin against God brought in sorrow and death, but sorrow and death mercifully imposed of God, until full redemption should be provided in God's time by the Divine emancipator, the Lord Jesus Christ. But soon efforts were made by the line of Cain, who had already rejected the promise of Christ, to make the best of the world without God. The result was the Cainite civilisation, which boasted its refinements and improvements, as have the other civilisations which have followed at intervals during the centuries down to that of our time. All these civilisations borrow that which it is possible to borrow of the things of God, and, without regard for the revealed will of God, or the great spiritual need of men's hearts before God, apply that which they borrow to material and social circumstances. This has ever had the same result, further departure from God and consequently multiplied sin, which has ended in chaos and disaster, and Divine judgment. In the same way a modern civilisation which uses Christian ethics to make the best of the world without Christ will result in disaster at the end of this age. (Details of this and evidence of it from Scripture prophecy are provided in the later chapter on "The End of the Age.") Man's real need is of Christ, not the teachings of Christ, not the ethics of Christ. His need is The Christ as a Person, and as a Person who is Saviour because of His sacrifice and atonement for men.

It follows, therefore, that the work of the Church is not a moral work, nor a social work, but a spiritual one, a work which goes to the root of man's need with a message that presents Christ as a living Saviour and Lord to be personally received. The power of

this message of the Gospel has millions of times met the need of earth's most wretched sinners and reconciled them to God; and they have gone on to live changed lives which demonstrate that correct morals and proper social behaviour are the fruit of the heart's being right with God.

The application of Christianity to social and moral needs without individual conversion is not only subversive of the Gospel but is impracticable, because of the corruption of the human heart. The lower standards of common morals and basic righteousness are so rarely attained that the attempt to apply the very much higher standards of Christianity is folly.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to see the social advantages which would result if the ethics of Christ could be universally applied. Many, seeing this as a wondrous dream, try to attain for themselves and the world the present social benefits of these ethics. But let the warning be sounded for the world is deceived, and the professing Church aids in that deception. The teachings of Christ will never work in the world, and, if applied, will end in disaster to individual, community and nation. The full application of the ethics of Christ in the present world would lead only to an end equivalent to Calvary. The teachings of Christ are not for the world. They were never given to the world nor intended for the world. They are for those alone who have had the experience of conviction of sin and confession of sin followed by that definite, decisive receiving of Christ Himself as a living Saviour and Lord. To take these teachings and to apply them to the world, a sphere for which they were never designed, is folly; and, what is far worse, to take them from where they belong without authority is theft.

<sup>1</sup> The Christian teachings of the New Testament strike a higher note than that of normal legal righteousness. A consideration of the remarks, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time," and "But I say unto you," repeated five times (Matt. v. 21, 27, 33, 38, 43), will make this evident. It is further exemplified by comparing the statement from the law, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exod. xx. 15), with "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour . . . that he may have whereof to give" (Eph. iv. 28). The first prohibits the evil of theft, but the second eclipses it, and requires that the converted thief shall labour, not only to be honest, but to become a philanthropist.

Though the Law is thus quoted, and its principles used comparatively to show the much higher standard of Christian conduct, it is not stated that the Law ever properly applies to any other than the Covenant People, the twelve tribes of Israel. Nevertheless, the principles of the Law are found written in hearts (Rom. ii. 15) and men are held accountable in regard to this knowledge.

## THE NECESSITY OF JUDGMENT

That there are three spheres of government—material, moral and spiritual—in which three kinds of principles operate, has been shown in an earlier chapter. As a part of His moral government God has delegated to kings and magistrates authority to punish crime, and to deal by force with the moral and social evils that are found within their jurisdiction. It is also part of His moral government to move one nation against another, to inflict chastisement. Thus, as has been shown, war and other evils are Divine visitations. But all this belongs to the realm of providence and moral government, a realm in which it is unfortunately necessary, because of the lawless instincts of men, for force to operate and judgment take place. Were it not for the force behind the uniformed policeman he would be a laughing-stock; but the fear of an enforced penalty commands respect. Were it not for the executioner, murder would be rife. By means of magistracy and visitations, earth's evils, which would otherwise increase enormously, though never eliminated, are restrained. But these necessary means, though righteous and instituted of God, are not Christian, as is evident from the fact of their existence before the revelation of Christ and those principles peculiar to His people. Their operation prior to the inception of the Church shows that a Church is not necessary for their operation. Whereas instructions are found directing the churches to submit to these institutions, none are found directing the churches to operate or act in these institutions.

The work of the churches is neither moral nor social, still less is it physical and retributive. Though there is a realm, righteously instituted, in which force operates, and in which judgment must be meted out, and though the believer is to be subject to it (and may even suffer righteously or unrighteously in it, see the chapter on "Believers Suffering"), he is never called upon to act in the capacity of it.

It seems, in the light of that which in previous chapters has been discovered from the Scriptures, that war must be regarded as one of the necessities of the governmental sphere—at least as long as the nature of man remains unchanged. Nevertheless, though it may in this sense be a necessary part of the moral government of the world, and though in some instances it may appear to be justly waged, it

is never Christian. The principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" applies to the realm of government, but the principle of love applies to those already in the Kingdom of God.

A few questions may serve to clarify the implications of all this.

If apparently evil rulers need to be judged, and if God has said, "Vengeance is mine I will repay" (Rom. xii. 19), is it not presumption for the Christian to act?

If God, in the rule of the vast orbs of heaven, can dispense with the aid of Christians, does He need their help to execute His vengeance in providence?

Does not the fact of vengeance in providence imply that the political or religious pacifist, who would rob the king of the sword, is misinformed of the ways of God, and in thus acting, takes Christian principles outside of the proper Christian sphere?

Does it not also imply that the Christian who acts in judgment is acting below his proper sphere?

But the day is coming in which Christians will have the power of rule and right of judgment. This is stated in 1 Cor. vi. 2. This will be committed to them (according to Rev. xx. 4 and 5, 9) upon the revelation of Christ to the discomfiture of all His foes, and upon the incarceration of Satan in the Abyss (Rev. xix. 11, xx. 4). The Christians of Corinth behaved in a way that amounted to the mistake of attempting to reign before their time. With some grimness the Apostle says, "I would that ye did reign, so that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor. iv. 8). It follows that if rule is not yet delegated to the Church, neither is the power to judge. This is emphasised by the question of 1 Cor. v. 12-13, "What have I to do to judge them that are without?" At present this is only God's matter. Not yet has He shared it with the Church. Hence for a Christian to endeavour to act in judgment is for him to intrude into a realm in which he has yet no authority, interfere in that for which as yet he has not the necessary competency, to act out of order in regard to the purposes of God, and by taking that which is the prerogative of God, to rob God (Rom. xii. 19).

## THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

Even though the exhortations of the New Testament are all designed to withdraw the Christian and the churches from direct intervention in the affairs of the world, there is a sphere in which the believer, and the assemblies of believers, may have a hand in providence as it controls the circumstances of men. A higher realm, spiritual in character, governs the affairs of earth, and it is in this realm that God has been pleased to give believers, both individuals and companies, a standing and a power which, by their prayers, they may use for the good of mankind.

This is taught in the New Testament, as we shall see, and exemplified in the Old. The intercession of Moses saved the Jewish nation in his day, even though God had lifted up His hand to destroy that generation of it. (See Ezek. xx. 13 and Exod. xxxii. 10-14.)

Samuel's power with God brought mercy to a sinning nation at a time when they rejected God and desired a human king; and his life of prayer and faithfulness became an important stepping-stone to the greatest glory of Israel in the reigns of David and Solomon (Ps. xcix. 6).

The way in which these men are mentioned in Jer. xv. 1 is evidently intended to emphasise the importance of a spiritual and a hidden ministry of intercession for the circumstances of men. Each stood before God in his day, and by his prayers prevented the calamities that would otherwise have come upon the people. Elijah too, by prayer, influenced the affairs of nations. We are told that he was a man of like passions as we are (Jas. v. 17), yet he, in his day accomplished by prayer what the combined power of armies and navies could never do.

God does not at any time need the physical help of His people to control His material creation. And though in past or present ages He may providentially move nation against nation for purposes of chastisement, the puny strength of the individual believer or riven churches is equally unnecessary to help Providence deal with the evils of this age or any part of it. But though in both realms God can well dispense with the physical energies of His people, He desires the expenditure of their spiritual energies in behalf of the material good of others. The surprise of Isa. lix. 16 ("He

wondered that there was no intercessor") is eloquent support of this principle.

Intercession of this kind is necessary in every age and it will go ill with men if it be lacking. What men like Moses and Sanuel did in their day, according to national principles, it is the privilege and responsibility of the churches to do in their day, according to principles which are not limited by national distinctions.

The New Testament churches are viewed dispensationally and locally. Dispensationally and in its widest sense the Church embraces every true believer in the present age, and is called the body of which Christ is the Head (Eph. i. 22-23). In its local character it is composed of all the believers in any locality who assemble together for specified purposes. Three purposes are clearly mentioned in apostolic teaching: to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to receive ministry and to engage in intercession. Several chapters of the Epistle to the Corinthians are devoted to the explanation of the gatherings for the breaking of bread and ministry (see 1 Cor. xi. 16 to xiv. 40), but it is the first Epistle to Timothy that devotes the following passage to the explanation of the objects of a meeting which is vital to the interests of men—the prayer meeting.

The recognition of the way in which Christ and His work are presented, and of the character in which God is portrayed in any New Testament Epistle becomes the key to the true import and proper aspect of its teaching. The following list<sup>1</sup> will reveal at a glance that it is the Saviour character of God which is prominent in first Timothy, and that the paramount object of Christ's coming into the world is presented as that of saving sinners. Everything that is enjoined upon Timothy, either as an individual or for the

- <sup>1</sup> 1. He is the one who makes all things alive (1 Tim. vi. 13).
2. He preserves all men in life, especially believers (1 Tim. iv. 10).
3. He gives to His creatures all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim. vi. 17).
4. He created all things for their use (1 Tim. iv. 3 and 4).
5. He willeth that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. ii. 3 and 4).
6. To this end God in His Saviour character and Christ Jesus, the only hope of those who believe committed apostleship to Paul that he might be a herald of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God and a teacher of these things (1 Tim. i. 1).
  1. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. i. 15).
  2. Christ Jesus is the only Mediator (1 Tim. ii. 5) and Ransom (1 Tim. ii. 6).
  3. Christ Jesus is our hope (1 Tim. i. 1).
  4. Saviour character is also evident in that although He dwelleth in light unapproachable (1 Tim. vi. 16), He has been manifested in flesh (1 Tim. iii. 16).

local church, is with a view to the kingdom which will obtain at the appearing of Jesus Christ, Who Himself neither took part in nor moved against any of the present kingdoms, but Who, in "His good confession" (Tim. vi. 13) before Pontius Pilate, declared that His kingdom belonged not to the present constitution of this world at all (John xviii. 36).

It is also clear that until the dawn of that kingdom testimony to the Saviour character of God, testimony that the object of that incarnation was to save sinners, and testimony to the fact that the true kingdom is future, is the great object of the existence of churches.

The fact that prior importance is given in this Epistle to the prayer meeting emphasises that it is an essential part of this testimony—a testimony which is dependent, not on the existence of Christians in the world, but on the gatherings of Christians.<sup>1</sup> It is stated that the breaking of bread meeting has a testimony character, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. xi. 26). Not less so, and perhaps, as far as the world is concerned, more so, has the prayer meeting a vital place in the present testimony of the churches.

If the churches are not permitted the use of physical force, nor allowed to devote any of their influence and power upon social or political affairs, and if the prayer meeting is part of the essential reason for the existence of churches by means of which they manifest the character of God, and can and should thereby bring blessing to men, and if by that means they can wield a greater power for human good than can the combined force of all the Empires, it is incumbent upon all Christians at whatever cost first to learn the will of God regarding the prayer meeting and then at any cost to fulfil the function of that meeting.

<sup>1</sup> Of how great spiritual importance these gatherings are may be deduced from the following facts:—

- that Satan makes tremendous efforts to frustrate, or divide, or destroy them
- that flesh always mars them
- that human arrangements and organisations pervert their character
- that God uses such exalted terms as He describes them
- that their influence when properly constituted and functioning brings to the world temporal blessing in circumstances and material things, and eternal blessings of salvation through the Gospel to those who believe.

## THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR ITS UNIQUE MINISTRY

In view of this a careful consideration of the passage which authorises and explains this meeting is necessary.

“I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, *himself* man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony *to be borne in its own times*” (1 Tim. ii. 1-6).

It is enjoined as a matter of prior importance that in their gatherings Christians shall pray for the circumstances of mankind, and it is also intended, as God, answering their prayers for others, gives rule and order and peace to men, that Christians shall reap the benefit of being able to live lives of tranquillity and quiet, instead of passing the days of their sojourn in agitated and strained circumstances and disturbed and evil times.

The church at Ephesus, and all other local churches too, are encouraged in this passage to take up the ministry of prayer and intercession for men's circumstances, on the argument that, if God is willing to save without distinction, He is ready to grant circumstances of good to all, and circumstances which shall make it possible for men to live, and living before Him in some measure of order to be saved through the Gospel and thus come to the knowledge of the truth.

The fact that benefit in circumstances will accrue to believers as their ministry becomes fruitful to others seems to emphasise that it is the circumstances of men that are the object of that ministry. This is similar to the principle of Jer. xx. 7, in which the Jewish captives were instructed to seek the peace of the city whither the Lord had caused them to be carried away captive, and to pray unto the Lord for it. It is explained that “in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”

In this way the churches of God gathered locally, are to function for mankind as did the tribe of Levi for the nation of Israel. The way in which the Levites were taken out from amongst the other tribes, and consecrated to stand in priestly service between God and the nation of Israel, illustrates how the churches are taken out of the nations and consecrated to stand in priestly service between God and

the nations of the world, to present to God thanksgivings for blessings in the circumstances of those who do not themselves thank Him and to offer prayers in behalf of those who do not themselves seek His face.

It is questionable whether anything comes to man, saved or unsaved, apart from prayer. The statement of Ezek. xxxvi. 37, "I will yet for this be enquired of . . . to do it for them," is probably an abiding principle. Although God delights to give, He also delights to be waited on and it is fitting to His supreme dignity that men seek Him. The Psalmist had this in mind when he said, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (Ps. lxv. 2). God will not be without those who stand before Him. In view of the fact that men generally do not, and in fact, cannot stand before God, the sacred dignity and privilege of priesthood in their behalf is granted to the churches to be exercised in private, but especially in its gatherings for prayer.

Four words are used to denote the nature of the ministry—supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings. The difference between the first three words is not easy to explain, but the following suggestions may prove helpful:—

*Supplication* seems to have in view the particular matter of need which we bring before God.

*Prayers* rather presents the idea of wishes spread out and consequently of the One before whom they are spread out.

*Intercessions* emphasises the nearness of communion, which gives opportunity to present to God the needs of those who are not themselves in that state of nearness.

### THE SCOPE OF THE MINISTRY

The terms used in the passage to describe the scope of this ministry show that it is to be exercised in relation to all men, kings, and all that are in high place.

"*for all men,*"—The full force of the words rendered thus in A.V. and R.V. is '*in the behalf of, and in regard to all mankind.*' It is the widest of terms, which allows no limit, nor recognises any parties of men. Nations as such are not in view. Nor does any kind of men find preference: neither white men nor black men, neither Englishmen nor Frenchmen, neither good men nor bad men; but simply

“for men,” as His creatures, irrespective of distinction has God designed that the prayers be offered. Just as none are debarred from salvation, so are none to be deprived of the prayers of the churches.

“*for kings,*”—Not for the King (as 1 Peter ii. 13 and 17), but “for kings”; nor is it for good kings but for kings, irrespective of whether they are good or bad. Kings affect the lives of so many of God’s creatures and because of this are the special object of Satanic influence. There may thus be an even greater need to pray for bad kings than for good ones, and to ask that the evil which dominates the bad and brings ill to so many might be restrained, whilst the good that marks other rulers be retained. Satan and his hosts, by controlling evil kings, can harass the people of God, hinder the spread of the Gospel, and make still more harsh the lot of an already groaning creation.

“*for all that are in high place,*”—The leaders of men, the pillars of society, civil magistrates and all in whom is vested authority, and whose position is endowed with dignity, are to be served by the churches in the inner courts of the sanctuary of God, because upon them much of the structure of ordered society hangs.

#### THE OBJECTS OF THE MINISTRY

The main object of the intercession of this holy priesthood is order, tranquillity and quiet.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the churches is

<sup>1</sup> The similarity of meaning between the words translated “quiet and peaceable” in the A.V. and “tranquil and quiet” in the R.V. is so close, and their rarity of use such, that it is difficult to catch the sense of difference in meaning which is surely existent or the Spirit of God would hardly have used the two, for if the words are identical in meaning, one would have served.

The former word is used only in this passage. It has been suggested that it relates to things without. Strong suggests that it is derived from a term which indicates the idea of lonesomeness, as of being in a wilderness. If this is so, it would appear that the intercession of the churches should be in order that Christians should be left alone to lead lives free from interference, lives, the domain of which should be free from the invasion of untoward and coercive circumstances.

All the associated forms of the latter word, and the uses of these in the New Testament, seem to hold the idea of restrained expression. Hence its force seems to be directed to that which is within. The use of it (in 1 Peter iii. 4) in connection with the spirit seems to support this suggestion.

If these things are so, the ideas seem to be that this ministry of the churches should be in order that believers shall be able to live lives free from outside interference, and therefore free to be altogether devoted to the bondservice of Christ; and unexcited, restrained, self-contained, and quiet as regards that which is within, thus manifest the Spirit of their Lord.

dependent upon their local gatherings, these local gatherings are dependent upon circumstances of peace and freedom, and, in turn, peace and freedom are dependent upon the prayers of God's gathered intercessors. This is a blessed circle of interdependent things, which Satan would replace with a vicious circle of evil consequences. Disorder, agitation, disturbance and lawlessness render the peaceful, but potent, gatherings of intercessors either impossible or ineffective. And, being either impossible or ineffective, disorder, agitation, disturbance and lawlessness reign without a spiritual ministry to check them.

Lawlessness, that would disintegrate all ordered life and overthrow every Divinely instituted relationship, is already secretly at work (2 Thess. ii. 7), and, unless restrained by a mightier secret power, will break out in apostasy and produce the great Lawless One, the monster of iniquity (2 Thess. ii. 3-8). How great a part the ministry of intercession through the Holy Spirit plays in this restraint we may not now know. It would seem, therefore, that in intercession for the circumstances of mankind, the churches should pray for:—

1. the ordered supply of the *means of life*, such as food, raiment, etc.
2. the maintenance of the *relationships of life*, such as marriage, parenthood and home.
3. the support of the *government of life*, such as civil justice and kingly rule.
4. mercy in the *circumstances of life*, such as peace, security and privileges.

And as the workings of creation with its faithful seasons link hand with Providence, in its control of circumstances, to make possible ordered life in tranquillity and quiet, the churches are to present thanks to God, who thus opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. The anthems of praise and the incense of prayers are to mingle as they ascend from those who have most fully proved His grace, and who, acting on the principle of grace, minister in behalf of an undeserving and sinful world and praise Him that the life of its people is prolonged, so that God's saving message may reach men who otherwise might be victims of distraction because of anxiety, and of death because of calamity.

Frequent mention is made of the debt of Christians to the State,

but there is an aspect of these things to which reference is rarely made, that of the debt of States to Christians. In the light of this invaluable ministry it might be asked what is the extent of the debt of states and nations to those who intercede in such a ministry.

### THE FITNESS FOR THE MINISTRY

To fulfil this ministry, described in the Apostle's words to Timothy, which is so important to God and to man, the Lord's people will need "the largeness of heart as the sands of the sea shore" with which Solomon was graced (1 Kings iv. 29).

Those who possess not this largeness of heart will find in the Scriptures both encouragement and rebuke.

Jonah lived in a dispensation of law, when for a Jew a nationalistic spirit was encouraged by the promises of God. He begrudged mercy to the Ninevites and was saddened at God's magnanimity toward those people. Whereupon God remonstrated with him, and urged the rightness of sparing the wicked Gentile city because of their repentance and the presence of the thousands of children. If it was wrong of Jonah in such nationalistic and legal surroundings to grudge mercy to the undeserving, it is surely much more wrong of Christians to do so to-day because they themselves are the recipients of God's greatest grace in a dispensation of grace.

In contrast to this, enjoyment of the exalted themes of the Epistle to the Ephesians, between Timothy and which there is a strong affinity, will empower believers to enter upon the exalted practices outlined in the Epistle to Timothy.

The purpose of the former is to explain the present position of the believer, who is declared to be already enthroned and enriched in the very sphere where the Lord Jesus is seated far above principalities and powers at the right hand of God.

It is further declared that the witness and the warfare of the churches belong to that sphere. As the people of God, rising up in spirit, realise the wealth of their spiritual blessings, rejoice in the forgiveness of their sins and their acceptance in Christ, and feel the power of their high place with all its dignity of association with so highly exalted a Head, being thus enabled to live an exalted life, with

becoming witness in heavenly places, they will find the ability to withstand, by their testimony and prayers, and thus surmount the stratagems of their adversary the Devil, who, by his rule of darkness, causes men to take those paths which always end in sorrow and affliction.

Whilst it is redemption and the sacrifice of Christ that give admission to the courts of God and a standing in them, there are differences of power on the part of intercessors. The character of those who approach has much to do with the result of their intercession.

In a past age Levi and Phineas were given the priesthood, not only because they were redeemed, but because of their devotion to the will of God and because they took sides uncompromisingly with God (Deut. xxxiii. 8-10, and Num. xxv. 10-13).

Both Abraham and Lot were righteous souls, but only Abraham could intercede for the cities of the plain. He, free of its affairs, treading the genuine pilgrim way, was in the secret of the Lord and could have power with God. But Lot, within the city, involved in its affairs, walking the way of compromise, had power with neither God nor man. Abraham, outside, commanded the respect of the world and was powerful in intercession, but Lot, inside, was despised by its citizens (though he sat upon its council), and had no power in testimony to move even his own sons-in-law. Not only was he powerless to bring good to others, but he needed a miracle of angelic ministry to extricate him from the circumstances of judgment. But the intercession of Abraham, although not fruitful in the preservation of Sodom and Gomorrah, resulted in the salvation of Lot from its ruin and consequently the preservation of Zoar as a refuge for him (Gen. xix. 29 and 17-25).

Moses would never have been the priest that he was, had he not refused the pleasures and ambitions of Egypt, and chosen to suffer affliction with the people of God in the pilgrim way.

Samuel's sustained growth in his experience of God developed him so that the noble words, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. xii. 23), indicate the sacred value that he had learned to set on thus ministering to the Lord for others.

Daniel, who purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat, and who was sanctified even in the midst of

an ungodly court, knew the mind of the Lord, and swayed the destiny of nations.<sup>1</sup>

The inspired records of these men indicate to us some of the features required for power with God and show the kind of intercessors who have weight in the courts above.

Surely the groaning of mankind to-day is a special reason why the churches should rise to this ministry and unite to intercede persistently for the children of men. God delights in mercy even though He brings visitation and will undoubtedly grant that mercy in answer to the prayers which He desires and has authorised.

#### AN EXAMPLE OF THE MINISTRY

An occasion which provides an example of the working out of these principles in the experience of the very servant who was used of God to write the instructions that have just been considered, took place during the voyage to Rome (Acts xxvii. 1 to xxix. 10). Unlearned in nautical matters, Paul, Divinely guided, gave advice which was set aside, owing to the captain's ideas which were based upon natural wisdom, and the desires of the ship's company for a more commodious harbour. Setting sail according to human desire and advice contrary to God, they soon found themselves in the very straits of which they had been warned, and found themselves helpless to meet the need of the situation. In the hour of their need the man of God was not found wanting. Conscious of God's purposes for him, he waited upon God for himself and all the ship's company, and although the lives of all were forfeit, preservation was allowed (Acts xxvii. 24). The man of God dealt not with material things, but with things which proved effectual in the preservation of all who sailed with him and resulted in great blessing being brought to the inhabitants of Malta. What blessings in the Gospel came to the ship's company or to the Islanders are not stated, but it is easier to suppose that they were

<sup>1</sup> The great prayer of the ninth chapter of his prophecy was fulfilled—

1. *immediately* in that the messenger came with explanation;
2. *in a matter of months* in that the temple began to be built;
3. *in the course of a century* in that the city was restored.

His prayer of 2,400 years ago will yet affect the matters of nations at the end of this age.

blessed by the Gospel as the result of these happenings than that they were not.

During times of providential upheaval the Spirit of God uses circumstances to awaken men and at the same time uses the people of God to bear the message of the Gospel to those thus exercised. It is also usual to see a time of visitation followed by a harvest of souls.

May the Lord bless these and the following meditations in His Word and make His people more and more intelligent of His ways in both Providence and Redemption, so that they may be more effective witnesses for Him in these difficult days, witnesses who shall be able to explain God instead of trying to excuse Him. And may His people's knowledge of Him and His goodness result in that nearer intercourse with Him which will enable them, as intercessors, to give more pleasure to Him, and to be of greater blessing to their fellow-travellers to eternity.

## PART II

### *The Destiny of Nations*

**T**HE nations, formed by God long centuries ago, who have been the subjects of God's providences, will, in the persons who compose their remnants (after God has taken out the several companies referred to in the chapter on "The Purposes of God"), enter into their destiny at the second Advent of Christ, when, revealed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He will inaugurate the kingdom prepared in the purposes of God from the foundation of the world. Then the preserved and prepared remnant of each nation will enjoy the blessings that God has in store for men upon the earth.

God has designed to establish a reign of righteousness and peace under which healthy men, women and children shall live in an environment as congenial and beautiful as Eden, and as prosperous and wealthy as in the days of Solomon. Nature, liberated from the curse of the Fall, will don a new garment of glory at the command of its Creator King and rejoice to wear its beauty for His praise.

Isaiah rejoiced to tell of a time when

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God" (Isa. xxxv. 1-2).

The stately glory of Lebanon, the fragrance of Carmel and the beauty of Sharon contrast strangely with the pollutions of civilisation's factories and slums, and the steadier and gentler life of the former with the ruthlessness of modern rush and bustle. Man's belauded inventions, with all their jangle and complexity, will be removed, to make way for God's original peaceful garden-scene, and, the excellency of man, in which there are so many paradoxes, will give place to the excellency of God, in which there will be no inconsistency or blot. Luxuriant sunshine and showers of blessing upon delightful nature will cause earth to yield her increase, so that the rich harvest will

make the threshing reach to the vintage and the vintage to the sowing time.

In the midst of its wealth and beauty the animal creation will lose that wildness and lust for blood which have marked it since it lost its due subjection at the fall of Adam. For the lion shall eat straw like the bullock and the wolf and the lamb feed together. A delightful picture of health and safe child life amongst the tamed and beautiful animals is given us by the same prophet of glory, who bursts forth,

“And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. xi. 6-9).

This lovely scene of animal pacification and gentleness is enhanced by the mingling pictures of unimpaired and happy childhood. Without mention of years, three ages of child life are suggested: a little child, the toddler of three, four or five years, safe and at home, leads the majestic creatures of God’s creation; the weaned child, released from its mother’s arms, shall find no hurt follow its infantile sport; and the child at its mother’s breast, so young and defenceless, will need no defence, for no danger will exist even from adder or asp.

These children born to healthy parents will know nothing of sickness and disease; “Jehovah the Healer” will be their King.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing” (Isa. xxxv. 5 and 6).

Disease and death which fled before the word of His power when He visited earth in lowly guise, will flee again when He takes the reins of government.

The great variety of national types shall grace the lands that God has apportioned to them. The mystic character of the Easterner will perceive the deep beauties of the King and the mysteries of His purposes. The relentlessness of the Prussian will be the goad of his

devotion to God. The matter-of-fact, the romantic, the demonstrative nations, all will have their place and yield their devotion and homage to the Lord, blending as in the beautiful pattern of a great mosaic.

No armies shall find place in that scene, for they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; returning to pastoral pursuits, they will learn war no more; cultivation rather than destruction will be the tenor of their way and the Lord shall be King over all the earth. "In that day shall the Lord be one and His name one." One supreme absolute Monarch of perfect wisdom and perfect love reigning sacredly as a Priest upon His throne will be the object of the worship of the nations who, desiring to learn His ways, will seek His temple for instruction. Thus instructed they will all see eye to eye. And the various nations, with the variety of character in each, shall live in a great religious, social and political harmony, the music of which shall ascend to God from sunrise to sunset.

"A King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment." The Lord, being exalted and dwelling on high, will fill Zion with judgment (discernment) and righteousness and there shall be stability in those times, abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge, and the people shall treasure the fear of the Lord. "The work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever." Israel, Egypt, Assyria, Edom, Moab, Ammon, the coasts of the Mediterranean, and all the nations of the far corners of the earth ruled in this way, will no more walk in the stubbornness of their own evil hearts, but will rejoice in the knowledge of the Lord.

They will live out their days without deceiver, for Satan will be bound; without contamination, for sin will be swept away; without war, wildness, snare, error, want, sickness, hospitals, prisons, gallows, slums, poor, oppression, injustice, ignorance. The sacred wisdom, knowledge and experience of previous ages, the spread of truth under priestly education, will bless those times.

Knowledge will be diffused throughout the earth by the teachers of Israel and will be inculcated from the Holy Word of God aided by the ceremonies of the object-lesson sacrifices in the great Millennial Temple described by Ezekiel (xl. to xlviii.). There will be enacted before the eyes of all the nations the great sacrifices of Ezekiel's

description (not that they will put away sin any more than the sacrifices of ancient days did, but they will illustrate the one great sacrifice of Calvary). As the ascending offerings rise before God in incense-fragrance, those born in that age will learn how He, who is their King, once offered Himself without spot to God, how at Calvary He yielded that fragrant life for the glory and pleasure of His God, and as they see the sin-offering they will learn that by His sufferings for them He made purification for sin.

In those days the meaning of Jacob's prophecy will be enjoyed by them all, "Unto him shall the gathering of the peoples be," and the promise to Abraham will be realised that in Him "shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves."

He shall be the boast and glory of men, the object of their praise and their fear, and the wonders of His atoning work shall be their sacred meditation. Thus "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

There is a spiritual direction in human affairs, "for it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jer. x. 23). We have shown in the chapter on the government of nations that there is a spiritual realm which governs this human realm. At present in that spiritual realm there is a prince of darkness who governs contrary to God and human good. Adam, by his revolt against God, sold himself and his line to the slavery of sin and Satan, who has evolved a system known as the World; so that unsaved men walking the ordinary course of life are walking "according to the Prince of the Power of the air." But it will not be so in the age to come. The destiny of nations will be a time of emancipation from the intrigues and machinations of the evil one. The day is coming when Satan will be dethroned (Rev. xii. 7-9) and bound (Rev. xx. 1-3), and the places he and his angels have occupied will be filled with redeemed men, whose characters have been moulded by the Divine education of earthly pilgrimage. Perfected as their Lord (Luke vi. 40 and Heb. v. 8), they will share with Him (2 Tim. ii. 12) the rule of the age of regeneration (Matt. xix. 28). For "Unto angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whercof we speak." At present we see Jesus crowned . . . and God bringing many sons to glory (Heb. ii. 5), but when that glory shall be fully realised in the unveiling of Christ, men upon earth shall be ruled by men in Heaven, headed by THE Man Who, by the grace of God, tasted

death for every man. Then the human touch, graced by Divine character, will administer all the movements of earth. Sinners, saved by grace and perfected to be partakers of His holiness, will benignantly administer from the skies a restored earth and an adorned humanity, and will realise for man the destiny of nations and the object of God in the inception and development of nations.

It has often been asked, how the great change between the age of the Church, and the age of the Kingdom in its full manifestation of material blessings will come about; by what mode of transition, and by what stages. In an endeavour to help along this line of enquiry the following section on the end of the age has been penned. It shows that the methods of moral government, which have been partial in the way that they have operated through the ages, will become exhaustive at the end of the age, and at the same time serve to remove the rebellious of the nations, and prepare a remnant in the midst of each which will enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom on earth.

## *The End of the Age*

### (I) THE END OF THE AGE

THE Bible unfolds many mysteries of the past and unveils many wonders of the future. We have discovered how God in His providence originated the nations, and distributed them to the lands He had previously formed, and have seen some of the principles by which their circumstances are controlled. Now we draw again from its rich treasure, but our eyes are directed to destinies rather than to origins. Prophecies of future things occupy a large proportion of the Bible, and their object is to enlighten us about the end of this age, and to show how it will close, and how God will introduce an age of rest and blessing.

Human history has been divided into periods of irregular length, styled in Scripture "ages." The Cross came at the end of certain ages, when Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. This crisis of the first Advent concluded a previous age and began the present one, which will end in the crisis of the second Advent at the future unveiling of the Lord Jesus, when He will again appear apart from the question of sin, unto salvation (Heb. ix. 24-28). This "appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13) will inaugurate the "age to come," which has been the expectation of inspired prophets, the song of Scripture poets and the desire of the godly of all ages.

The same Jesus who was "received up in Glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16), will come "in the glory of His Father and His angels" (Matt. xvi. 27) and, amidst the myriads of His Holy Ones, will execute judgment on the ungodly (Jude 14-15). Resurrection will bring to the glory of the new age those who have died in faith; the godly will be recompensed and enjoy eternal life (Matt. x. 30); the Lord Jesus, reigning in power and righteousness, shall cause creation's groan to cease, liberating it from the bondage of corruption and restoring earth to

Eden's fruitfulness and beauty; nations will learn war no more ; a world of redeemed men will unitedly praise and serve the Saviour who saved them and God who blesses them; and "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace amongst men in whom He is well pleased (Luke ii. 14)," will be realised to the full.

## (2) THE "PAROUSIA" AND TRANSITION

The happenings which will take place relative to the return of Christ will require a period of years for their fulfilment as did the happenings of His first coming and His presence among men. This period of years may be as long as that which related to the first coming. Converging upon the time of the second coming there are many other prophecies that will be fulfilled at points along its period of years, however many they be. Some have suggested seven, others as many as seventy. There hardly can be fewer than seven or as many as seventy. Perhaps the analogy of the duration of the first coming and what followed in our Lord's presence here will prove to be nearer the truth. This period of years will constitute a transition from the conditions of this age to those of the Kingdom in its full glory and is spoken of as the "end of the age."

The Lord Jesus is now exalted in the place of highest authority, angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to Him; and, as Head over all things, He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens, glorified with all the "glory that He had before the world was." What a miracle does Heaven hold! The glory of eternal Deity shining out in His body that still bears the marks of His passion and the anguish of Calvary. At present His power is concentrated upon the work of the Gospel and the formation of the Church, and to this end He acts, as well in the governmental realm, in the blessed character of a "Prince and a Saviour."

Even so, at present the predominating offices He fills are those of High Priest and Advocate of His people and Saviour of all those that in repentance toward God put their trust in Him.

When He comes again, in virtue of the rights won at Calvary, with the full power with which He is invested by the court described in Rev. iv. and v., He will rid the earth of everything that has not "Himself" for its foundation and centre and every one who has not enthroned Him in his heart as Saviour and Lord, and His ensuing reign of unveiled and outshining power and glory will be in contrast to the indirect and hidden form of His working during the present age.

In the transitional period of the end of the age, between the present

and future forms of His power, the visitations of God, that have previously been partial, will become exhaustive; then, summary justice will deal absolutely with all forms of sin, political, religious and moral, and the happenings of that generation, bringing to a head the sins of the age, will result in the systems of the present being displaced by the order more fully described in the chapters on the "Destiny of Nations" and "The Kingdom of God."

The Epistles, from the heavenly side, and the aspect of the Church show that period the course of which from the earthly side and the aspect of the world is described in Matt. xxiv. The Book of the Revelation, in chaps. iv. to xix., deals with both aspects of the same period and shows how Christ will control the providential judgments of God so as to bring the age to the climax of His appearing.

A number of interesting words are used by the Holy Spirit in His teaching of the return of Christ, each of which is a study in itself. But it is essential to right views of the coming to understand the sense of the most frequently used term "parousia." It is a Greek word which occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament: twice rendered "*presence*," and twenty-two times "*coming*." Liddell and Scott say that it primarily means "*a being present*." It requires more than the idea of arrival and rather emphasises the consequent presence upon and after arrival. Its use in the following places establishes this meaning:—

- 1 Cor. xvi. 17 : the presence of Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus with Paul ;  
 2 Cor. vii. 6 } : the presence of Titus with Paul ;  
 „ vii. 7 }  
 Phil. i. 26 } : Paul's presence with the Philippians ;  
 „ ii. 12 }  
 2 Cor. x. 10 : Paul's presence with the Corinthians.

It is used of the first coming of Christ when, in 2 Peter i. 16, Peter, describing the presence of the Lord Jesus on earth, made particular mention of His being with them on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Peter uses it again in the third chapter in regard to the dissolution of the heavens and earth when the day of God will be present.

In the remaining cases it is used with reference to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. James v. 7 and 8 and 2 Peter iii. 4 use it when speaking of the coming in a general way, but, in the following list, it conveys four ideas which form a sequence:—

- |                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 1 Thess. iv. 15 | } | the idea of meeting His people, who will be caught up to meet Him in the air, as the Lord Himself descends from Heaven.  |
| 2 „ ii. 1       |   |  |
| 1 Thess. ii. 19 | } | the idea of His presence with His people, who have been caught away from earth, and who will be presented before God. Then they will stand before the Judgment-Seat of Christ. |
| „ iii. 13       |   |  |
| „ v. 23         |   |  |
| 1 John ii. 28   |   |  |
| 2 Thess. ii. 8  | } | the idea of that presence, in glory with His people, shining out to earth to the destruction of the Man of Sin.  |
|                 |   |  |

At this point of the outshining of His Parousia (rendered in the Authorised Version, “brightness of his coming”), the “revelation” of the Epistles converges with that of Matt. xxiv., in which the disciples ask about the signs of the Parousia and the end of the age (Matt. xxiv. 3). The further occasions, Matt. xxiv. 27, 37 and 39, refer to the same “brightness of his coming” as 2 Thess. ii. 8, and describe the lightning-like brilliance and suddenness of the outshining of His presence to an unexpected and sin-blinded world with the result that the wicked will be removed from earth as they were by the flood of Noah’s day.

### (3) TRANSLATION AT THE END OF THE AGE

At present death is the only way by which men pass out of this world and enter unseen realms. But there are exceptions to the rule: Enoch and Elijah were translated. At the end of the age at least one mass translation will take place, though others may be inferred. "Enoch was translated, that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him" (Heb. xi. 5). The removal of Enoch in this exceptional way is an illustration of that translation of masses, spoken of by the Apostle in his Epistles to the believers at Corinth (addressed at the same time to "all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"). He says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery (or secret): we shall not all sleep (or die), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv. 51). When that moment has come, it will be true of all genuine Christians as it was of Enoch, that they shall not be found, because God will have translated them.

The Pauline ministry, which became possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit following the exaltation of Christ, unfolds for the first time this great secret. Though the germ of the idea may be discerned in the words of the Lord to the disciples in the upper room, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I come again and will receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2-4). Nevertheless, it was left obscure until the teaching from the Throne fulfilled the desire of Christ expressed in the words to the disciples, "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John xvi. 12 and 13). The translation of saints was one of the many things He desired to speak of, which they were unable to receive; but after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, truth previously hidden from Apostles becomes evident even to young believers.

A knowledge of the times and seasons was impossible to the Apostles as they questioned the Lord just before He was taken up (Acts i. 6 and 7), but less than twenty years afterwards it was unnecessary

to write to the Thessalonian converts in explanation of the times and seasons (1 Thess. v. 1), for they, although saved so short a while, entered into that which at the previous time was hidden from those who companied with Christ. This progress of doctrine had become real through the continuation of the work of teaching, left unfinished by Christ when He went to the Cross; but when He mounted the Throne He shed forth the Spirit at Pentecost and thus unfolded, as believers were empowered to receive, new revelations explaining the character and purpose of the new age of the Church and the great crisis when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16), and inaugurate the "parousia." It is explained that then the dead in Christ shall rise first and we—referring to believers alive on earth—shall "together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. iv. 16-18). In one grand instant, in the twinkling of an eye, the great translation of believers will take place; in a flash they will be changed, as they are winged with lightning-like rapidity to meet Him Whom not having seen they love.

This waiting "for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 10) is the proper hope and normal outlook of those who have been turned to God. Out of the commonwealth in the heavens, they look for, as Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change their body of humiliation so that it shall be brought into conformity to His body of glory (Phil. iii. 20 and 21). Heaven will be made the richer as the vast Church, gathered out of all the nations, having served the purpose of God upon earth, will realise the Bridal Glory for which she was chosen, designed and destined from before the foundation of the world, to be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. i. 22-23).

But the enrichment of Heaven will prove to be the impoverishment of earth because of the removal of so many whose presence has acted as salt and light. Hastened corruption and increased darkness will be the result. In the midst of this, God will exert correspondingly greater power to bring to the feet of the Saviour other companies of believers.

Of the unbelievers who are left upon earth at the rapture, some will come within the threefold designation of 2 Thess. ii. 9-12.

1. "they received not the love of the truth," v. 10. This shows that the truth had been offered to them previously, but that they received it not.

2. "they believed not the truth;" v. 12 implies that they had previously declined to believe the truth that was set before them.

3. "but rather had pleasure in unrighteousness;" v. 12 shows that a choice had been made against the love of the truth that would have saved them, and in favour of their pleasure in unrighteousness.

These unbelievers will not only forfeit the opportunity of salvation after the rapture, but will by their rejection of the Gospel ensure for themselves the delusion of the Man of Sin (2 Thess. ii. 10) and most surely find themselves among the ranks of the apostates who, worshipping Satan's Christ, will with him go into perdition (2 Thess. ii. 11 and 12). In this way the Rapture of the Church will seal the doom of thousands familiar with the Gospel.

Whilst this is so, it must be made clear that all upon earth do not come within the threefold designation just referred to. There are millions who have not heard the Gospel, for whom God will have a message after the Church is in His presence. As they are free of the condemnation of rejecting the Gospel of the grace of God, they will be allowed the opportunity of salvation during the time between the removal of the Church and the dawn of the Kingdom. In those days Christ will be preached throughout the whole world as the same Saviour and Sacrifice with especial emphasis on His coming as the King. This Gospel of the Kingdom will be heralded to all the nations (Matt. xxiv. 14), the ranks of whom will be swelled by the rising generation who come to maturity in the passage of those years of the transitional period on earth concurrent with the "parousia" of the Lord with His previously translated people; and though their days will be lived in earth's darkest period, the power of God and the preaching of Christ will be fruitful to the extent that a great multitude will be saved out of "the great tribulation" to fill Levitical usefulness and blessing in the sacred courts of the true tabernacle of Heaven, where they are seen "before the throne of God" through having "washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 9 to end).

Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and the sovereignty of God will ensure that He is never left without a witness. Whatever the time or conditions on earth, the "man of God" is present and "vessels meet for the Master's use are found." After the removal of the Church the company of Rev. vii. 1-8, spoken of as bondservants of our God (v. 3), miraculously sealed, will be raised up for service on earth and will be empowered by the Divine agent of Christ, the Holy Ghost, who will secure the glory of Christ in that day by this ministry of the "Maschilim," as Daniel terms them, who knowing their God "shall be strong and work," instructing many and turning many to righteousness, eventually shining as the sun when they in their glory fulfil the type of the Cherethites and Pelethites, who accompanied David as personal attendants, couriers and bodyguard; for they will be with the Lamb "whithersoever he goeth" and sing that peculiar song of triumph that can be learned by no other (Rev. xiv. 1-7).

These companies are seen in Heaven in their heavenly position waiting for the kingdom age. And that they are seen in heaven before the age commences, suggests that they are translated from earth as the two witnesses of Revelation, chap. xi., are plainly stated to be. It cannot be that they compose the Church, for they retain their separate Jewish and Gentile character, whilst those of the Church lose their Jewish or Gentile position and designation, on becoming Christians. It is well to observe the implication of this, demanding as it does that the economy of the Body of Christ ceased before the tribulation. Those who retain their separate character come out of the great tribulation (Rev. vii. 14). Did the economy of the body of Christ continue until the great tribulation, then there is no purpose in their being thus separately distinguished. The burden of the Epistle to the Ephesians is to show that all in this age are made one in Christ Jesus. But no flight of imagination could make the 144,000 and the great multitude of Gentiles one; they are two companies in their inception, two companies in their destiny, two companies in their activities in glory. Each forms one of the families of the heavens of which the Apostle speaks in Eph. iii. 15 (compare Rom. ix. 25 and 26), sharing with the separate company, the Church, and the Sovereign Christ administrative glory in the coming age.

The magnitude of Christ's work at Calvary is brought home to

our hearts as we discern the different companies redeemed in virtue of it. The following table will repay perusal:—

(a) OLD TESTAMENT COMPANIES

*Gentile*

From Abel to the dying thief innumerable millions like Job, Melchisedec, the Queen of Sheba, and the many of whom Christ spoke in the words to the centurion, "Many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. viii. 11).

*Jewish*

The believing Jews of the whole period from Abraham to Christ. This includes all the nobles of faith and the unmentioned millions who discerned in Tabernacle offerings and Temple sacrifices the shadow and picture of the nobler work of Calvary, when "His (Messiah's) soul shall make an offering for sin."

(b) THE NEW TESTAMENT COMPANY

The Church, the "Ekklesia," called out by the Gospel from all the nations of earth between the day of Pentecost and the moment of the Rapture (Matt. xvi. 18).

(c) THE GREAT TRIBULATION COMPANIES

The 144,000 Jewish saints who will be the bondservants of our God in the dark days of the end (Rev. vii. 3 and 4), miraculously sealed and maintained to do their unique work in earth's darkest day.

The innumerable multitudes saved during the great tribulation (Rev. vii. 14) from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, washed in the blood of the Lamb, thus fitted for the heavenly sanctuary and its Levitical work (Rev. vii. 9 to end).

(d) THE REMNANTS FORMED AFTERWARD

In the section on the "Everlasting Gospel" it is explained that the prophets show God-fearing remnants within each nation, produced by the mercy of God to form the nucleus of the millennial earth.

They will be the parents of that vast populace who will praise and serve the Great King in the coming age.

It would be presumption to suggest a number for any of these companies (except perhaps the 144,000, and that number may be symbolic). All these myriads of myriads from every age are saved by the same Saviour on the same principle of grace and the same condition of faith and are brought to different positions in the economy of the Kingdom of God.

#### (4) THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION ABOUT IT

The disciples who were with the Lord when He turned His back upon the Temple, were gripped by His closing words to the Jewish people, "Ye shall not see me henceforth until ye shall say blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. xxiii. 39). This drew out the questions, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?" They desired to know the signs of the end of the age and the great changes that will take place in the transitional period on the eve of His coming as the King. He does not disappoint the earnest enquirers, but gives them a word-picture of the generation (Matt. xxiv. 34) that will conclude this age, of which vv. 4 to 34 of Matt. xxiv. are a description. Even this lengthy account does not content the perfect Prophet and Teacher, Who further enlarges and explains His word-picture by seven parables that follow, filling, as they do, the rest of the chapter and the whole of the next.

The first three parables have special encouragement for us in our enquiry about the end of the age, and are also the easiest of interpretation, namely, the parable of the fig-tree, the days of Noah, and the parable of the householder. Just as the tender branch and the new leaves of the fig-tree are one of nature's signs of coming summer, so there will be signs of the summer of His power and glory when it is near. The point of this parable is to emphasise the *fact* of signs, and to show that the signs of the times and seasons may be read as easily in the moral, religious and political conditions of the nations as the signs of summer in the leaves and branches of the fig-tree.

The second parable demonstrates the *need* of signs; for the days of the end of this age will be as the days of Noah were, strangely animated, gay and deceiving; the earth dwellers of Noah's day were so occupied that the flood took them by surprise, and, finding them outside the ark of God's provision, swept them all away. There is a need of signs to make the godly in our day aware of the end, and to awaken the unbeliever.

The message of the third parable might be summed up in the words, "*forewarned is forearmed*," establishing, as it does, the *value* of signs. If the householder could have had a sign of the coming of the thief, he would have been prepared and so have saved himself the

loss resulting from having his house broken into. It is clear the Lord wished to teach that there are signs to meet the great need of guidance in the deceptive days of the end, their object being to unmask the evils and deceptions and to warn of, and awaken to preparation against, the spiritual and moral dangers of the last days.

The most prominent features of the word-picture of the end of the age are,

1. wars and rumours of wars,
2. racial antagonism,
3. contrariety of kingdoms,
4. famines,
5. pestilences,
6. earthquakes,
7. persecution of the godly and the need of their endurance,
8. installation of the idol which was the subject of Daniel's prophecy,
9. the greatest tribulation of human history,
10. physical disturbances in the sun, moon and stars,
11. sign of the Son of Man,
12. His actual appearance in Glory.

It is not difficult to recognise among these features of the end of the age some of the more severe forms of Divine visitation common to previous ages, but evidently intensified and more widespread. They are portrayed symbolically by the four horsemen of the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse, who are given authority over so large an area as the fourth part of the earth, with the result that sword, famine, death and beasts of the earth hold destructive sway.

A further feature that we have observed before is found present in these coming happenings, namely a time of intense persecution of the believers who will belong to that period, caused by the earth dwellers, venting their rancour upon the godly, when God rises up in retributive justice.

Most sinister of all, an "abomination of desolation" standing in a holy place will be the herald of a time of tribulation, unequalled by anything that has swept the earth since creation (Matt. xxiv. 21; Mark xiii. 19). The Jewish nation will then experience more severe affliction than they have known since the inception of the nation

(Dan. xii. 1). Daniel speaks of a sinister figure who will come to power in the latter days. Paul tells us of one who will even claim divine honours and set himself above every object of worship (2 Thess. ii. 4); and the Apocalypse declares that power will be given to him for a short period of forty-two months over peoples, nations, tribes and languages (Rev. xiii. 5). In those days, men will be unable either to buy or sell, unless they wear the badge of state homage and emperor worship, and bow the knee to the wonder-working image of the emperor, which will be raised up by the False Prophet who will use his art and cunning upon mankind to subjugate them to the great Emperor (see chap. xiii. of Revelation).

The extraordinary tribulation and persecution resulting from the presence and power of this person, energised by Satan, will be cut short by tremendous physical disturbances in the heavens and the earth. The sun, moon and certain kinds of stars will be affected and earthquakes will shatter cities and systems, all of which will change earth's face and culminate in the appearance of the Lord Jesus in His glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The storm thus brought to its awful climax will, by death and destruction, remove the ungodly from palace and cot, and afterward subside into the peace of the thousand years' reign of the Prince of Peace.

In this manner the Lord Jesus described the end of the age and prefaced the description by the words, "Let no man deceive you." The idea that the world will improve, its systems get better and better, is a deception. There is no hope for the world. Prophets, Epistles, the Lord Jesus and the Apocalypse unite in one voice, solemnly warning us that to press on to greater efforts to remove the world's troubles results in greater troubles. Only those who return to God and shew repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ have any real hope. "HE" is their hope, and, it is their privilege to wait for the Son of God from Heaven and the ensuing demonstration of His power.

Whatever the measure of temporal blessing God will grant from our days to the actual end of the age, whatever degree of peace, will be short lived and will be granted more upon the principle by which God would have saved Sodom, because of the godly in its midst, than upon the principle by which He saved Nineveh, because of general repentance by the people.

The description of the end of the age and its distinguishing signs is not limited to the chapter of Matthew, but is the object of all prophecy. Will it surprise us to find that three-fifths of the Bible is prophecy, and that nine-tenths, if not all, of the prophetic word converges upon the end of this age? The spirit of the prophets, who each minister to present and local needs of their own people, is projected into the latter days; so, out of local pictures and nearer happenings, they soar to speak of the end of the age in most of their orations. The anointed eye of the obedient believer and true bond-servant may thus discern descriptions of events of the end-time. The prophets saw the burden of Egypt, Babylon and Tyre, depicting things never yet exhaustively fulfilled, even though they appear in some measure to have taken place. They describe for us Palestine and Jerusalem, and unfold particulars of commercial greatness, social behaviour and political importance that will belong to the nations that surround the cradle of the race in lands at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean. Already this war has brought these lands into prominence, and if we are near enough to the end, as we perhaps are, to a prominence that might well increase. It is not a little unfortunate that the horizon of some students of prophecy has been bounded by certain chapters of Daniel and one or two particular chapters of Ezekiel, and constricted by school opinions. This has affected the whole study and led to predictions a year or two ago that the Axis would not function. Had these students given more attention to wider prophetic outlook they would have saved themselves folly, and, what is more, saved prophetic study from being brought into a measure of discredit. All the minor prophets are projected in spirit to the end of the age and all the major prophets, too, not to speak of the Psalms and the prophecies found amongst the words of Jacob, Balaam, Moses and others. But though there is so much revealed, our short chapter can do no more than touch a few general features that will help us to see the governmental ways of God in the end of this age and the opening of the age to come; we shall therefore, in line with earlier chapters, consider some of the political, religious and moral features of the end, which call forth the judgments which will conclude this age and inaugurate the coming one.

## (5) THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK

The idea of Federal Rule for earth is becoming current in widening circles. Men are talking about a United States of Europe and some have mooted a more ambitious scheme for a United States of the World. Statesmen of this and other countries hope that it will prove the solution to many present-day international problems. From a natural point of view it seems the most feasible scheme and the most hopeful way of dealing with aggression and oppression.

Although the idea appears new it has been spoken of before. Tennyson dreamed of a commonwealth of the world and others have visualised a strong imperial league able to control and administer the affairs of the earth. But long before the birth of present-day statesmen and the days of the great poet, the Bible foretold Federal Rule. In several prophetic visions God has given foreviews of a Great United States. As early as the days of Daniel the prophet, more than five hundred years before Christ, two visions were given clearly predicting that in the last days, immediately prior to the second Advent, a Federal Empire would hold the reins of world sovereignty.

The first vision given to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii. 45) was of a metal colossus, human in form and composed of gold, silver, brass and iron. The complete human figure was used to depict human rule, from Nebuchadnezzar's time until the days of Divine Rule in the Kingdom of God. The metals denote four forms of rule which have been fulfilled in turn in the Empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Just before the Kingdom of God displaces all other forms of rule, world empire is portrayed as the feet and toes of the image, composed of iron with an added substance, clay. These two elements are interpreted for us and it is easy to recognise around us now the methods of government depicted by them; in fact their antithesis is the cause of conflict at present. The iron of the legs of the image is a figure of the Roman form of government, the harshness of which is revived in Nazism and Fascism, which sacrifice the individual to the state. But the clay

of the feet, which prevents the full power of the totalitarian element, rendering it brittle, and interpreted as, "the seed of men" in the place of rule, clearly sets forth the power of democracy. Eventually the vision shows a federation of ten kings (Dan. ii. 43-44) who jointly administer world affairs. The interpretation is confirmed by the second vision given to Daniel (vii.), which by means of four monstrous beasts shows the same succession of empires. The fourth beast is shown with ten horns in its head, which are interpreted as a confederacy of ten rulers (Dan. vii. 17 and 23), who in the subsequent vision of Revelation are said to be united in power and rule for a short time before the heavenly kingdom is realised in the world (Rev. xvii. 12-14).

It is the purpose of prophecy to show the end, the climax, of any movement of which it treats; thus the value of prophecy to the Christian is evident, as it shows him how things will turn out at the end of the age. It is made clear in the Book of the Revelation that a federation of the world will not result in peace for the world. As a matter of fact, in spite of all the federation's efforts and power, the end of the age will be a time of unparalleled strife and unrest. What a world of paradoxes this is! In our days there have been immense efforts for peace, but now a most disastrous war; tremendous energy expended and great brains used for the preservation of life and health, but now even more energy expended and greater brains used for the destruction of life; never was there more refinement in the world, yet never more barbarism; never more education, yet never more blindness; never greater efforts at unity, yet never less cohesion; and in the future, however good the method used or however pure the motives of good men and women, Federal Rule will fail to bring peace and will fail to secure settled and lasting prosperity and rest for men. Human history is a long story of attempt and failure, more attempt and more failure, greater attempt and greater failure, and it will yet be the story of the greatest attempts, and of their proving the greatest failures; all because men fail to see that circumstances depend upon attitude toward God and behaviour before Him.

Peace does not depend upon condition of rule or order of environment but upon the moral and spiritual condition of the nations. Peace and blessing come down from God; they cannot be manufactured synthetically or be "got up" on earth, though the world

unite in the attempt. We have proved that the government of circumstances operates according to moral and spiritual principles; so, whatever be the efforts of politicians or idealists, the moral and religious evils of the end of the age will bring in their wake all the forms of visitation that human history has seen.

## (6) THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

### (a) PRESENT DRIFT

The New Testament contains serious warnings about the condition of the churches at the end of the age. A special message is given by the Spirit telling us that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith (1 Tim. iv. 1), drawn from pristine truth by other doctrines, taught by no less evil teachers than demons. We are told that these men, hypocritical and having cheated their own consciences, will become the exponents of the teachings that have seduced them (see 1 Tim. iv. 1-7). The warning is repeated in Peter's Epistle: "there shall be false teachers who will stealthily introduce destructive sects and pursue practices that cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of" (2 Peter ii.). This departure from the original teachings of the Lord and His chosen followers will be aided by tolerance and lack of conviction on the part of those who do not themselves depart from the faith. A Laodicean luke-warmness and apathy, coupled with lack of appetite for the wholesome Word of God, will rob many of the power to withstand the encroachments of error.

Jude traces the development of religious evil in three stages: the way of Cain, the error of Balaam for hire, and the gainsaying of Korah (Jude 11). Cain's bloodless sacrifice identifies the way of Cain and makes it easy to recognise in our day those who follow that way. Atonement by blood is the demand of God, satisfied at Calvary by the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus. But those who follow the path of human effort, in contrast to faith in the work of Christ alone, have already started on the path of apostasy. How very largely is this characteristic seen in churches to-day, as the masses are taught to profess religion, do the best they can, and hope for heaven! The next stage of evil is seen in the error of Balaam, who was prepared to compromise principle to add to his worldly position and wealth. The true men and women of God in all ages have been marked by readiness to sacrifice position, wealth and even their lives for the principles they have learned by revelation from the Scriptures. But the ranks of the class that suppose gain in this world to be godliness, increase, and even draw into their number true believers who

lack the conviction and faith to stand out against the allurements of the world and the general drift. The final stage of apostasy is traced in the term, "the gainsaying of Korah." He who was a priest amidst the people of God stood up publicly to oppose the truth. The reader will hardly need the matter to be made clearer. Already in the highest places of almost every religious body in Christendom there are those bold enough to stand up to oppose fundamental truth, teaching what they claim is advance and progress.

The Scriptures hold out no hope whatever of general recovery. In fact, the pictures of the churches at the end are depressing. Even of true believers it is predicted that the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but, having "itching ears," will multiply teachers for the sake of variety of voice and style, and choose them according to the measure in which they please the ear and satisfy the taste of the people. The criterion will not be the Word of God alone, but a measure of the Word of God diluted by, and adjusted to, the ideas of the hearers. No wonder Jude was spurred by a parallel need to exhort the believers to contend earnestly for the faith. But the strategy of the Christian is to build up himself, rather than contend with those who depart from the faith. To this end Jude urges four things upon true believers, so that they shall be able to quit themselves like men:

1. "building up yourselves upon your most  
holy faith . . . . . : Doctrine,
2. praying in the Holy Spirit . . . . . : Devotion,
3. keep yourselves in the love of God . . . . . : The atmosphere of the  
soul,
4. looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus  
Christ unto eternal life" . . . . . : The outlook and hope.

Believers who do not continue to build up themselves, and who fail in devotion and hope, will contribute to the decline and aid the tide of religious evil by their own personal defeat.

#### (b) EVENTUAL APOSTASY

The Book of the Revelation is the book of climaxes, where we find the end of every road. There is a threefold blessing promised to those who will interest themselves in it. "Blessed is he that

readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein" (Rev. i. 3). With this encouragement we turn to its pages to find the climax of religion and the last picture of the religious world of the end of the age. The first three chapters are full of instruction, and in them the Lord Jesus is seen judging the churches, condemning evils, commending right, giving counsel, promising rewards, altogether giving us what amounts to a foreview of the "Bema" or Judgment-Seat of Christ, at which believers will suffer the loss of the works which have not been pleasing to Him, whilst others will receive reward for faithfulness. But it is to the seventeenth chapter that we turn for final instruction. Symbolised by a domineering, rich, unfaithful woman, the religions of the world are united at the end. Instead of their being faithful to God and an absent Lord, they are described as a woman that is a harlot. No longer poor like her Lord, for His lowly character has been rejected and exchanged for worldly wealth, she has cast off subjection and become subjugating, dominating not only her devotees of all nations, but the throne of world power itself. The picture is so striking that the question starts almost involuntarily, "How does it become thus?" Plans well and deeply laid by Satan, the Prince of earthly religion, adjusted to the tastes of human kind, will then have ripened fully. This great unity of religious power is the result of a secret system which has operated on earth since soon after the Flood, and has produced every religion of the world in its turn. Those religions, appearing on the surface to be so different, will show under a little examination striking likenesses. Confucianism, Buddhism, Lamaism, Greek Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Modern Anglicanism, Modern Nonconformity, and a whole crop of American cults, all make salvation largely dependent upon human effort, in contrast to the Scriptures, which conclude man under sin, shutting him up to a salvation without effort, a salvation procured by the death of Christ, so that the glory of salvation shall be to the Lord alone. Justification by faith is the hall-mark of the one Truth from Eden to the New Heavens and the New Earth, in contrast to which justification by human effort is the brand mark of one error presented in many forms from Cain to Antichrist. It has ever been the practice of the evil one to use what is Divine and to add something palatable to the truth, just as the woman adds the leaven to the meal, and so corrupts the whole. To preach that man cannot

help himself, but must cast himself entirely on the mercy of God and rest wholly on the sacrifice of Christ, has no attraction for the natural man; but to tell him that he must do his bit towards it and hope that all will be right in the end, flatters his pride and completely deceives him.

To be able to measure anything a standard is required; and a lowered or adjusted standard will inevitably falsify the measurement. The Divine Revelation of the Bible is the only standard by which the veracity of religion or the correctness of morals can be measured. If that standard is neglected and set aside, deception will be more easily possible, and sin will multiply and increase in seriousness, unheeded and unrealised.

The religions of the world have all introduced into their beliefs and practices things unwarranted by God. By addition and going beyond the Scriptures a large percentage of what is done in the name of God is utterly without Divine direction, until a huge human superstructure, hiding the truth, changes the whole character of things and becomes worthy of the charge with which it is indicted, that of being a harlot. The churches are intended to be stewards of the Divine truth of the Scriptures and witnesses to the absent Lord Jesus; and "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Is it any wonder, then, that the Lord calls an unfaithful religious system a harlot? Plighted to Him, professing His name, she has turned aside to give pleasure to kings of the earth and the men of the world.

Over and over again Divine revelations once held in faith and love have been perverted and debased by man. It was so within a century after the Flood. Nimrodism was the product in that day. So again in the days of the Judges, when idolatry and lawlessness became widespread, and history has repeated itself in the departure of the ten tribes of Israel, in the failure of Judah, in the condition of the returned from the captivity, in the perverted Pharisaism that rejected Christ, putting Him on the Cross, in the errors and evils of the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, in the Papacy and its unmentionable evils of the dark ages; even in post-reformation days, the same perversion and debasement of truth is to be seen in Protestantism's loss of its "protest," denying to-day the very truths the reformers lived and died for. Again in Non-conformity the same thing has worked, until it may be asked whether there is one religious movement in England to-day that

is altogether faithful to the first principles of truth once held and which the founders of these movements bought at so great a price and upon which they built at so great a labour. In every case the process is the same. Introduction of the unwarranted, human innovation, development of the social side, as the ministry of truth is curtailed, have served like leaven to corrupt the meal and, like the abnormal growth of the mustard shrub, to change the character of the movements, to the extent that each has become the resting-place of those who are against God and His truth. It requires but the passage of time and the removal of the true believers from every system, for all those systems to come together into the strange unity and yet confusion so worthy of the Bible name of Babylon.

The present disunited state of religion is an anxiety to many, and already efforts to remedy this are operating. At the end they will attain almost complete success, uniting all the religions of the world in one universal system accommodated to the ideas of each constituent, but meriting, as we might expect, the judgment of God for its unfaithfulness.

Eventually when these religions unite in the coming bed of luxury, ease and world power, they will find it their death-bed, for the men of the world, banded together in their political federation, will destroy the systems that have duped them for so long, and thus carry out the Divine will upon what has been so unfaithful to God and His Word and so successful a servant of Satan (Rev. xvii. 16 and 17).

## (7) MORAL CONDITIONS OF THE END

In a dark paragraph on the last days the inspired Paul depicts abnormal times when iniquity shall abound and the old evils of heathenism return. He says, "Men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof" (2 Tim. iii. 1-5).

This advanced evil impending in the future has its parallel in the strikingly similar passage of Rom. i., and is produced by the very same means. In that chapter the moral state into which the nations of antiquity descended is described and the process which brought them into such depravity is traced. The same process is already at work in our day and a foreview of its consequence in general social behaviour is given us by the seer of the Revelation.

In ancient days the nations turned from the knowledge of God, rejecting the witness of creation and the light of revelation. Though they professed to be wise they were guilty of the great folly of turning from the worship of the Creator to the worship of the creature. They debased themselves to the worship of man, birds, beasts and creeping things in turn. The darkening effect of this became evident in deteriorating morals; they became like the degenerate objects they worshipped, and they were debased until their glory was in evil rather than good, and their boasting in the things of which they should have been ashamed.

In our day men have been immeasurably uplifted and enlightened. Directly or indirectly, the benediction of the spread of the Gospel, the light of the Bible and the fear of God have been felt by untold millions in the last few centuries. Wherever the Gospel has been received amongst the nations men have been spiritually, morally and mentally enlightened. But the old process is already at work, the decline has commenced, the rot set in. Men have been turning away from the light of the Scriptures and the witness of creation into the dim regions of human speculation and reason. Even now

some of the old fruits of this refusal to acknowledge God as God are to be seen: selfishness, greed, lack of natural affection, disobedience to parental control, love of pleasure and denial of the controlling power of revealed truth. As time goes on, evil men and seducers from true godliness and right morals will wax worse and worse, deceiving others and being themselves deceived. Professing enlightenment and liberty, they will become darkened in their philosophies and enslaved in their self-pleasing and sin, though claiming to be advancing; for as the true light is rejected, men can only recede into darkness, and a darkness as heathenish and immoral as that of the ancient world.

The conditions of the end of the age will corroborate the truth of the saying that history repeats itself. The moral horrors of ancient Rome, the gilded lie of Grecian culture, the superstition and cruelty of Assyrian and Egyptian days, will be repeated and attest the truth that man is helpless to live aright apart from submission to the Bible, the fear of God, and faith in His promises. The "Higher Criticism" has robbed many of confidence in the Bible, and the hypothesis of Evolution has stolen from others the sense of the reality and personality of an Eternal and Almighty God. Giving nothing in their place, these Satanic instruments have laid open many thousands of hearts to the allurements and deceptions of Eastern religions, Psychic Research, Astrology, Materialism and a score of supposedly new heresies. Insidiously these things are penetrating the masses of Europe already robbed of the fear of God and faith in the Bible; lawlessness in morals is rampant and philosophies teaching that might is right are accepted, and to be governed by high principles is even now regarded by many as prudishness.

The seer of Revelation describes the end, explaining in a couple of short verses the character and conduct of society when the present leaven has fully worked its corrupting process. A passage from Dr. Seiss's work on the Apocalypse will furnish us with ample exegesis of the two verses that close the ninth chapter of Revelation:

"And the rest of mankind, which were not killed with these plagues repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk: and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts" (Rev. ix. 20 and 21).

*Murder* will be amongst the commonest of crimes. Sensual and selfish passion will make sad havoc of human life, with no serious thought about it on the part of the leaders of public sentiment. Foeticide, infanticide, homicide and all forms of sin against human life will characterise society, and be tolerated and passed as if no great harm were done. And well would it be for us, if such were not largely the state of things even now.

*Sorceries*, impure practices with evil agencies, and particularly with poisonous drugs, is also given as one of the dominant forms of vice and sin in those days. The word specially includes tampering with one's own or another's health, by means of drugs, potions, intoxications, and often with magical arts and incantations, the invocation of spiritual agencies, the putting under influences promotive of sins of impurity both bodily and spiritual. We have only to think of the use of alcoholic stimulants, of opium, of tobacco, of the rage for cosmetics and medicaments to increase love attractions, of resorts to pharmacopoeia in connection with sensuality, of the magical agents and treatments alleged to come from the spirit world for the benefit of people in this, of the thousand impositions in the way of medicines and remedial agents, encouraging mankind to recklessness in transgression with the hope of easily repairing the damage of nature's penalties, of the growing prevalence of crime induced by these things, setting loose and stimulating to activity the vilest passions, which are eating out the moral sense of society, for the beginnings of the period when the sixth trumpet is sounded.

And interlinked with these sorceries, and reacting the one to the other, will also be the general subversion of marriage and its laws, and the deluging of society with the sins of fornication and adultery. The Apostle uses the word "fornication" alone, as embracing all forms of lewdness, but as if to intimate that marriage will then be hardly recognised any more. And already we hear the institution of legal wedlock denounced and condemned as tyrannical, and all rules, but those of affinity and desire, repudiated as unjust. Already in some circles we find the doctrines of "*free love*" put forth and defended in the name of right, a better religion, and a higher law. And it would be strange indeed if the revival of the old heathen philosophies and religions, which justified, sanctioned, and sanctified promiscuous concubinage, did not also bring with it a revival of all

these old heathen abominations. So also has the holy Apostle written that "in the last . . . men shall be . . . *incontinent*." And here the seer enumerates fornication as one of the outstanding features in the social character of those times.

And last in the catalogue stands the statement of general and abounding *dishonesty*, the obliteration of moral distinctions, the disregard of others' rights, and the practice of fraud, theft and deceit wherever it is possible. Pollock makes his ancient bard of earth tell of a time when—

"Blood trod upon the heels of Blood;  
 Revenge in desperate mood, at midnight met  
 Revenge; War brayed back to War, Deceit deceived  
 Deceit, Lie cheated Lie, and Treachery  
 Mined under Treachery, and Perjury  
 Swore back to Perjury and Blasphemy  
 Arose with hideous Blasphemy, and Curse  
 Loud answered Curse; and drunkard, stumbling fell  
 O'er drunkard fallen; and husband husband met  
 Returning each from others bed defiled;  
 Thief stole from thief, and robber on the way  
 Knocked robber down; and Lewdness, Violence,  
 And Hate, met Lewdness, Violence, and Hate.  
 And Mercy, weary with beseeching, had  
 Retired behind the sword of Justice, red  
 With ultimate and unrepenting wrath."

And that time, with just this condition of things, will have come, when this sixth trumpet sounds. We need not wonder, therefore, that it brings a plague of horror and judgment upon mankind, exceeding all that we yet have had to contemplate."

(THE APOCALYPSE—J. A. SEISS.)

The same road inevitably leads to the same end; and whoever takes it and at whatever time, will find that every step upon it brings him nearer to the same ultimate destiny. The nations of antiquity trod the road of rejection of God, of the light of the Scriptures and the promises of Christ. It led them down into the depths of a heathenism which, though it boasted culture, held, too, the grossest immoralities. Modern nations have already started upon and are advancing along the road of rejection of the personal God, the Creator, and of rejection of the revelations of Scripture and repudiation of the true Christ of the Bible; this same road can only

lead to the same end—a modern heathenism, albeit religious and refined, yet holding under that veneer the evils of ancient days.

The same sins committed by a modern populace can only result in the same punishments. God will have no other course but to visit upon the sinner of the future the same punishments as He has done upon the sinners of the past. The following argument quoted from another is incontestable:—

“We may, a moment or two, compare the state of men at that time with former times, when the long-suffering of God was exhausted, and judgment burst forth.

“1. This day is worse than the times of the flood. Then the earth was corrupt before God, and filled with violence. Here corruption of every kind, both between man and man, and man and the Most High, prevails; and murders, the highest of the crimes of violence, are numerous. Besides this, there are idolatry and demon-worship, which are not named as existing before the flood. If then, even in that day, and despite of their few advantages, wrath broke out, overturning the usual course of things, how much more then!

“2. Of the men of Sodom we read, that they were ‘wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.’ Sins of Sodom are here, and others superadded. If miracle avenged iniquity then, much more now!

“3. Oppression, rising even to murder, sorcery, and idolatry, were found in Egypt. But other sins are found here. No marvel then, if plagues like those of Egypt overtake the world then!

“4. Like to these were the sins of the nations of Canaan, when God commanded their extermination by Israel. On them fell supernatural judgments, combined with the sword of the tribes.

“5. The days of Ahab and Jezebel resemble these. Then was there murder of the righteous, and taking of his inheritance by fraud; fornication, idolatry, and sorcery. Then fell the judgment of three and a half years’ drought. Why should it not fall again on earth under like or greater sins?

“6. These are like the times of Israel and Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar sent and carried them away captives, destroying temple and city. Is it any wonder, then, if the next chapter but one foretells judgment coming on both the temple and metropolis of Israel once more? The type of the Assyrian came in Zedekiah’s days; but now that transgressors are come to the full, the great usurper appears.

“The world has heard the Gospel and refused it. Far greater is its responsibility in that day than in any previous one. Far stouter and more deeply rooted is its attitude of resistance than at any former time.

“Things are advancing with no slack pace towards this dismal consummation. Beneath the thin crust of formal Christianity, the germs of these trespassers here and there peep forth. Idolatry is putting forth its feelers; and the giving heed to seducing spirits is already visible. On this basis all the other evils will establish themselves.” (Quoted as a footnote by J. A. Seiss in “The Apocalypse.”)

## (8) THE PROCESS AND THE CLIMAX

The first nine verses of the last chapter of Zephaniah divide into three portions conveying in turn,

- 1 the plague of evil in the city (vv. 1-4),
- 2 the failure of every measure of Providence to correct it (vv. 5-7),
- 3 and the day when the plague will be stayed (vv. 7-9).

Pollution, filth and oppression; disobedience, infidelity and departure from God; cruel princes, plundering judges, light and treacherous prophets, hypocritical priests violating the law they should teach; all describe the moral, political and religious state so deserving of divine visitation.

The righteous Lord without iniquity, not condoning evil, brings daily His judgment to light, which is seen in Providence cutting off nations, desolating battlements, cities, dwellings and streets; but the hope that the nations will receive correction proves vain; "the unjust knoweth no shame," and even though checked in the midst of visitation, he takes advantage of any respite to hasten again to his old ways of sin.

"Therefore wait ye for me," saith the Lord, "until the day that I rise up to the prey" . . . "to pour upon them mine indignation even all my fierce anger." A day is predicted when the judgments of God will be of such a nature as to remedy the evils of earth by removing from it all that offends.

This Great Day of the Lord will be at the time of the Parousia of Christ, at the end of this age when the trumpets and vials of exhaustive visitation will purge earth of the evils which have from time to time been the reason of His partial and recurring visitations.

The first two sections of this passage give a resumé of the process of God's providence down through the ages, and the third shows the climax of Divine Government at the end of the age.

The recurring times of visitation and tribulation acting as the flail of Providence, bringing suffering and death to the nations of men, have produced varied effects in different lives: some are awakened to the knowledge of God and are converted; others are brought to fear God, but without conversion; many are hardened,

and in spite of everything they resist the voice of God; the children of God, never unaffected during the world's tribulations, are sanctified and prepared for the Kingdom of God.

In times of visitation the slain are multiplied until, numbering more than thousands, they are counted in millions, a great proportion of whom are borne hence suddenly by the monarch against whom there is no human power. As a servant to the godly Death liberates them from the toil of earth and the bondage of the body, to be "with Christ." As a servant of justice Death removes the sinner from the scene of his sin. The great scythe that mows down the people of earth has a moral effect on those who are spared. The danger hanging as a pall, sobers men, and unmask as transient all the pleasures and pursuits of sin, but even so, fails to purify men completely or to recover them from the ways of evil. At the same time the cry of the oppressed, the groaning of the prisoner, the hopelessness of correcting others (Jer. ii. 30), moves Him, "Who will not always chide," to grant mercy and terminate the days of evil. So God allows the light of morning to follow the night of gloom, the rest of peace after the throes of war, and easier circumstances to come after times of tribulation. Were there no respite "the spirit would fail before me" (Isa. lvii. 16), saith the Lord. So, in His pity and goodness, He again allows mankind to enjoy those mercies of creation and providence withdrawn in days of visitation. The times of tribulation alternate with times of tranquillity, wave after wave having their effect upon human sin, but never curing it, salt-like deterring corruption, though never completely arresting it; salutary for the while, but soon fading in times of peace, when men relax and self-indulgence recurs.

Again and again down the ages and dispensations the waves break and roll back in apparent defeat, until the dread hour arrives when the quick waves of apocalyptic tribulation bring the tide of Divine justice to its height; then tribulation will head up in the "great tribulation," Days of the Lord culminate in the "great day of the Lord," expelling the wicked from the earth and sweeping earth clean of every rebel.

It is easily recognised that in modern days the cycles of events are shorter. Everything moves more quickly; tragedies are soon forgotten, salutary effects rapidly fade; impressions made by days of chastening are quickly erased and men hasten back to the very

sins for which they and their fathers have been punished. The more rapid return to evil shortens the periods of tranquillity, which are followed all the earlier by further visitation. The accelerated march of events makes all forms of blessing and power short-lived. Sins more seductive become more widespread and, being more widespread, there is less consciousness that what is practised is sin, and in a more general and more popular atmosphere sin develops to greater magnitude. Thus visitations need to be more severe and far-reaching, until those days arrive at the end of the age that are worthy of the solemn designation of the Lord Jesus the "days of vengeance" or "retributive justice."

The word translated "vengeance" has righteousness as the main idea and then of action taken because of righteousness. Justice, satisfaction, punishment are synonymous. The sin of man, the evil of the movements of earth, political, religious and moral apostasy, will together cause a cry to ascend to Heaven which will call forth the Judgments of the Day of the Lord.

## (9) THE LAST MESSAGE TO AN APOSTATE WORLD

The end of the age is described in many parts of the Scriptures. Most, if not all the canonical prophets contribute to the foreview. The Lord Jesus speaks of it as we have seen; Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude add their quota, and it is left for the last book of the Bible the keystone of the sacred Scriptures, to give us evidence which will bring all the revelations of the Spirit into line. In the Book of the Revelation the veil between heaven and earth is removed, making it possible for us to see the movements which will take place in heaven at the end of the age and their reaction on earth at that time.

Ezekiel's vision showed him how the storms of earth in his day were set in motion and controlled by the heavenly beings directed by the One who sits on the Throne. In like manner, but in greater scope, the Book of the Revelation shows how the happenings on earth at the end of the age are controlled by ceremonies, prayers and legal contests in the heavens. The triumphant Lion-Lamb Who prevailed at the Cross and Who has been forming a kingdom of those redeemed by His death, opens in Heaven the seals of a momentous scroll. As He does so, powers go forth upon the earth, causing the rise of a great conqueror, involving war, famine, death and the persecution of saints, all of which result in the "Day of the Wrath of the Lamb."

A careful consideration of the happenings of these seals in the light of other prophecies suggests that a period of years will be required for these happenings of not less number than the seals. These years lead up to further events on earth resulting from the sounding in heaven of the Seven Trumpets, and culminate in the awful state of affairs produced amongst men by the pouring forth of the vials from the Temple above. It is evident that the apocalyptic judgments take place in three phases; seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials, each phase accelerating and intensifying the visitations that are so prominent a feature of the latter days. After the six seals have been opened the seer describes a short, ominous hush. "There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (Rev. viii. 1). Thus John tells us of the short pause before the seven angels who stand

before God sound the blasts upon the seven trumpets; as though Heaven itself is awed to silence at the prospect of the impending storm; its praises wait; its songs are hushed; and the Angel Priest (surely none less than Christ) approaches the altar presenting with incense the prayers of all the saints. Only one kind of prayers by "all the saints" is at that time still completely unanswered. (No answered prayers could be again offered at this point; nor could prayers unanswered because they were not according to the will of God, rise at that time.) These are prayers that have been prayed by every true believer of every age, prayers in full accord with the will of God, but which up till this time in the future are yet unanswered. They are the prayers according to the principle of "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." These prayers, expressed by so many, oft repeated, accumulating, though awaiting answer, unforgotten, because kept in the custody of Christ, are now offered, with the incense of His own Person and sacrifice. Thus offered they are swiftly answered; and the answer means that the saints receive the kingdom, the meek inherit the earth, and the mourners and poor in spirit realise the blessings of millennial glory. This requires that the rule of earth be wrested from the sinful hands which hold it, and that those who are not the followers of Christ be relieved of possession of the earth, so that the true followers of the Crucified, who have waited long, can possess their rightful inheritance. The unsaved of the end of the age will therefore be removed in the days of the retributive justice of trumpet and vial visitations which will requite with death every wanton sinner, every flagrant rebel, every pleasure-drunk earth-dweller and all rejectors of God and followers of Antichrist. Operating as did the Flood, of these judgments it will be said, "One shall be taken and another left" (Matt. xxiv. 37-40), the sinners taken, earth stripped of the proud, the arrogant, the violent, the unrighteous, the defiled, the atheistic and infidel, leaving the denuded nations with a remnant in their midst.

There was a pause between the end of the seal visitations and the commencement of the trumpet judgments; so there is a respite ere the vial judgments, completing the wrath of God, answer the prayers for the Kingdom by ridding earth of its rebels. God who delights in mercy pauses on the eve of His greatest wrath. The day of vengeance is no pleasure to Him, but a dreadful necessity, demanded

by human sin and a rejected salvation; though He has waited long, He waits again and speeds forth by angelic ministry one last urgent call of simplest character, a message imperative, which cannot be hindered by human means because of its superhuman messenger, warning of the hour of judgment, urging to honour God as Creator and Judge, so that all may not be swept away in that hour of the extermination of sinners from earth.

The seer observes, "another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people;" and hears, too, the words of the message, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth and sea and the fountains of waters" (Rev. xiv. 6).

This message, the eternal or everlasting Gospel, is a demand to acknowledge God as Creator and Judge and lies at the root of the messages spoken of as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. iv. 23 and xxiv. 14) and the Gospel of the Grace of God (Acts xx. 24), but does not contain the fulness of either. Whilst its message is contained in the two other messages it does not itself contain the further and higher truth of these messages. But, being on the threshold of both, it is intended to prepare the heart for the further revelations of redemption and its blessings. There is in the recorded words of this message, preached by the angel, no mention of Calvary, no word of forgiveness of sins, no promise of eternal life. Yet it is a Gospel, because anything that brings men to a sense of God and the fear of God is good news, though some may not think it pleasant news. Anything that emphasises to men the creatorship of God is good, because it also emphasises their responsibility to Him and thus brings a sense of sin, the solemnity of which is emphasised by the fact that God is Judge. In this way hearts are prepared for hearing the further message of forgiveness of sins through the One Who said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath eternal life and cometh not into judgment" (John v. 24). It seems unreasonable to suppose that men will show repentance toward God, unless they are made profoundly conscious of God and of their responsibility to Him their Creator and their Judge.

This recalls a point established in the chapter on the objects of Divine visitation, where we saw that it was designed that Providence

should bring the indifferent, the atheistic, infidels and the materialistic to confession of the existence and power of God. Chas. Finney, in his *Lectures on Revival*, draws attention to this principle, that the happenings of Providence awaken men and women, and prepare the way, thus contributing to the work of salvation through the message of Christ. It was so with the Philippian jailor who was awakened by the earthquake, and through it and the succession of circumstances made to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts xvi. 26-34). The ready reply of the apostles presented the Lord Jesus Christ for his faith, and, as they went on to speak to him the Word of the Lord, the result was the conversion and baptism of the erstwhile hardened sinner.

There is a great need of a message like this to awaken men in our day when so many deny the creator character of God, but there will be a much greater need in the days of the advanced evil of the end of the age. Men have strange success in shutting God out of their thoughts and uncanny aptitude at turning to themselves for solution to their problems, begrudging the honour due to Him Who made them, and refusing to fear Him Who holds them responsible.

God has borne long with an unbelieving and wicked world, to which and for which He sent His Son and to which for over nineteen centuries He has heralded the great message of His grace. At length, at the end of the age, the longsuffering of God comes to an end. Yet so that some may escape the exterminating judgments, an imperative word hastily goes forth. The alternatives are clear, the issues plain: homage or judgment. Men *must* then give God His due homage as their Creator and fear as their Judge, or be removed from the earth, which is doubly His, both by right of creation and of redemption. It seems that the everlasting Gospel, belonging as it does to the realm of Providence, results only in physical preservation from the destruction of the last plagues; those who heed not its message will be taken, whereas those who obey will be left upon earth preserved. In like manner as in the days of Noah, when the Flood took away the ungodly and corrupt, leaving the remnant in the ark to emerge into a new world, another age, so those who at the end, before the last thunders roll, and the final lightnings flash, give heed to the message then proclaimed will be preserved from the destruction of the last plagues, and thus will be found on earth at the appearing of Christ in glory. But though thus preserved the

vision of Christ is required for their salvation. They seem to be those of all the tribes of the earth who will wail because of Him (Rev. i. 7), and amongst whom will be found the sheep spoken of in Matt. xxv.

With the remnant of Israel these remnants of all the nations will join in the contrition and confession of Isaiah's passion song: "For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

"He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth" (Isa. liii. 2-7).

As the Spirit of God shall be poured upon these of all flesh, they will see in His rejection and death on the Cross God's incomparable grace at the hour of man's greatest crime, they will perceive that the Lord Jesus became the sacrifice for their sins, and realise that His atoning work meets their need as well as the need of the unnumbered millions of believers of every age. Those who compose the remnant of each nation will at the throne of His Glory be declared to be the sheep, the righteous, and possessing everlasting life will enjoy the Kingdom prepared and realised at last (Matt. xxv. 31 to end).

#### (a) OLD TESTAMENT EVIDENCE OF THE REMNANTS

Two prophecies, the fulfilment of which belongs to the end of the age, give from another angle a detailed account of the preservation of remnants in the midst of nations when all the nations come under

the visitations of the great day of the Lord; Zephaniah's third chapter tells of a remnant of Israel, and Isaiah's nineteenth chapter of a remnant of Egypt. It is required that other nations shall be in the millennium, as our chapter on the destiny of nations shows. The way God will bring a remnant of these two nations through into the blessings on earth of the Kingdom Age illustrates how He will, at the same time, produce and bring through the storms of judgment, remnants of all those nations that are called by His name. Each passage shows that God will humble the pride of each nation and judge the particular form of it expressed in each tribe. By means of these remnants He will fulfil the purposes spoken of in Acts xv. 16-18, 'rebuilding the tabernacle of David and causing the residue of men to seek the Lord and all the nations upon whom His name is called.'

#### (b) EGYPTIAN REMNANT

The story of Egypt at the end of the age shows its leaders self-sufficient, evolving their policies regardless of God, and the nation religiously given to idolatry, necromancy, spiritism and sooth-saying, guilty of political and moral pride. She is reduced by the failure of the Nile, which causes the ruin of fisheries, agriculture and manufacture and consequently the discomfiture of the princes and counsellors, and the breakdown of the morale of the people; the collapsing state thus becomes an easy prey to an enemy and is subjugated by a cruel lord. By restricting the flow of the river on which they depend, God reduces the independent and proud state to a condition of vassalage to another. The oppression following causes many in their misery to cry to God, "for they shall cry unto Jehovah because of the oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender and He shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known unto Egypt and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day; yea, they shall worship with sacrifice and oblation and shall vow a vow unto the Lord and shall perform it. And the Lord shall smite Egypt, smiting and healing; and they shall return unto the Lord and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. . . . In that day shall Israel be third with Egypt and with Assyria a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of

my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. xix. 20-25). So by reducing the proud, destroying the arrogant and antagonistic, removing the evil by the sword, famine, pestilence and miraculous earthquakes and judgments of the Apocalypse, God will produce a suppliant nucleus among those that remain, a remnant calling on His name from whom He will repeople the millennial earth.

### (c) JEWISH REMNANT

In like manner the Jewish nation shall righteously be brought into the most intense fires of all their history, the day of Jacob's trouble, which will prove to be for that nation "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1).

By means of these severe providential dealings God will take away out of the midst of Israel those that are proud, and they shall no more be "haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. iii. 11 and 12).

In the end-days "the many" of Judah will be regathered to their land and the "children of the violent among thy people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall fall" (Dan. xi. 14). Great attempts will be made by nationalistic Jews in a spirit of self-sufficiency to realise for themselves the promised blessings upon their nation and land. Looking to themselves and to others for help rather than to God, they will, with means and ability, endeavour to reinstate themselves nationally. Having gained riches and developed the land long barren, they will covenant with other powers for protection; and, rebuilding their temple, they will restore the ancient rites and rest upon earthly princes for military protection; but their covenant will prove "as a bed too short to lie outstretched upon, and whose covering will be too narrow to wrap in" (Isa. xxviii. 20). For the Lord will rise up in visitation, and their merchandise and riches will evaporate; the covenants produced by scheming and intrigue will treacherously be broken, and, cheated of the promised protection, they will be the victims of the malice of every nation. Into such a "wilderness of the nations" will God

allow them to be brought (Ezek. xx. 35). Pleading with them thus, He will make them pass under the rod. Purging out the rebels, He will bring forth the purified remnant and take up His abode amongst them again.

To the afflicted and waiting remnant of Israel will the Lord Jesus be revealed and they, looking on Him whom they pierced, shall mourn, every family apart, rich and poor, priestly and royal, and mourn as for an only son (Zech. xii. 10 to xiii. 3).

“Then the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid” (Zeph. iii. 13). The comforting words of the King will be addressed to them, “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thy enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not fear evil any more.”

“The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save: he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”

So smiting and healing, purging and refining, will God have for Himself a remnant of every nation called by His name and Israel in the midst of them: a varied populace, contrite and dependent, in thankfulness and praise ready to do the will of God on earth, as that will is done in Heaven.